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# THE OSCE AND SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

*Marc PERRIN DE BRICHAMBAUT*

## **Introduction**

In 2005, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) celebrated not only thirty years' of existence as a regional organization, but also thirty years of experience as an enduring framework for dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Initially conceived as a loose conference mechanism to provide a forum for East-West political dialogue, the OSCE has evolved into a solid framework with a permanent structure, an annual budget, a network of field operations as well as other operational capabilities, and an international and highly-skilled professional staff. Since its creation in 1975 as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), the OSCE has been a work in progress reflecting the changing needs of participating States as well as the transforming context of European and international affairs.

As much as the Cold War was the formative early experience of the CSCE, engagement in South-Eastern Europe has defined the modern history of the OSCE. The Organization's experience in this region, indeed, has shaped the OSCE as it stands today, driving much of the form and scale of OSCE field operations and affecting the structure of OSCE Institutions. The OSCE has been in this region every step of the way since the early 1990s, walking with the peoples and communities of the countries of South-Eastern Europe through tension and war and working tirelessly to build peace and confidence. The process has been difficult for all concerned. But the scale of change over the last fifteen years has been historic. The OSCE is proud to have played a role in accompanying, even stimulating, positive trends across the region. Much has been accomplished, and much remains to be done. The OSCE will remain deeply engaged as the countries and the peoples of South-Eastern progress towards their rightful destiny of peace, stability and integration.

OSCE field Operations in South-Eastern Europe have been working to address root causes of conflict, to eliminate sources of tension and to facilitate reconciliation, as much as supporting efforts in inter-community relationship building. The OSCE profile in South-Eastern Europe spans the full range of OSCE activities, from conflict prevention to crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. In this article, I will review the success stories of OSCE experience in the region before turning to discuss

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the challenges ahead. But before starting, it is worth stepping back to examine the nature of the OSCE at a more general level.

### **A Laboratory of Ideas**

The creation of regional organizations and institutions based on and driven by common values, shared standards, and agreed commitments was once the ideal of a few far-sighted philosophers, scholars, enlightened statesmen, and peace activists. Viewed from this perspective, the founding of the OSCE demonstrates how ideas can become building blocs for change, and how such ideas can be transformed into new realities. On this basis, even to this day, the OSCE functions as a laboratory of ideas, and this role has grown in strength over the last decades. Nor is it surprising that the OSCE serves as a reference and a focal point for its participating States which resort to it to manage change in Europe as well as within their own respective societies.

Many features make the OSCE a unique regional organization in the European landscape. For one, the OSCE is an association of states and their societies, joined by Partner States for Co-operation in the Mediterranean and Asia. It is neither a military alliance nor an economic union, but an inclusive forum spanning the transatlantic and Eurasian geographic areas, and embracing the world's major religions and cultures.

Second, the OSCE's core rests on a far-reaching aquis of politically binding values and standards in areas concerning democracy, human rights and the protection of the rights of national minorities, as well as standards concerning military affairs, such as the principle of democratic oversight. The OSCE operates on the principle of equality that is enshrined by the rule of consensus in decision-making. Although the decisions of participating States are only politically rather than legally binding, this allows for greater flexibility in the Organization. While no legal obligations are placed on States through their OSCE commitments, a process of peer review among participating States has fostered an impressive record of implementation.

Moreover, the OSCE is an organization that has always been ahead of its time, especially when it comes to the articulation of new ideas and the development of a body of shared standards and agreed commitments. Already in the 1970s, the OSCE, then still the CSCE, embraced a radical concept of security, founded on the concept of "co-operative security," where the security of one state is inherently linked to that of all other states. To implement this vision, the OSCE pioneered confidence and security-building measures that have served as inspiration to regional organizations worldwide. The OSCE has also been at the forefront of widening our thinking on security in another way. Indeed, by adopting the notion of comprehensive security, the Organization transcended early on the traditional wisdom of viewing security merely through a political-military prism. Instead, it added an economic/environmental as well as a human dimension. All of these three dimensions carry equal weight, and are embedded in all activities of the Organization's institutions and field operations. The two pillars of the OSCE concept of security -- cooperative and comprehensive security -- were revolutionary thirty years ago, and they remain so today, even if they have become commonly accepted by other organizations and actors in the global system.

The OSCE has played a key role in European security by articulating new ideas and turning them into political action. This is well-documented in relation to what, indeed, might be called the OSCE aquis. The OSCE role is also evident with respect to the Organization's pioneering and extensive efforts in early warning and conflict prevention, as well as crisis management, conflict resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation. While its forerunner, the CSCE, had always a preventive function in that it brought two antagonistic systems into a forum for political dialogue and confidence-building, it was not until the first half of the 1990s that the Organization's capabilities in attending to conflict and post-conflict situations were developed. This occurred at a time when few other international organizations were fully prepared and ready to implement long-term conflict prevention and conflict resolution measures or had the operational capacity to do so.

In order to be effective in this task, the participating States created a number of new structures and mechanisms, many of which have since been extensively tested. At present, the OSCE is able to draw on a variety of instruments in emerging crisis situations. These include, most importantly, the Chairman-in-Office and his Personal/Special Representatives and Envoys; the Secretary General and the Secretariat's Conflict Prevention Centre; the Institutions, including the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights; the Field Operations; and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. In crisis situations where the OSCE has played a role, a combination of tools available to the Organization is applied in accordance to the specific circumstances of a particular situation. Through the adoption of comprehensive principles and commitments, the participating States have created a solid basis for the Organization's to become deeply involved in conflict-related activities.

The OSCE has developed robust operational experience. The Organization's nineteen field operations -- deployed in seventeen countries, absorbing about two-thirds of the OSCE's budget — are an important vehicle for assisting participating States in capacity- and institution-building. But, more than this, their conflict prevention and resolution capacities have been vital to host countries.

### **Success Stories**

The OSCE has a long and distinguished history of assisting the governments and societies in South-Eastern Europe. This support began as early as 1992, and it has ranged since across a broad spectrum of activities. These have included early warning preventive diplomacy and crisis management, and stretched also to post-conflict rehabilitation, the rebuilding of inter-community relations, as well as longer-term reform processes, such as institution- and capacity building, for democratic consolidation. OSCE involvement in South-Eastern Europe illustrates the depth of OSCE activities in the field and the scale of the Organizations' vision of security.

The violent conflicts in South Eastern Europe provided the stimulus for the establishment of an extensive network of OSCE Field Operations in the region. As of mid-2006, the OSCE had seven operations altogether, with the Mission to Montenegro

launched in the summer. The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia unleashed not only unprecedented violence in the region at the end of the twentieth century. It also gave rise to complex problems associated with post-conflict environments, the formation and consolidation of new states as well as the accommodation of an intricate web of multi-ethnic societies. Thanks to the efforts of many actors, including the OSCE, the immediate post-conflict reconstruction efforts have now given way to long-term engagement in transition processes and democratic consolidation in the States in this region.

The OSCE role in South-Eastern Europe has been wide-ranging, requiring the allocation of extensive resources and the deployment of personnel in its field operations. More than 70% of the OSCE's Field Operation budget is spent on the field activities in the region. South-Eastern Europe also hosts the largest concentration of international and national OSCE staff members, nearly 2,000, with the Mission in Kosovo having the highest number of staff of all OSCE field operations.

Across the region, OSCE Missions share similar priorities to strengthen states, consolidate democratic institutions and values, and to foster regional co-operation. The OSCE's objectives remain to further consolidate states and societies in order to accelerate their firm integration into wider European developments. Here, the OSCE works in partnership with local authorities and communities as well as with other actors from the international community.

The activities of the Field Operations in the region are multi-dimensional, covering, indeed, the political-military, economic/environmental, and the human dimensions. While they vary according to the needs identified by host countries, the missions are similar in that they all address an exhaustive list of issues. The list is long, ranging from legislative and electoral support, police development and education, particularly with regards to creating a multi-ethnic police force and implementing community policing standards, assisting governments in fighting organized crime and corruption, strengthening local government, supporting citizen participation and civil society development, monitoring criminal reform, and assisting with educational reforms. The basic objectives of all of these activities have been to strengthen the institutions of States and their governance and to assist the emergence of healthy societies. The idea is simple: healthy societies make for well-governed states, which, in turn, ensure positive regional development.

Indeed, in addition to this focus on building strong institutions, good governance, and the rule of law, the OSCE supports regional cooperative processes that deal with the long-term consequences of war: the return of refugees and proceedings on war crimes. These issues are also critical for the re-establishment of constructive inter-community relations. Four OSCE Missions—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia— have established, with the assistance of the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre, mechanisms to enhance cross-border co-operation in these areas. Such regional cooperative processes, the so-called “4x3 Initiative” on refugee return and the “Palic Process” on inter-state cooperation in war crimes proceedings, will continue in 2007 and require consultations with the EU and the United Nations (UN) .

OSCE activities to improve inter-community relations in the region take place at two levels: First, through the creation and institutionalization of effective confidence-building measures – for example, in police development and training, media training, the protection of minority rights or education and tolerance building; Second, through long-term reform programmes designed to benefit communities. In most of its field operations in South-Eastern Europe, the OSCE has been engaged in the creation of a multi-ethnic police force and in training police officers in community-based policing to encourage communities to work with local police and to build trust between different ethnic communities and security forces. Moreover, many of the activities that facilitate inter-community relationships take place in the realm of media training and media development as well as civil society development and educational and tolerance-raising activities.

The OSCE's efforts to promote tolerance and non-discrimination in multi-ethnic societies mirror the Organization's efforts to promote inter-cultural dialogue and inter-faith co-operation. Certainly, in today's world, deepening intercultural and interfaith dialogue and co-operation are important for building long-term and broad security. Ignorance, discrimination, and intolerance of different groups and cultures have become key factors of tension within the OSCE borders and beyond. Given the region's importance as a crossroad of different cultures, religions, and national and ethnic groups, OSCE assistance to youth, education, and the media are in themselves crucial confidence-building and security-enhancing measures.

Looking specifically at the Republic of Macedonia<sup>1</sup>, it goes without saying that the country and its people were particularly fortunate in having prevented large-scale armed confrontations. This was largely thanks to the efforts of its political leadership. An important role was also played in the preventive efforts initiated by the international community. As the host country to one of the earliest and longest-serving OSCE Field Operations, the Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje has been a showcase for demonstrating the OSCE's successful involvement in all phases of a conflict cycle—from conflict prevention in the early years of independence, to crisis management during the violent events of early 2001 to peace implementation and post-conflict rehabilitation.

Moreover, the Republic of Macedonia has itself taken a leading role in conflict prevention and conflict management, through its political power-sharing arrangements among all ethnic groups, through decentralization of power throughout the country, and through the implementation of broad minority rights. As such, it serves in many ways as an example for how a country can successfully manage the complex fabric of inter-ethnic relations. With the implementation of key provisions of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the country has taken major steps away from worrying episodes of its past. This was also confirmed by the positive opinion from the European Commission regarding the country's application for EU membership.

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<sup>1</sup> In the original text the author is using the provisional reference for addressing the Republic of Macedonia as a member of OSCE.

The OSCE does not act on its own in the region, but in partnership with other regional and international organizations. Intense and wide-ranging inter-action is also part of the OSCE success story in South-Eastern Europe. The OSCE, indeed, works in close co-operation not only with the EU and NATO, but also with the UN, the Council of Europe, and other regional actors such as the Stability Pact and the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECF). For one, OSCE cooperation with the UN in Kosovo, where the OSCE Mission serves as the third pillar of the UN Interim Administration, is an institutional arrangement that is unprecedented in the history of the OSCE as well as in the region. The OSCE also works closely together with the EU, NATO, and the UN in assuring the smooth transition to a post-status Kosovo following the termination of UNMIK. The case is not isolated. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Republic of Macedonia, OSCE Missions, while autonomous, act as part of an integrated international presence.

In addition, OSCE institutions and missions in the region are in many cases key partners for the implementation of joint projects with the EU for example, and especially the European Commission. The “Ohrid Process on Border Management and Security in South-Eastern Europe” is another excellent example of successful co-operation between the OSCE, the EU, NATO, and the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. What is more, the OSCE and NATO have worked in the past closely on disarmament issues, such as the elimination of small arms and on security sector reform. Moreover, governments in the region work in co-operation with OSCE Missions to fulfil the criteria related to future EU membership; these processes have reinforced OSCE-EU interactions.

Thus, in many respects, the OSCE as we see it today was forged in South-Eastern Europe, in response to the conflicts of the 1990s and to the difficulties of complex transition processes. While often the result of urgent need and changing circumstances, OSCE activities have been led for over a decade by the principles of co-operative and comprehensive security. As a result, the OSCE profile across the region is both wide and deep, covering all three OSCE dimensions, focusing on societies, States and the region itself. Much has been achieved, and with some success. Of course, the key ingredients have been, first, the willingness of the governments of the States in the region to undertake the necessary reforms to build new futures from difficult pasts, and, second, the resilience and vibrancy of societies to act together. The OSCE has been most successful when these two ingredients have acted together.

### **Challenges Ahead**

The story, of course, is not over.

Many challenges lie ahead, both for South-Eastern Europe, and for the OSCE in the region. For South-Eastern Europe, the basic challenge is to continue on the path of successful transition. This is a prerequisite for the creation of healthy states and societies, and for the fulfillment of South-Eastern Europe’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Several more difficult turns on this path remain to be negotiated across the region. For one, consolidating co-operation between countries in South-Eastern Europe, whether

in border management, in fighting organized crime, or in the refugee return process, is vital to the long-term stability of the region and Europe.

In addition, it is crucial for the region to come to terms with its past and face the responsibilities that derive from the wars of the 1990s. For Serbia, for example, full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is crucial and remains the prerequisite for the country to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU. Recent statements by Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte, as well as her visit to Belgrade, underline the urgent need to arrest and transfer all ICTY indictees, including Ratko Mladic. Non-compliance will further burden Serbia's relationship with the EU given the ICTY's insistence that SAA talks with the EU continue to be suspended until there is full cooperation.

Determining the future of Kosovo remains by far the most pressing challenge since it has uncertain implications for the region and beyond. While the precise timetable in the final determination of the Kosovo status remains unclear, the OSCE must ready itself now to provide major assistance in any transitional period which will see the divestment of UNMIK powers. With the OSCE and the EU as the primary actors in a post-status Kosovo, concerted efforts must continue on defining areas of responsibility where the two organizations have comparative advantage and can bring unique value-added. Moreover, maintaining uncertainties in the final determination of the status might have negative repercussions for Kosovo and the region, since it could lead to a heightening of tensions and increased violent incidents, all of which would impact on the security of Kosovo's neighbours. In addition, from another perspective, despite the clearly unique nature of this situation, the decision taken on the status of Kosovo may be seen by some as a precedent for other regions in the OSCE area, such as the unresolved conflicts in the former Soviet Union.

The OSCE itself also faces a number of institutional challenges. One of these concerns the present trend of downsizing and phasing out of field operations. Croatia may be the first country to experience this. Should this trend be confirmed, it may set an important precedent in the region and further afield. It would also require from the host country a greater assumption of responsibility and commitment to ensure local ownership of institution and capacity-building processes and to remain on the path of what promise to be prolonged and complex reforms. In addition, the OSCE's capacity to pursue regional initiatives, as it currently does with regard to refugee return or judicial co-operation, as well as new regional cooperative projects, would become more difficult to undertake without the physical presence of field operations.

### **Looking Forward**

The developments that the OSCE faces in South-Eastern Europe are magnified by the wider challenges that the Organization faces as a whole when it comes to improving its effectiveness and to finding an appropriate role in future European security. At present, the OSCE (as, indeed, are the EU and NATO) is adjusting its role and place in the European security landscape. It is true that the OSCE is not the only European security organization. It is also true that the OSCE did not develop



into the pre-eminent pan-European security organization as some had envisaged in the 1990s. More importantly, the Organization faces the challenge of adapting to changing international circumstances and to new threats and risks facing participating States. Partly as a result, the 2005 Ministerial Council set forth an agenda for the reform of the Organization. The challenge now is to make this process meaningful.

Reform and adaptation are never easy. However, I believe that the Organization has the resilience and vibrancy that are necessary to undertake this path with success. In conclusion, I wish to highlight three points about the Organization. Some of these may seem obvious, but the essential is important and is also too often forgotten. These essential features of the OSCE ensure for it a key role in Europe's security landscape. Nowhere is this role more evident than in South-Eastern Europe.

First, the Organization is the most inclusive organization and, indeed, the world's largest security organization. Compared to other organizations, the OSCE can be seen to embody an inclusive definition of Europe. This is a key resource, and one that matters also for finding long-term sustainable solutions to enduring problems in South-Eastern Europe. All countries of the region are represented in the OSCE, along with their major international partners. Second, over the last thirty years, the OSCE has become a unique laboratory of ideas and principles in Europe, having itself been born from the idea that states and their societies can cooperate when it comes to their intrinsic need for security and peace. Finally, the OSCE has a proven record of providing value added to the security of its participating States. In South-Eastern Europe, this record has been demonstrated at the operational level, where the OSCE has developed unique experiences, such as acting to assist States in implementing their commitments in the struggle against terrorism to anti-trafficking cooperation.

Of course, building peace after war requires the effort of all; everyone counts, from young pupils to local police officers, from town government to civil society activists. The lessons of the last fifteen years in South-Eastern Europe can be summed up in one sentence: we all, from the international community to local communities, must act together to embed peace, craft stronger institutions and healthier societies. Much has been achieved, but a lot of hard work remains before us.

The transitions underway in South-Eastern Europe are complex and dynamic. Their success depends on active support from all political actors inside and outside these countries. This path involves institution-building and state consolidation, but more besides. Successful transition requires crafting a democratic culture, one based on inclusion and reconciliation. Such a culture must be adhered to by all members of society to take root. Strengthening the institutions and culture of democracy in South-Eastern Europe will help to build healthy societies and states, which, in turn, are vital ingredients of regional and broader European security. The OSCE has been active in South-Eastern Europe in the difficult times; the Organization remains as firmly committed as ever to supporting the region's States and societies to move towards a better future.