

Aleksi Härkönen

The OSCE and Outreach Activities – Prospects for an Enlarged Role?¹

Introduction

The CSCE/OSCE has a history of co-operation with other regions beyond its geographic area. In the past thirty years, the OSCE has developed a framework of relations with non-participating states and other regional organizations. This approach was entrenched in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. The chapter on the Mediterranean, also known as the fourth dimension of security, emphasizes the inter-linkage of security in Europe and other parts of the world, in particular the Mediterranean area. Since then, this notion has been reiterated time and again in subsequent CSCE/OSCE documents. After the Cold War, the OSCE developed a similar framework for co-operation with Asian Partner States.

The OSCE has never operated in a vacuum. A basic premise for relations with Partner States is that security is indivisible. Co-operating by sharing information and expertise with a view to countering common challenges to security is part of the Organization's *raison d'être*. A major part of the ongoing dialogue between the OSCE and Partner States focuses on an exchange of views on issues of mutual interest and common concern. One of the main objectives has been to keep open channels of communication between the OSCE and the Partners, as well as among the Partners themselves.

It is often said that the OSCE could be a source of inspiration for other regions, because the OSCE has a broad mandate and a comprehensive approach to security and is renowned for its innovative and flexible ways of dealing with security issues. But it should be also noted that history never repeats itself, and other regions may develop equally innovative ways of dealing with their concerns. Still, the OSCE experience deserves close study.

In the past few years, the OSCE has undertaken efforts to strengthen relations with its Partner States. As relations have developed, the Partner States themselves have often taken the initiative. Questions raised in this dialogue have included the status of Partner States vis-à-vis the OSCE, possible additional fields of co-operation and the encouragement of Partners to voluntarily implement OSCE norms, principles and commitments.

1 The views expressed in this contribution are the author's alone.

A Brief Overview of Relations with Partner States

Currently, the OSCE maintains relations with six Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia). These relations were established in 1994 except in the case of Jordan, which joined the partnership in 1998. The OSCE has established relations with five Asian Partners for Co-operation: Afghanistan (2003), Japan (1992), the Republic of Korea (1994), Mongolia (2004), and Thailand (2000). The Mediterranean partnerships are rooted in the Mediterranean dimension, which was an initiative of the CSCE participating States in the 1970s. The Asian partnerships have developed individually and at the initiative of the Asian states concerned following the end of the Cold War.

Sharing information and expertise, especially on new threats to security and stability, such as terrorism, immigration and trafficking in all forms, and the need for tolerance and non-discrimination have consolidated relations between the OSCE and Partner States. Areas in which the OSCE has gained a comparative advantage, such as policing and border management, may also harbour further potential for co-operation with Partner States.

More traditional aspects of the OSCE's experience gained in confidence-building measures, rule of law and democracy building as well as economic and environmental issues remain important parts of the agenda of co-operation.

In the OSCE, interaction with the Partner States takes place at various levels and forums, and covers different areas, including security issues. The main mechanisms for co-operation include: informal Mediterranean and Asian Contact Group meetings within the framework of the Permanent Council (which provide for an exchange of information and discussion on issues of mutual interest), as well as joint conferences, seminars, and workshops. The Partners also have the possibility of participating in election observation missions and seconding staff to OSCE field missions.

In the last three or four years, the Partner States have been invited more regularly to observe meetings of the Permanent Council and the Forum for Security Co-operation. They participate in Summits, the Ministerial Council, and review meetings, as well as high-level meetings with the OSCE Troika and the Secretary General. Partner States have access to OSCE official documents and the right to submit views to the Chairman-in-Office.

Latest Developments – Becoming Involved Beyond the OSCE Region

The OSCE Ministerial Council meeting held in 2003 in Maastricht created new opportunities for fostering relations with Partner States. In the OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century, the Organization decided to “intensify co-operation with its Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation, by early identification of areas

of common interest and concern and possibilities for further co-ordinated action”.

In a separate decision, the OSCE was tasked with preparing a report on partnership issues, to be submitted to the next Ministerial Council. The Sofia Ministerial Council in 2004 led to the strengthening of the partnership with the Mediterranean and Asian Partners. A comprehensive report on enhanced co-operation was submitted, based on the deliberations of an informal working group. The importance of the report was underscored in a Ministerial Council decision, which recognized the increasing importance of the well-established co-operation between OSCE and its Mediterranean and Asian Partners.

The report, which is annexed to the 2004 Sofia Ministerial Council Document, provides for a broad range of activities that could be undertaken with the Partner States. These range from offering assistance and support during elections to organizing workshops, training sessions, and briefings on subjects in which the OSCE has a particular comparative advantage with the participation of government officials, practitioners, NGOs, and academic institutions.

It should be noted that the Forum for Security Co-operation was closely involved in preparing the report, and its substantial contribution is included in the recommendations. Furthermore, the Partner delegations were invited to participate in some of the deliberations of the informal working group. They used this opportunity and also submitted their views in writing.

Elections are a further area where the OSCE has recently become more involved beyond its own region. In April 2004, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly sent an observation mission to the presidential elections in Algeria.

In October 2004, acting on an invitation from the government of Afghanistan, the OSCE deployed at short notice an elections support team to assist a Partner State during the presidential elections. This was the first time that the OSCE had deployed an operation in a Partner State.

At the 2004 Mediterranean Seminar held in Sharm El Sheikh, a proposal was made to assist in the presidential elections in Palestine. This was followed by a formal invitation from the Palestinian Authority. The OSCE sent a short-term Training Needs Assessment Team to the January 2005 elections.

The Palestinian Authority also asked to become an OSCE Partner for Co-operation. After lengthy consultations the OSCE Chairman-in-Office replied that the necessary conditions for reaching a consensus were not yet in place, but it would be useful to pursue practical contacts and co-operation.

Global Security and OSCE Outreach

Security in Europe must be seen in the wider context of world security. This was well understood by those involved in the early stages of the CSCE pro-

cess leading up to the Helsinki Conference of 1975. However, the intense East-West tension in Europe sometimes overshadowed the broader context of security and led to a narrow interpretation of the Helsinki process.

As a result, some observers and practitioners questioned whether there was a need to continue the Helsinki process after the European map had been redrawn. If the aim of the CSCE had been limited to overcoming the division of Berlin, Germany, or indeed Europe, the process could have been declared complete with the end of the Cold War. For most of the 1990s, however, the OSCE concentrated on tasks related to intra-state conflicts in the Balkans and elsewhere. In the interim, other security concerns have emerged. Many of them are not limited to Europe and cannot be regarded as solely European problems.

Understanding the interconnectedness of European and global security has implications for the future potential of the OSCE. It could therefore be worthwhile to take a look at the wider context in which the process has developed.

The Helsinki Final Act expresses the conviction that “security in Europe is to be considered in the broader context of world security and is closely linked with security in the Mediterranean area as a whole, and that accordingly the process of improving security should not be confined to Europe but should extend to other parts of the world, and in particular to the Mediterranean area”.

Why does the Mediterranean area figure so prominently in the Final Act? Partly because, in fact, Europe and the countries south and east of the Mediterranean have a lot in common from a security point of view. The Second World War extended to the region, and colonial rule continued in some countries for decades after the war. The creation of the state of Israel had its roots in the persecution of Jews in Europe.

While CSCE consultations were already in process, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War broke out, causing a serious energy crisis in Western Europe. A peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict, including a settlement of the Palestinian problem, has been sought since the 1970s. Many OSCE participating States, including the United States, EU member countries, and Russia, are involved in such efforts.

The recent terrorist attacks, especially those in the United States in 2001 and in Spain in 2004, have been a stark reminder of the indivisibility of security for OSCE participating States as a result of the Middle Eastern and North African connections of many of the perpetrators. A further serious concern has been that Russia has suffered several terrorist attacks, which have also been inspired in part by religious extremism.

It would be simplistic to point at religious and cultural differences as the main sources of conflicts, but it seems that many OSCE countries are uncertain of how to deal with developments in the Islamic world. The Middle East conflict was a taboo topic in the OSCE until recently. Now there are several

topics that directly touch upon the Middle East, such as tolerance, democratization assistance in Palestine, and the possible development of new OSCE partnerships in the region.

No specific mention was made of any other continent in the 1975 Final Act. Still, there were certainly security concerns involving matters outside the OSCE area during the consultations in the early 1970s. In Asia, for example, where the United States was involved in a major war in Vietnam, and the Soviet Union was assisting the other side. The war came to an end only months before the Final Act was signed. The main adversaries of the Cold War agreed to *détente* in Europe while the confrontation continued elsewhere.

Another Asian conflict was perhaps more directly relevant for the early stages of the Helsinki process. China had challenged the Soviet Union's position as the leader of the Socialist bloc and underlined its strength by acquiring nuclear weapons in 1964 and by engaging Soviet forces in a limited armed conflict on the Ussuri River in 1969. The Chinese challenge may have moved the Soviet leadership to accept the compromises included in the Final Act to stabilize its Western "front", which was weakened by frequent popular uprisings.

The Cold War in East Asia and the Pacific had been as divisive as in Europe, and to some extent continues to this day, especially in the Korean Peninsula. After the orderly and largely non-violent end of the stand-off in Europe, a number of Asian countries expressed an interest in the OSCE process. A desire to follow in the footsteps of the CSCE/OSCE was not expressed by a group of countries but by individual countries: Japan at first, then the Republic of Korea, Thailand, and, more recently, Afghanistan and Mongolia. Although the People's Republic of Korea has had a few contacts with OSCE countries, it not officially participated in OSCE events or requested partnership status.

Faced with the growing threat of international terrorism, the OSCE used rather straightforward language when it adopted the Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century in 2003. The document states:

As threats originating or evolving in adjacent regions are of increasing importance, the OSCE will intensify its co-operation with its Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation, by early identification of areas of common interest and concern and possibilities for further coordinated action. We will encourage them to voluntarily implement the principles and commitments of the OSCE and will co-operate with them in this as appropriate [...] The OSCE will also consider ways in which OSCE norms, principles, commitments and values could be shared with

other regions, in particular neighbouring areas. Contacts with organizations in those areas will be further developed.²

The Strategy goes on to state that

One way of dealing with threats from outside the OSCE region is to seek possibilities for expanding the relevant principles, norms and measures contained in a number of OSCE politico-military documents to adjacent regions. The OSCE is particularly interested in encouraging its Partners for Co-operation and its Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation to take part in a number of existing information exchanges and other endeavours in the framework of the CSCE confidence- and security-building measures. Mutual early warning exchanges will be encouraged.³

The implicit argument that threats and challenges move mainly in one direction, from adjacent regions to the OSCE region, is striking. From a reverse angle, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imposed ideologies and their consequences, which continue until the present time could also be seen as security challenges faced by the "adjacent regions".

In an era of globalization, security will also have to be addressed globally. The international system has changed radically since 1945, and the United Nations struggles to identify the actors who should bear the main responsibility for international peace and security in today's world. Multilateralism is of course only one possible way of dealing with security challenges. It has its deficiencies, just like democracy, but the alternatives may be much worse.

The OSCE, as a regional arrangement under the UN Charter, is also making attempts at reforming itself. Its Partners for Co-operation are following the reform process closely and making their own suggestions. Their voices should be heard if the OSCE is to remain a credible security organization in a global era.

Supply and Demand of the OSCE Acquis

As the above citations indicate, the strategy document suggests that co-operation between the OSCE and its Partners is largely based on the OSCE sharing its *acquis* with them, and encouraging the Partners in voluntary im-

2 OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Eleventh Meeting of the Ministerial Council, Maastricht, 1 and 2 December 2003, MC.DOC/1/03, 2 December 2003, pp. 1-10, here: p. 4 (para. 23), at: <http://www.osce.org>.

3 Ibid., p. 9 (para. 51).

plementation. This was echoed in the call for the OSCE to further develop co-operation with the Partners for Co-operation during 2004. More precisely, the OSCE was tasked with:

- Identifying additional fields of co-operation and interaction with the OSCE Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation for the purpose of enhancing mutual security;
- Encouraging Partners for Co-operation to implement OSCE norms, principles, and commitments voluntarily, in part as a means to further interaction with the OSCE;
- Exploring the scope for wider sharing of OSCE norms, principles, and commitments with adjacent areas; and
- Pursuing its work on procedures for future applications for partnership.

As can be seen, the OSCE expected the Partners to follow the OSCE *acquis* if they wanted closer relations with the Organization. However, it was clear that their position with respect to the Organization would not change. Partners would not become observers and would not be invited to all meetings of the Permanent Council or the Forum for Security Co-operation. What was being offered was enhanced co-operation in making use of the “intellectual property”, the “know-how”, and the experience of the OSCE.

The OSCE *acquis* consists of different kinds of commitments. They could perhaps be divided into three groups: inter-state, intra-state, and reinforcing commitments. Inter-state commitments such as the Helsinki Decalogue and CBM/CSBMs derive from the Cold War era. Intra-state commitments were developed using the common value basis of the Paris Charter of 1990. Reinforcing commitments reinforce the validity of agreements and decisions made elsewhere, such as conventions and resolutions dealing with counter-terrorism.

Different participating States may emphasize different parts of the *acquis* in their co-operation with the Partners. Some emphasize long-term development, whereas others would like to have results in the short term.

In the informal working group of 2004 there was a discussion about the scope of “voluntary implementation”. Should the OSCE *acquis* be implemented by the Partners wholly or partially and who decides what part is the most urgent? It was a useful debate, making clear that the OSCE *acquis*, which has taken thirty years to develop, should be available for the Partners to use depending on their situation.

It should be borne in mind that for the Partners, other organizations – the United Nations as well as several regional organizations – may be the main avenues of security co-operation. For them, the decision on whether to implement OSCE principles, norms, and commitments is therefore the result of a cost-benefit analysis. The desire for closer relations not only with the

OSCE but also with individual participating States will certainly play a role in this decision.

The demand for the OSCE *acquis* may be tempered by the fact that the Partners are closely following the discussions among OSCE participating States on their compliance with commitments and on the need to reassess the validity of some commitments. The debate concerning free and fair elections and election monitoring is a case in point.

The benefits of following the OSCE *acquis* depend on the situation of the countries in question. If a peace agreement were concluded in the Middle East, the parties might welcome a number of OSCE-type commitments that would support it. If the stand-off in the Korean Peninsula began to show signs of easing, principles and measures from the OSCE *acquis* could prove useful. In such situations outside of the OSCE region, however, the OSCE would most probably have an indirect, supporting role.

Values, Civilizations, and OSCE Outreach

During the Cold War, the CSCE could be described as a forum for co-operation between adversaries. By the late 1980s, the situation had changed radically. In the Paris Charter for a New Europe, a common set of basic values was agreed on. All participating States pledged to co-operate on the foundation of respect for human rights, democracy, rule of law, and economic liberty and responsibility.

The OSCE Istanbul Summit document of 1999, which contained the Charter for European Security, confirmed the validity of the Paris Charter. As no Summits have been held since then, the set of basic values established in 1990 remains intact.

When the OSCE reaches out and encourages the Partners for Co-operation to implement its commitments, the question of values is unavoidable. Some pointed questions have been asked. Are OSCE values essentially European/Western? Is the OSCE being used to undermine other value systems now that Communism is dead? What if Western civilization has already peaked and the OSCE's language is nothing more than the afterglow of the euphoria associated with the demise of Communism?

It could be argued that the European Union is established on similar values, and it succeeds in attracting new members and partners, some of which do not belong to the conventional "Western world". Modernizing societies, including those outside the West, tend to adopt or at least move closer to these values. The attempt to pit the "West" against the "rest" on the basis of values is thus untenable. Basic values such as the respect for human rights are universal.

Here the OSCE has an important role to play. Its work against forms of intolerance such as racism, anti-Semitism, and discrimination against Mus-

lims, Christians, and others has already brought some results. The existence of such problems is now recognized and ways to address them are being sought.

Societies in Europe are already multicultural, and immigration from countries on other continents will continue. A great deal of courage will be required from all the countries involved, as both participating and Partner States work for reconciliation and mutual respect across cultural boundaries that may not strictly follow the borders of the OSCE region.