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The OSCE: Construction and Identity Problems

The triumph of the CSCE was not really a reflection of the messages manifested in its documents, which during the period of the East-West conflict had often been negotiated laboriously, sometimes artfully but most often greased with surplus terminology and then finally adopted. Rather, this triumph was *firstly* due to the signals radiating from the "third basket" into the rigid Soviet socialist ruling systems and *secondly* to the fact that the entire institution contributed to making the end phase of the East-West conflict almost totally free of violent disturbances. If one examines them in retrospect, the texts of the Charter, concluding documents etc. depict the complex constellation of the East-West conflict in an astonishingly germane manner.

Even if today certain critics have made disparaging comments about it, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and especially the phrasing of the third basket are a diplomatic masterpiece. However, understanding of the multi-dimensional character of the East-West conflict already seems to be waning. The East-West conflict was not only a function of competitive power politics, but also placed two contradictory rival images of the human being, society and the world opposite one another.

It is precisely in the factors that have made the CSCE triumph in the East-West conflict possible that one must search for the reasons that the OSCE, in the decade after the end of this deep-reaching structural conflict in the international system of the twentieth century, has remained in a subordinate role shadowed by major events. This is not necessarily negative, but simply very different from what many had expected of the CSCE in 1990. It was not least the excessively high expectations placed on the CSCE in the early nineties and the fact that many of its political and academic friends and supporters demonstrated a certain defiance by insisting that the Organization play a key role in the newly emerging continental and trans-continental security scene, which have led to the aura of disappointment emanating from the OSCE. There is a possibility that this could have been avoided if the Organization had been given a different functional focus a decade ago. And this could still take place if the many organizational changes are maintained, which have since then been implemented, where however the real tasks associated with these have not been clearly defined.

Lady with a Past

In the old days there were often debates between Eastern and Western negotiating partners and in the West these debates were public (because this is

customary in democratic societies). The issue was whether the *project* for a European security conference developed over the years, which finally merged into the *process* known as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, should be built into a permanent inter-systemic *organization* or not. However, it is part of the intricate conditions for effectivity in this kind of inter-systemic institution that it not be too clear-cut. The development of different disciplines within the CSCE process such as: prolonged follow-up meetings, smaller expert meetings, seminars and fora as well as, towards the end of the East-West conflict, conferences on a whole palette of special topics (human rights, peaceful conflict management, the environment, economy, information services, cultural legacy, Mediterranean issues) were an example of this ambiguity, which had an important function against the backdrop of the East-West conflict.

One should also remember that during the seventies and the eighties, relations between East and West did not follow a linear course. If today the whole period after World War II is spoken of as the *Cold War*, this is a crude generalization, which no longer takes into account a series of simple but momentous alterations in the general atmosphere of these relations. In the language of the times, the expression *Cold War* was reserved for the period of high-intensity confrontation between 1946/47 and 1962/63. Subsequently - at first in the relations between both nuclear powers, the US and the USSR, and later on the European continent - a period began called "*easing of tensions*" or "*détente*". The fundamental antagonism between the two sides remained, but in certain areas (arms control, economic relations) limited and fragile co-operation began or was extended beyond the approaches to co-operation thus far concealed. During the period of *détente* the term *Cold Warrior* was considered a political insult.

The CSCE process was only possible at all as a part of and expression of East-West *détente*. What this meant and whether in the long-term it could lead to a kind of convergence of the systems, whether each side would consider it more damaging or more to their advantage, or how the advantages of this kind of antagonistic co-operation were distributed, was discussed in and between Eastern and Western countries extensively, partially in earnest, partially as propaganda, and this on the other hand, partially in supporting the CSCE process and partially as attempts to torpedo it.

After it climaxed in 1975, the process of *détente* in East-West relations declined rapidly. This was witnessed not least in the extraordinarily excruciating and laggard character of the negotiations and disputes at the two CSCE follow-up meetings in Belgrade and Madrid. All the nuts and bolts of what was then called inter-systemic co-operation started to rattle because it possessed a highly and as it were objectively confrontational component. In other words: The events and measures introduced through the CSCE process functioned simultaneously as instruments of both stabilization and socio-political transformation. The mechanisms of concepts like Egon Bahr's *change*

through rapprochement affected all levels of détente not just relations between the two Germanys.

And the more asymmetrical relations were, the more persistently these mechanisms influenced them towards change. However even during the seventies relations were considerably more asymmetric than they appeared and than political actors perceived them to be. The significant economic and (civilian and military) technological advantages held by the West, as well as Western legitimacy, were being confronted with the conventional military advantages of the Warsaw Pact in Europe. However the Pact was not able to transform their advantage into an increased capability to take political action. In spite of this - for whatever reason - this fact remained undetected by most observers both in East and West.

Also during the decades when détente eroded (1975-1985), it was quite clear that Eastern governments were still very interested in taking advantage of the comparative privileges offered in the individual baskets of the CSCE Final Act, although this was in totally undesired harmony with the dissidents in their societies, who cited CSCE processes and the Helsinki Charter for their own purposes. These governments estimated the costs to their system of rule as so low that they were tolerable.

Even during these not very détente-friendly years the CSCE proved to be exceptionally successful as a process in two senses of the word. *First* it continued to develop further and further. This was true despite the, often enough, vehement ideological and political debates between Eastern and Western governments. (Just as an aside, it should be mentioned that during these years there was a noticeable difference between the various Western governments with respect to their evaluation of the CSCE and each government's outward show at its proceedings.) *Second* it seemed to be a kind of stability guarantee for the internal changes occurring in the Eastern bloc countries. However, because in politics such a guarantee can only exist in the form of declarations of intention without further influence, this did not slow down the Soviet-Socialist regime's highly dynamic inner-societal decomposition, but actually encouraged it indirectly through confrontation with Western values and capabilities.

In other words: The CSCE played a major part in making sure that the signs of stagnation and decay in various areas of the economy and society were not seen as threatening to the leaders of the regimes of the Eastern countries. It is not easy to find an answer to the speculative question of whether the story of the East-West conflict would have taken another course in its last phase if the CSCE and its influences on Eastern societies had not existed and if the signs of decline had been recognized for what they were, i.e. a threat to Eastern regimes. Maybe a massacre like the one that occurred in Peking in 1989 at Tiananmen Square (Heavenly Peace Square) would have caused the chain of events to go in another direction. However, virtual history does not count. On

the whole, the fall of Soviet socialism was peaceful in the European countries where it had reigned. This was really quite extraordinary and unusual.

As consolation to the representatives, diplomats and officials of these fallen regimes one must immediately add that the CSCE was in no way thought of as a Western master plan to undermine Eastern ruling order. There were very few observers in East and West who recognized the dynamics of the CSCE process from the beginning with any clarity. Most of the persons involved in the West anticipated that this process would cause a kind of stability to enter into East-West relations. In addition to the expansion of inter-systemic economic relationships (which economic actors in the West considered rather laborious yet reliable profit-making enterprises), an extension of the individual freedoms - within limits - of the people of Eastern countries was expected as a *stability dividend*. There was wide agreement at government levels here that the crumbling base legitimizing the power of their antagonistic partners should not be placed under too much strain from outside, because this could lead to an authoritarian reaction by those in power there against their people. Decisive impulses for a change in regimes were to come from within.

It was difficult to recognize and understand this constellation and gave simple souls in the West every opportunity to refer to the double standards of Western policies with respect to repressive regimes. That is to say, such references were perfectly valid, but those making them did not understand the double effect of this form of stability combined with co-operation between antagonists, a form of co-operation, which undoubtedly encouraged an unpleasant form of stability. However, especially because it was interpreted by Eastern governments as being useful for their own purposes, this co-operation opened up the opportunity for inner-societal transformation processes to proceed and for the individuals and groups who pushed them ahead to act more freely. A difficult balance and at times unsuccessful balancing act! But it testifies to the lack of understanding of the fine points of inter-systemic policies promoted by Western democracies (with slightly differing accents) by evaluating them as being too supportive of Eastern governments and too pious towards the ruling order.

Ambivalence and double standards mark the history of the CSCE process. This may have caused a bit of a bad taste in the mouths of its critics leading to negative implications for its reputation. Nevertheless, its successes have been beyond all expectations.

The Antagonism Has Been Surmounted - The Cynicism Has Moved in

The thesis presented and then reiterated above hones in on the facts, but does not exaggerate them unreasonably: Everything that contributed to the triumph of the CSCE process during its first 15 years - and one can view the CSCE Summit in November 1990 and the quasi-notarial certification of the end of

the East-West conflict implemented there as being an expression of this triumph - all this ambiguous rhetoric on territorial stability, these contradictions between principles and values that were recognized as fundamental, the denials, to be found peeping out between the lines of ceremoniously proclaimed declarations of intention, that is, the desire not to maintain these intentions and the feeling that this was a right (if only to a certain degree), all these factors were obstacles on the path to successful perspectives for CSCE action during the nineties. Quite suddenly the international framework had changed. The balancing acts of the past were no longer necessary and a rearrangement of the Organization after the East-West conflict was tackled with much élan. This however did not lead to the desired results for several reasons:

- In an institution soon transformed into the OSCE, the fleeting moment of euphoria over the end of the East-West conflict was trapped like a fly in amber. Many observers or those actively participating in political proceedings interpreted this situation as the end of the history of violent conflict, at least in the macro-region extending from Vladivostok to Vancouver. They have been proved wrong. Their error had fundamental effects on the OSCE, which drastically limited the institution's horizons for taking successful action.
- The strong emphasis on security for the individual and not so much for the state has truly avant-garde characteristics. In all probability they will gain significance in the future, at least in the European-Transatlantic macro-region. However, this only helps in a limited way towards present-day conflict settlement because, especially in spectacular conflicts and escalations in violence, the victims of conflict cannot be given adequate assistance without recourse to the armed forces (to de-escalate). This was evident in the cascades of conflict occurring in the Balkans.
- The emphasis on common values in the CSCE process was a typical *petitio principii*. Moreover this was simply an endeavour to identify and extend the overlapping area between two antagonistic world views and conceptions of man. Today we are witnessing a return by some states to traditional political cynicism. For example: In Chechnya, the Russians are attempting to assert their power in the Caucasus region. The way they are conducting the war is in direct contradiction with the commitments they have made to the OSCE. In contrast to similar events at the time of the East-West conflict, the Chechnya war will not become one of the major points of the ideological-political disputes at OSCE proceedings. Instead, the other OSCE States have been playing down the importance of what is happening. If they did not do this there would be a danger the Organization would break down.
- In politics, especially in international politics, cynicism and callousness are not always bad habits (nor are they virtues however). But while during the East-West conflict they had a balancing function in the con-

text of a concept for peaceful change within the CSCE process, during the nineties they simply emerge from the requirements of realpolitik and build a conspicuous contrast to the ideal political rhetoric of OSCE actors.

Security in the New International Political Order

A promising interpretation of the OSCE, its present structure and its functions in an arrangement of varying regional security organizations as well as organizations with goals over and above security, leads to assigning the OSCE with tasks towards a new political order in the macro-region which will be decisive in the near or not too near future. In contrast sceptics persist in their claim the OSCE has had considerable losses with respect to its ability to function and its significance, which cannot be remedied in the future. There are two types of sceptics - the first consider this development reasonable and basically inevitable, whereas the others lament that the governments of the OSCE participating States set the wrong security policy priorities in the early nineties when e.g. they gave NATO a new task profile through Eastward enlargement (or as it is expressed more mildly: opening the Alliance towards the East) and also on an inner-European level strived to strengthen the WEU rather than the OSCE.

None of these three interpretations are completely irrational. It is well-known that in politics, it is not only important that ideas are good, but also that they are launched at the right moment. And it seemed that with the end of the East-West conflict the right moment had come for an organization that specializes in the *human dimension* (unusually peculiar term!) of security and co-operation between states. However this mood was deceptive. A shift in the emphasis of the range of instruments implemented by state and political powers from the use of the military and direct economic pressure to the use of elements of *soft power* - as had been predicted by many experts - took place only to a limited extent. The emergence of a hierarchy in the world of states and the difference in the average standard of the quality of life of human beings in different societies took on even more clearly pronounced and more clearly recognizable characteristics. Traditional patterns of perception and the interest structures in power politics changed only slightly.

The category *space* lost security policy relevance - not so much because of the end of the East-West conflict, but primarily as a consequence of the different courses of asymmetric globalization. Information on local and regional conflicts can be conveyed to a global public incredibly quickly and thereby become the subject of political disputes globally. Furthermore such conflicts can develop metastasis in other regions through the phenomena of migration and ethnic or religious diasporas. Meanwhile focused horizontal escalation of this type of conflict on the "periphery" is considered as potentially rather

dangerous in the metropolitan conglomerates because they are particularly vulnerable.

As a result of this constellation, which, incidentally, has not been rendered here in great detail, a hierarchy of international organizations has developed indirectly. Differentiating characteristics are: reach, task definition, means of taking action and organizational efficiency.

The United Nations is in the *first category* with its global reach and comprehensive task definition, but with little means of taking action and at the same time slightly improved organizational efficiency in the last few years.

NATO falls under the *second category* with a macro-regional but elastic reach, limited task definition, better means of taking action and considerable, even if it is not totally problem-free, organizational efficiency.

Most of the other security organizations can be placed in the *third category* whether they are designed to function in traditional patterns but can only do so to a certain degree or whether they have made the decision to place a special focus on future-related aspects of security. The limitations on reach and task definition and the restricted opportunities to take action keep their activities within a confined framework. However to a certain degree the OSCE is undervalued if you classify it exclusively from a security viewpoint.

Differentiation of Tasks and Organizational Growth

As always one can still describe the *Agenda for Peace* laid out by former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as being one of the most important texts in working out political solutions to conflicts threatening to escalate into organized violence or having already escalated. The broad spectrum of measures towards preventing escalation and encouraging de-escalation goes from preventive actions, intervention in the conflict centre through civilian means, as well as military intervention with or without the consent of the local conflict parties (but each time with a high level of multinational legitimacy) to post-conflict rehabilitation to prevent reverting to violence.

Each of these measures is thought of as applying to a particular phase of the typical development of a conflict and if it is cleverly implemented with the required emphasis, effective only or especially in this phase. The ideal security organization would have the capability of implementing the whole spectrum of the measures cited in the *Agenda* at the most favourable moment, which in the long-term could lead to the fact that the number of activities introduced after a war or during a war would then diminish. Security policy would then be shifted increasingly towards prevention.

This idea is the basis for OSCE growth. Setting an accent on questions of democratic institutions and human rights, freedom of the media, the protection of national minorities, arms control and confidence-building measures as well as missions and field operations, which have an exploratory character,

all point in this direction. Conflict prevention (to be more precise: the prevention of a transition from conflicts to violent confrontation) and assistance in coping with crises in their early stages belong to the special skills of the OSCE.

In contrast, it is not rationally designed or well-equipped for implementing measures to intervene in violent conflict. Peace-building work after a war - often enough these must be begun during hostilities - is diversified, cost-intensive and dependent on the local conditions for success. Actually, it can only be considered to have some prospect of success if a complete phalanx of different organizations - including primarily non-governmental organizations in co-operation with states and international organizations - participate. Here one would suspect a potential OSCE strength because it can create links and associations with transnational politics with somewhat more ease and speed than other international organizations.

The aura of disappointment mentioned above emerged because a series of OSCE missions were not particularly successful, but publicly were considered representative of OSCE effectivity. A series of other more unspectacular missions, which certainly could have been labelled successful, found little attention in public. This, on the one hand, is due to the selection criteria for controlling public attention by the media (and must be taken as a fact of life that it does not make sense to complain about). On the other, it is a result of the still valid trade mark branding the OSCE as one of the interlocking as well as sometimes reciprocally blocking - because of the competitive conditions they have been up against - macro-regional security organizations in Europe. It was and still is a mistake that the OSCE has been forced - not least by those who were favourable to it - to compete with NATO and WEU.

Organization for Human Rights and Security in Europe

Traditional security concepts have always been related primarily to the security of states and only secondarily to the members of society who live in them. Between these two levels a problem could emerge but not necessarily, i.e. state repression. The traditional security concepts are topical even today and it would be wrong to neglect them. However this does not mean that a problem like state repression can simply be ignored, *first* because the conception democratic societies have of themselves must be legitimized (although here all possible manipulation, suppression etc. is still very effective) and *second* because of the potential danger of escalation. Therefore in addition to the traditional security concept we need a new, more extensive concept that deals with this problem.

In truth, this is not an extraordinarily new idea. However it is a bit confusing that in the reconstruction of the OSCE this idea was given so little opportunity to be developed. In principle all participants and observers at the OSCE

agree: It is now a totally different organization from what it was before the end of the East-West conflict, whereby this difference is not nearly satisfactorily expressed through the change in terminology from *Conference* to *Organization*. The point is that within the OSCE framework a basic structure must be built for the common political culture of its participating States and that the individuals of the OSCE States must have adequate security. This certainly has to do with co-operation and preventing violence. Furthermore, the latter can still be thought of as the Organization's highest goal. However, this is about *human security*, a term recently propagated by the Canadian government and just as unwieldy as the *human dimension* of security. The fact that clearer phrasing has not been found is also a sign that there is still a huge amount of conceptual work that must be carried out. Moreover in the search for institutions to interlock with OSCE, one could take e.g. the Council of Europe into consideration, and not necessarily NATO and the WEU. However organizational fusions in the area of politics are harder to master than creating a completely new structure with new goals. Nevertheless one could and should think about joining the forces of these two organizations. In any case, it would be a loss of future open-mindedness in Europe and its bordering macro-regions if the OSCE allowed itself to be overcome by an aura of disappointment thereby slipping into the shadows of international politics. It is an institution with a significant past and promising future. No one should put the latter at stake by subjecting this institution to entirely unnecessary pressure to succeed.