

*Ursel Schlichting*

## Foreword

Two years ago, the foreword to the OSCE Yearbook began by asking, “is the OSCE going through a crisis?” To anyone who has been following the discussions of recent months – within the OSCE, but also among academics, politicians and the interested public – it is clear that most observers would answer this question with a “yes”. The general impression is of a long-term and extremely serious crisis.

At first glance, several indicators seem to support this view: EU and NATO enlargement means that powerful actors, maybe even rivals, are penetrating ever more deeply into an area in which the OSCE was, until recently, the only organization with responsibility for security and stability. This is true despite the fact that Vienna has long been seen above all as a staging post on the road to Brussels. The EU and NATO will soon have members that until recently still hosted OSCE missions – something that is not easy to square with the standard image of an EU country, especially in view of EU states’ claims that they possess adequate democratic and constitutional mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts (e.g. those involving minorities) and do not need to rely on the OSCE and its institutions, such as the High Commissioner on National Minorities. Moreover, the EU has begun to take on civilian conflict-management tasks, thereby entering a field that has until now been the OSCE’s core area of activity.

The OSCE’s field missions have generally received high praise for their active and frequently successful engagement in areas such as post-conflict rehabilitation – and hence also the prevention of further conflicts – and are universally acknowledged to be the Organization’s key comparative advantage. But even these have now come in for criticism and have even been condemned as superfluous by several states – the accusations ranging from interference in internal affairs and geographic imbalance, to the claim that the OSCE’s practical work focuses too much on the human dimension. Some states have even argued that OSCE missions are a stigma that stands in the way of their integration into the West. The fact that the critics include the Russian Federation must be seen as a serious problem given that Russia was long one of the Organization’s strongest supporters. Recently, Russia has not only displayed decreasing interest in the OSCE, but has become one of the Organization’s sharpest critics. It now belongs to the group of countries that question the value of the Organization as a whole.

Finally, the unilateralism that is currently in fashion – and appears to go hand in hand with a tendency towards seeking military solutions to security problems – threatens to undermine the OSCE’s fundamental commitment to multilateralism and to conflict management through non-military means.

Perhaps our opening question should therefore be rephrased as “does the OSCE have a future?” Have the developments listed above rendered the Organization superfluous? Are the tasks it performs being gradually taken over by other organizations?

But even this – apparently pessimistic – question is not new, as Adam Daniel Rotfeld notes in his contribution to the current volume. That in itself is cause for optimism: For the question of the OSCE’s future that we have made the central topic of this Yearbook is no longer primarily posed – as Rotfeld also notes – by the Organization’s critics, but above all by its defenders. As a result, we may hope to find well thought-out, factually based, creative and properly “forward-looking” answers.

It appears that the “great” questions of the past – the questions of giving the OSCE a legal basis, of giving it precedence over other security organizations, the question of competition versus co-operation and co-ordination – are now all either of secondary importance or have already been answered. OSCE decisions will thus not become legally binding for the foreseeable future. A hierarchization of security organizations with the OSCE at the top has now also been excluded – not only as a result of political developments, but explicitly in the Charter for European Security. Co-operation and co-ordination with other organizations that share “responsibility” for security and stability, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights have become a matter of course – so much so that it is now possible to dismiss the “competition and duplication” and “inefficiency and waste” that continue to exist alongside the expected and hoped-for synergies as “natural wastage” and “unavoidable everyday occurrences”, as Ingo Peters does in his contribution to this volume. Although enhancing co-operation and co-ordination remains as important as ever, it now appears to be something that is not only feasible but is desired by all parties. Consequently, the problem of inter-institutional co-operation between European security organizations can be said to be largely solved.

The events of 11 September 2001 have also played a not inconsiderable role in bringing the frequently abstract, time- and energy-consuming debates and discussions of principle on legal personality and hierarchization, “repoliticization” and “revitalization” to an abrupt end. The new focus is on concrete, acute, urgent problems that require decisive – and collective – action.

The real question should therefore not be whether the OSCE has a future, but what sort of a future it will have. What will its concrete tasks be? How will it be able to carry them out in practice? What powers and capabilities will it require? What areas should the OSCE engage in? Should it narrow its focus or diversify? Limit or expand its activities? Should it (or will it be forced to) restrict its work to certain regions and countries, or will it retain its pan-European focus? And, as important as ever: What shape will the division of labour between international organizations take in practice in view of the “new threats to security” and the “challenges of the 21st Century”?

The current volume reflects the OSCE's comprehensive spectrum of long-established, newly assumed and potential future tasks and areas of engagement. The Organization's traditional involvement in conflict prevention and crisis management, democratization and the promotion of human rights and the building of co-operative security has now been joined by – above all – its role in combating terrorism, where the Organization has a role to play, for example, as a result of its assumption of tasks in the areas of border monitoring and border security. Further contributions to this year's Yearbook deal with the OSCE's role in security-sector reform, its growing involvement in environmental matters, such as the protection of vital natural resources (and, through that, the prevention of environmental conflicts) and its commitment to media freedom and the protection of persecuted journalists. New and urgent topics include a consideration of Islam as an integral part of the cultures found between Vancouver and Vladivostok and organized crime and its role in acute or "frozen" conflicts – something that sheds a whole new light on these conflicts.

Facing as many threats and dangers, urgent issues and tasks requiring attention as it does, Europe cannot afford to ignore an actor as experienced as the OSCE, especially one that has come to focus so strongly on its operational activities and work in the field. A premium should therefore be placed on the Organization's practical experience, even if this is occasionally seen in terms of "niche activities", and the OSCE itself described – in my opinion, degradingly – as a "niche organization".

The OSCE is still the most inclusive security organization in the Northern hemisphere. It looks set to retain this position in the long term, even if the number of states that belong to no other (Western) organization has declined and will continue to do so in the years to come. The OSCE also remains the organization with the most comprehensive concept of security, one that includes not only the politico-military, but also the economic-environmental and the human dimensions. The view that only an approach of this kind is adequate to deal with contemporary security challenges has won general acceptance in the past decade following the unexpected outbreak of new types of conflict and the equally unexpected (at least in terms of their extent) appearance of new threats. At the same time, the recognition has also grown that no single organization is capable of managing all the tasks that need to be dealt with.

For the OSCE, this means continuing along familiar paths whilst simultaneously taking on new tasks in perhaps unfamiliar areas. Of course, within this, the Organization needs to strive for a new balance between the dimensions and in the geographical distribution of its activities. Although this is not one of the more urgent of the Organization's many tasks – no one seriously doubts the importance of the OSCE in promoting human rights or deny the differences between participating States in terms of democratic and constitutional practice – it is unavoidable in order to ensure the continued sup-

port of a large and important section of OSCE States – as well as to promote fairness and to reduce complacency on the part of the Organization's other participating States.

It is important to note, as Wolfgang Zellner does, that “in a certain sense, crises have always accompanied the development of the CSCE and the OSCE”. However, it is also clear that, against the background of the challenges and problems that Europe faces, the question “does the OSCE have a future?” can and must be answered in the affirmative.

The authors featured in the current volume have brought great skill and dedication to bear in producing an exceptionally wide-ranging variety of contributions. They have gone some considerable way towards identifying the new challenges facing the OSCE and working out ways to meet them. The editors would like to thank all of them for their valuable contributions to this – vitally necessary – discussion on the future of the OSCE.

Dieter Lutz, founder of the OSCE Yearbook and the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) and, from 1994, Director of the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFHS), died suddenly in January 2003 at the age of 53. This book is dedicated to him.