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The Evolution of the OSCE - A Perspective from the Netherlands

The Paradoxical Nature of the OSCE

At the time of the Vienna Ministerial Council, the Director for Security Policy in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Herman Schaper, likened the OSCE[1] to a lizard: In the course of its life it may lose its tail, but it will always grow a new one. If Darwin's theory of evolution holds true, that the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances determines survival or extinction, the OSCE, surely, has proven to be quite a remarkable creature of multilateral diplomacy. More than once, this seemingly unattractive forum has been declared defunct or irrelevant, only to rise, like Lazarus, and show that it is still very much alive.

In fact, from its very inception, it seems, the CSCE did not inspire much hope or high expectations. Nor has it really generated a great deal of interest, let alone enthusiasm, in the public's perception. On 21 July 1975, only a few days before the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, a New York Times editorial read:

> "The 35-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, now nearing its climax after 32 months of diplomatic quibbling, should not have happened. Never have so many struggled for so long over so little."

Even after the 25-year commemoration of the Final Act was celebrated last year, the present-day OSCE still struggles to gain public recognition. A mere whisper of possible NATO involvement in the Balkans is usually enough for extensive media coverage, while the fact is ignored that the CSCE/OSCE has had people on the ground in this troublesome part of Europe for more than five years already, performing all sorts of tasks, from border monitoring to the organization of elections, from police training to the setting up of independent media. As a matter of fact, the OSCE is currently the only international organization which can rely on an extensive network of field offices in every country in the Western Balkans.

It would be useful, however, to point out that posterity has judged the CSCE less harshly and in less categorical terms. It appears that the New York Times' paraphrasing of the great Winston Churchill was not entirely appro-

1 When referring to the Organization in the period after the Budapest Summit of December 1994, the name "OSCE" is used; in the period preceding this Summit the name "CSCE" is used.

priate. Henry Kissinger, widely seen by his contemporaries as the incarnation of August von Rochau's idea of *realpolitik* and at the time also sceptical of the merits of the Final Act, nevertheless had this to say in his standard work *Diplomacy*:

> "As it turned out, heroic reformers in Eastern Europe used (this text) as a rallying point in their fights to free their countries from Soviet domination. Both Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia and Lech Walesa in Poland earned their place in the Pantheon of freedom fighters by using these provisions, both domestically and internationally, to undermine not only Soviet domination but the communist regimes in their own countries.
> The European Security Conference thus came to play an important dual role: in its planning stages it moderated Soviet conduct in Europe and, afterward, it accelerated the collapse of the Soviet Empire."[2]

Kissinger's reminder of the Cold War roots of the OSCE provides a useful point of departure in the context of this article.
Originally a diplomatic conference for moderating East-West relations, the CSCE had reasonably clear objectives and well defined parameters, meticulously spelled out in the notorious Blue Book. After 1989, the CSCE, like the Warsaw Pact and NATO, faced an existential crisis. Unlike the Warsaw Pact, however, which dissolved so quickly that one wonders if anyone even noticed, and even unlike NATO which, suddenly robbed of its mirror image, had to struggle for the next ten years to reinvent itself, the CSCE proved remarkably adept in this phase of acute evolutionary challenge.
Since 1990, with the signing of the Charter of Paris, the CSCE developed into a generic institution which has more or less charted its course as it went along, taking on radically new tasks and assuming responsibility for issues which other, more established international organizations were unable or unwilling to do. Today, more than anything, the OSCE is a highly operational organization for early warning, crisis prevention, conflict management and post-conflict rehabilitation.
At present, the OSCE has some 4,500 people in the field, working in 22 missions, stretching from Central Asia to the Caucasus and from Eastern Europe to the Baltic and the Western Balkans. At a time when most, if not all international organizations had to respect zero growth or even reduce expenditure, the OSCE's budget increased eightfold. Currently, the OSCE's budget surpasses that of organizations like the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO). In addition, it should be recalled that the vast majority of expatriates working for the OSCE are seconded by their national governments. Were this additional funding to be properly reflected in the budget, experts

2 Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy, New York 1994, pp.759-760.

rate that it would have to be doubled. By these standards, the OSCE is not a minor organization at all. Yet, it still relies on a small and lean bureaucracy of not more than altogether 250 people at the Secretariat in Vienna, while approximately 80 per cent of its budget and 95 per cent of its personnel go to field missions.

While retaining its impressive repository of common principles and shared commitments, the OSCE, inevitably, has lost some of its original features along the way. Although political and military security remain at the core of the agenda, in many ways this has taken on more practical operational characteristics, with most of the resources and political energy invested in stabilizing the Western Balkans and finding a solution for the so-called frozen conflicts in the Caucasus and Moldova. At the same time, based on its comprehensive concept of security, the OSCE has become a tool for the promotion of socio-political transformation. The agenda of the human dimension is pushed forward with renewed vigour, only this time not merely from the conference halls in Vienna, but also in very concrete ways in the field itself, through its missions and in particular through two other new instruments of the OSCE, the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) in The Hague and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Warsaw. In this respect, the OSCE has asserted itself with confidence, however daunting the task in participating States which often had little or less historic experience with established market economies, a free media and a mature and functioning parliamentary democracy.

At this point, it is possible to make three observations.

Firstly, the events that unfolded with the fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia propelled the CSCE into a new role, a challenge for which it proved to possess the required flexibility and adaptability. The turning point, of course, were the Dayton-Paris Agreements, which charged the OSCE with the conduct of the elections and the rebuilding of a civil society on the ruins of war-torn Bosnia. What in fact occurred with this new-style assignment was a recalibration of the Organization's *raison d'être*, a development which was reinforced and then confirmed by subsequent missions in Albania, Eastern Slavonia/Croatia, Kosovo and, recently, Belgrade.

Secondly, precisely because of its comprehensive concept of security, its broad *acquis* and remarkable institutional flexibility, the OSCE has become a Jack of all trades. Thematically, regionally and operationally, the diverse array of tasks which preoccupy the present-day OSCE is truly astounding. This has been traditionally reflected in its three dimensions, while in the course of the 1990s it equipped itself with such novel institutions as the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights mentioned before, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Next to its valuable *acquis*, therefore, the OSCE has developed a reservoir of broad-ranging expertise and field experience. It has difficulty, however, in

packaging this and presenting it as a coherent whole. There is a world of difference between organizing elections in Kosovo, advising governments on amending their language laws and conducting a monitoring operation along the Georgian-Chechen border.

Consequently, the OSCE is vulnerable to national governments pursuing a policy of pick-and-choose. One may argue that this is what gives it its famous flexibility, but, equally, it has resulted in a lack of clear political purpose. In this media-driven age, it should hardly be surprising that politicians and the press have difficulty in explaining to a wider audience what exactly the OSCE stands for and what it does. Accounts tend either to focus on the large-scale missions in the Balkans or to get bogged down in exhaustive anecdotal summaries of its broad scope of activities. As a consequence, the OSCE suffers from a chronic problem of visibility.

Thirdly, the lizard may have grown a new tail, but has it really changed its nature? The OSCE has its origins in the Cold War, serving, as it were, as a kind of diplomatic frontline between East and West, breaking down barriers when it could. Today, that picture is, of course, more complex. For one thing, the European Union has increasingly become an actor in its own right. Another development of major significance is the close alignment of the 13 associated countries with the positions of the EU. If the OSCE has retained something of its frontline status, the line of demarcation has thus shifted eastwards.

One set of divisions within the OSCE is determined by those countries already accommodated within the Euro-Atlantic structures and those with a reasonable prospect of joining in the near future on the one hand and, on the other hand, those countries which do not have this prospect. In this respect, the OSCE partly serves as a kind of pre-school for some aspiring countries of the former communist world. By the same token, the OSCE provides a bridge to countries which are not about to join. Furthermore the Council of Europe has become a political actor in areas traditionally held by the OSCE, while NATO's Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council also affirmed itself.

Consequently, in many Western capitals, the OSCE is no longer perceived as the primary over-arching platform for pan-European security. Rather, it has become an instrument of choice for the pursuit of more limited foreign policy objectives, mainly in those regions where neither the EU nor NATO can tread or where they are reluctant to make the necessary political investments. The OSCE's involvement in the Central Asian republics is a case in point, as is the Southern Caucasus, although the EU has recently moved this region higher up on its political agenda. In the Western Balkans, where both NATO and the EU have since become heavily involved, the OSCE has been steadily pushed into the role of junior partner. The most recent and perhaps most illustrative example of this is the way in which the EU assumed a lead role in dealing with the outbreak of inter-ethnic violence in Macedonia.

That the OSCE has been engaged progressively in so many field activities and has evolved into a highly operational organization is in itself proof of the fact that there is a need for such activities. The Netherlands in particular has contributed in many ways towards strengthening the operational capacities of this Organization. However, somewhere along the way the OSCE has lost its central position in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture as a strategic organization responsible for pan-European peace and stability. If the OSCE is to retain its viability and political relevance in the future, it is essential that it refashions an equilibrium between its newly developed operational capacities and its comprehensive and inclusive concept of security.

The OSCE's Stiffest Challenge Yet

The day after last year's Vienna Ministerial Council, several newspapers reported that the days of the Cold War seemed to have been revisited, with a major clash between the United States and Russia. Because only a Ministerial Declaration on the Role of the OSCE in South-Eastern Europe and an in-itself significant Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons were in the end adopted, the annual meeting of foreign ministers was generally seen as a failure. While perhaps only those who were privy to the negotiating process realized that this situation was by no means unavoidable, it is fair to observe that a festering wound within the OSCE had been torn open. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Yevgeni Gussarov, speaking at the closing ceremony, remarked that this might in fact prove to be a healthy development so as to allow the healing process to start.

The writing had been on the wall for the OSCE since the pull-out of the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) and the subsequent NATO air campaign against Serb troop concentrations and military installations. The Norwegian Chairman-in-Office did a truly remarkable job of navigating the OSCE through this intense political minefield and concluding a successful Summit in Istanbul, which resulted in a broad package of substantial political commitments. At the same time, the success of this Summit concealed a deepening division within the OSCE membership. A good ten years after the signing of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, it would appear that this phase of the OSCE's evolutionary cycle, which started so full of optimism, is nearing its end.

The willingness, for instance, on the part of participating States to continue to invest in new large-scale missions appears to be waning, at least for the time being. A case in point is the new Mission to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, established early 2001. Remarkably, the matter of the Mission's mandate proved less controversial than the discussion on the maximum number of international staff. Quite a number of Ambassadors of participating States insisted on a limited staff.

Similar reservations could be observed during the discussions on the temporary strengthening of the Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje. While the need to increase the Mission's capacity for the purpose of monitoring the border between Macedonia and southern Kosovo was widely recognized, all the Permanent Council could agree to was an increase of eight extra Mission members. And this was in the midst of a potentially destabilizing situation in a country where the CSCE as early as 1992 had fielded its first-ever mission designed to monitor possible spillover. On top of that, Max van der Stoel as HCNM had warned the Permanent Council on numerous occasions about the build-up of inter-ethnic tensions in Macedonia.

Strangely enough, though, only one week later, the Permanent Council also approved an extension of the mandate for the Georgia border monitoring operation, bringing its staff detail back up to summer strength, that is doubling in size to 42 monitors without so much as blinking an eye. What, if anything, do these seemingly contradictory decisions signify?

I mentioned earlier that the metamorphosis of the CSCE into an organization primed for all manner of operational activities could very well imply that a more selective use would be made of it. In fact, the OSCE has to find its way, as it were, in an increasingly crowded labour market. As NATO has made its first steps in the Western Balkans as a peacekeeping organization, this aspect has been irrevocably lost to the OSCE, at least in Central Europe and the Balkans, in spite of the fact that it had been nominally part of its broad mandate. The Council of Europe, too, has increasingly ventured outside its Strasbourg premises, setting up field offices and becoming more operationally involved. In doing so, it interferes, on occasion, with the OSCE's activities, like, for instance, in the case of the status issue of the separatist region of Trans-Dniestria. There have been other examples bordering on unhelpful competition and duplication, which are to be avoided.

The biggest actor to be stepping on the lizard's tail, however, may well become the European Union. The Common Foreign and Security Policy has been steadily taking shape, and with the appointment of the High Representative, Javier Solana, Europe finally may get what Henry Kissinger had found wanting for so long: a telephone number. The European Union increasingly disposes of a considerable arsenal of foreign policy instruments, not least its political and economic weight. Currently, moreover, the European Union is developing its crisis management capacity and with that, its ability to field missions of its own. In time, it will also possess the capacity to deploy military units for the type of operations that are presently undertaken by SFOR and KFOR.

As other international organizations and the European Union are steadily adapting to the new demands of a fundamentally changed security environment, the OSCE will need to resist pressure which would relegate it to some kind of technical sub-contractor. Paradoxically, it has been the relatively successful development of the OSCE's operational field capabilities which at one

and the same time has left it vulnerable to such pressures. When the political dialogue on any given conflict situation is conducted outside the framework of the OSCE, it may be increasingly difficult to expect this Organization to involve itself constructively and in a meaningful manner.

Another change in this respect is the growing tendency to limit consultations within the OSCE to only the biggest powers; those which, by the way, do not necessarily contribute the largest percentage of the budget

The axiom of "no taxation without representation" may, in case this continues, very well become a considerable factor in the policy deliberations of an increasing number of participating States and affect the future role and potential of this Organization.

Although the OSCE, like any other international organization, is continuously pondering its future course, at this stage it seems important that this process of reflection is taken forward with vigour.

A particularly pertinent case in point, in my view, is the whole issue of arms control and CSBMs in the OSCE. The current arms control systems and applicable CSBMs have proven to be extremely useful in enhancing pan-European security. Not merely because the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) has assisted in considerably bringing down the numbers of military hardware in a transparent way. But, equally important, because this CFE Treaty with its intrusive verification regime and the Vienna Document with the broad confidence-building nature of its agreed measures, promoted frequent contacts and intensive exchanges of information between former adversaries in ways that were unimaginable two decades ago.

However, care should be taken that we do not, like those Generals, prepare to fight the last war. Again, it should be remembered that the current OSCE arms control regime dates from the Cold War. Naturally, the relevant documents have since been amended to better account for the changed politico-military situation in Europe. But there appears to be little enthusiasm at this stage to look at the possibilities for developing new measures in this field. Yet, the nature of armed conflicts in Europe has changed dramatically. Present-day threats to security arise chiefly from intra-state social and political instability, disputes over power-sharing mechanisms, ethnic tension and often obscure rebel movements, who operate with narrow political agendas and whose sources of finance are often equally obscure. What does seem clear, however, is the correlation between the proliferation of small arms, low intensity warfare and organized crime, especially with regard to the drugs trade, trafficking in human beings and corruption.

The current tools of the OSCE in the field of arms control and, particularly, CSBMs are not up to date with these developments. Some steps, of course, have already been taken, like the adoption at the Vienna Ministerial Council of a Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Furthermore, the OSCE is conducting at the moment a broad study on how to enhance its capability to act in the field of police-related activities, building on the substantial experi-

ence gained through the OSCE Kosovo Police Service School and through its role in Eastern Slavonia when this territory was reintegrated into Croatia. At the same time, however, it is of increasing importance that within the OSCE, clear agreements are reached on arms control and CSBMs covering so-called "other forces", including paramilitary forces.

Back to Basics

Looking at today's untidy geopolitical map and the experiences of the last ten years, it is clear that Europe's troubles are far from over still. In the generally jubilant atmosphere which prevailed at the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama may be forgiven for having proclaimed *The End of History*. After ten years of the bloody dealings of Slobodan Milošević, the international community, too, may be forgiven its brief pause for celebrating the promise of a return to normalcy of the Western Balkans.

Although the raising of the Iron Curtain may have brought to an end the stark political and military division of Europe, at the same time much older, historic fault lines have resurfaced with the collapse of the Soviet empire. Many of the conflicts that the OSCE currently deals with are variations on some of the same themes that emerged with the break-up of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. Indeed, some historians and political observers argue that the origins of these fault lines must be traced back even further, pointing to the split of the Roman Empire, in 400 AD, in its Western and Eastern constituent halves and the subsequent separate development of the Roman and Orthodox Churches.

Although the economic, social and environmental devastation brought upon Eastern Europe by decades of communist misrule will continue to fuel conflict situations for the foreseeable future, it would be wise to bear in mind that the Soviet legacy is only one of the top layers of this volatile crust. Neither should we underestimate the potentially destabilizing impact of the shock rendezvous Eastern European societies are experiencing with Western capitalism. In any case, all of us involved in foreign policy-making would do well to entertain the idea of "a rediscovery of history", rather than merely propagating the simplistic notion that the advance of liberal democracy is irreversible and therefore a foregone conclusion. Bruno Kreisky once remarked that history has many lessons to teach, but, unfortunately, finds few pupils.

It is obvious that the violent and ethnic break-up of the former Yugoslavia came as a shock to the West. After all, it negated all the values and political principles it had staunchly defended in the last 50 years. Liberal democracy and everything it entails may have emerged victorious from the Cold War, by now it should be abundantly clear that serving as a role model alone will not bring stability and prosperity to the whole of the European continent.

No international organization has more experience in this part of the world than the OSCE, not simply by virtue of its field missions, but especially because every single country whose security is determined by its proximity to these fault lines is represented in the OSCE. Consequently, there is no better place than Vienna for a continuous dialogue on and risk-assessment of (potential) conflicts.

What is needed is that this wealth of experience and expertise is better harnessed and geared towards early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. The OSCE must invest heavily in building up its position as the foremost knowledge and nerve centre of security issues in Europe, treating all three dimensions equally and in relation to one another. In this respect, it would appear necessary to further strengthen the analytical and planning capacities of the OSCE Secretariat, as proposed in the recent joint Dutch-German paper "Reviewing the OSCE: Food for Thought and some Possible Steps Forward". Also, its suggestion to create informal working groups in Vienna assigned to develop subregional strategies deserves particular consideration.

At the same time, the OSCE must shed the illusion that it can resolve each and every crisis on its own. It is imperative that the OSCE takes the lead in giving real and practical meaning to the Platform on Co-operative Security. This will not be an easy task, as the founding principles of the various European institutions in practice often result in an open-ended interpretation of their various mandates. Consequently, competition between them has become a fact of life and interlocking institutions turn out to have a great potential for becoming interblocking institutions. What is important, though, is that the political imperative of demarcating the respective competencies of the Euro-Atlantic institutions, fully taking into account the comparative advantage of each, takes precedence over the bureaucratic impetus that we sometimes see in practice.

The core of this recommendation is in fact a variation on one of the proposals contained in the Kinkel-Kooijmans initiative of 1994, which introduced the concept of putting the *OSCE first*, in so far that it has a primary responsibility in solving the problems in its own security space, before this degenerates into one of global proportions.

What I have in mind is not a hierarchy between international organizations or some kind of gentlemen's agreement which would give the OSCE an automatic lead role. Rather, the OSCE should function more as a clearing house or nerve centre, where intelligence, analysis, normative frameworks and security dialogue come together in a much more coherent way. Depending on the situation at hand, the Permanent Council may decide on a course of action and deliberate whether to engage the OSCE's own resources or ask other international organizations, including the international financial institutions, to assume responsibility for certain tasks or provide support.

Examples of such inter-institutional co-operation within an OSCE framework could be, for instance, a request by the OSCE to the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA) to help in the clearing up of unstable munitions, or having the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe help to sort out this or that constitutional bottleneck. Equally, the OSCE could solicit the European Commission to assist the Co-ordinator for OSCE Economic Activities in drafting plans for the social and economic rehabilitation of war-affected regions in the Southern Caucasus. Neither should we ignore the substantial contributions participating States can make on an individual basis.

The point is, if such activities are undertaken outside the framework which the OSCE can offer for common security, they are more likely to contribute to a prolongation or even escalation of a conflict rather than to help in mitigating it. In this respect, it is crucial to bear in mind that in dealing with most of the (potential) conflict situations in the OSCE region, the Russian Federation needs to be positively engaged. The OSCE provides the logical platform to do this, but for the Russians to stay engaged, the functioning of the OSCE must meet at least somewhere their expectations and grievances. Currently, that may not sufficiently be the case. The European Union and United States would do well, therefore, to constructively consider some of the Russian concerns about the development of the OSCE. The upcoming debate on the further enlargement of NATO makes such a reflection all the more necessary.

There is, of course, nothing very novel about the ideas that I am putting forward, except that they refuse to get off the ground. No new frameworks would have to be developed; all the required *acquis* has been formulated already within the OSCE and in other principal documents. I wish to refer specifically in this context to the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation of 1997. Not only is the Founding Act a relatively young document, it is in my view particularly significant, as it commits the two major former rivals to a common approach on European security. Paragraphs 1 and 2 from the chapter on Principles read as follows:

> "Proceeding from the principle that the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible, NATO and Russia will work together to contribute to the establishment in Europe of common and comprehensive security based on the allegiance to shared values, commitments and norms of behaviour in the interests of all states.
>
> NATO and Russia will help to strengthen the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, including developing further its role as a primary instrument in preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention, crisis management, post-conflict rehabilitation and regional security cooperation, as well as in enhancing its operational capabilities to carry out these tasks. The OSCE, as the only pan-European security organisation, has a key role in European peace and stability. In strengthening the

> OSCE, NATO and Russia will cooperate to prevent any possibility of returning to a Europe of division and confrontation, or the isolation of any state."[3]

It is purely a matter of implementation, but that is easier said than done. The climate currently prevailing in the OSCE is not conducive for the type of co-operation geared towards promoting a genuine sense of common security.
Breaking this deadlock and positioning the OSCE as the principal knowledge centre on concrete European security issues and clearing house vis-à-vis other international organizations and European institutions will be, I believe, the main challenge for the coming years. Failure in this respect may imply a further political weakening of the OSCE. I believe this would be an undesirable development, as no other organization in Europe has the experience, expertise, broad mandate and, most importantly, the wide membership needed to implement the concept of common and comprehensive security. The OSCE is not that easy to be substituted, neither by NATO nor by the EU.

The OSCE and the Netherlands

Over the last fifty years, Dutch foreign policy has developed a particular affinity for multilateral diplomacy. Following the Second World War, the Netherlands set aside its cherished status of neutrality and became a founding member of the Benelux and the Council of Europe, the forerunners of the present-day European Union, of NATO and the CSCE. This affinity is firmly grounded in rational self-interest, as multilateral organizations offer a more level political playing field and thus serve to temper somewhat the preponderant influence the great powers would otherwise exercise unilaterally. Equally, an active engagement in multilateral fora offers the possibility of increasing one's own capacity to inject ideas we consider important.
Consequently, the Netherlands has consistently invested a great deal of effort and substantial resources in the functioning of international organizations. The OSCE is no exception. The Netherlands is one of the largest net contributors to the OSCE Unified Budget and among the most important financiers of the activities of ODIHR, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and some of the missions in the field. In fact, what the Netherlands contributes to the Unified Budget is only a fraction of the financial resources it makes available to the OSCE through voluntary funding. In addition, The Hague, as one of the official seats of the OSCE, hosts the offices of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and, for the past ten years, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs has operated and, in part, financed the FSC

3 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation. Issued in Paris, France, on 27 May 1997, in: NATO review 4/1997, Documentation, pp. 7-10, p. 7.

and CFE Communications Network, a crucial link in the OSCE arms control information exchange and verification regime. The Netherlands is furthermore the depository of the CFE Treaty of 1990 and its adapted version of 1999.

Dutch investments in the OSCE, however, have not been restricted to material contributions only. The Netherlands has also initiated various proposals that helped shape the conceptual evolution of the Organization. In addition to the Kinkel-Kooijmans initiative of 1994 and the recent Dutch-German paper that I already mentioned, examples that spring to mind are the initiative towards strengthening the Secretariat and the operational capacities of the Organization, as adopted by the Ministerial Council in Copenhagen of 1997, our contribution to bring about the REACT concept as adopted at the Istanbul Summit and our role with respect to the Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

The single most important contribution, though, that the Netherlands may make to the functioning and further development of the OSCE is likely to be in 2003, when it assumes the role of Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE. This promises to be a substantial and hugely challenging task. The burden on the OSCE Chairmanship is generally recognized to be severe and cannot be compared to, for instance, the Presidency of the European Union, which can rely on the support services of such established and large bureaucracies as the Council Secretariat and the Commission.

Given the limited political role of the Secretary General, which in our view needs to be bolstered anyhow, the functioning of the OSCE at present largely revolves around the Chairman-in-Office. Whether this is a good thing or not is a different matter, but it should be clear that in addition to shouldering the responsibility for all of the OSCE's regular activities, future Chairmanships will be expected to provide the necessary political guidance and impetus in shaping the future of the Organization.

As I pointed out earlier in this article, there is a need for the OSCE to reposition itself as the principal knowledge and nerve centre on European security issues and as a clearing house vis-à-vis the other international institutions. In several ways, the Netherlands looks to be well-placed to take this debate further. Given its position in all four Euro-Atlantic institutions, the Netherlands, in its capacity as Chairman-in-Office, should be able to give meaningful direction to a broader discussion on how to elaborate the Platform on Co-operative Security. In this respect, it is vital that the Netherlands not only conducts early consultations with the incoming Presidencies of the European Union, but equally with the United States and those countries that have signalled a dissatisfaction with the present functioning of the OSCE, chief among them the Russian Federation.

The Netherlands is looking forward to joining the OSCE Troika in 2002 and to assume the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2003. For us, this will be a new and daunting experience. We have a lot to offer. At the same time the Neth-

erlands and its foreign service in particular may draw some useful lessons. It may also enhance our understanding of some of the underlying tenets of the security issues currently confronting the European continent. The Netherlands is conscious of the task ahead and is fully aware of the heavy responsibility that comes with it. The logistical preparations for the Chairmanship are underway; what should be initiated in the near future are political consultations designed to develop a road map for the future of the OSCE.