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The Corfu Process – What Was It All About?

The Corfu Process was a cross-dimensional dialogue on European security involving all OSCE participating States that took place between the informal Corfu foreign ministers' meeting in June 2009 and the preparations for the Astana Summit in December 2010. I was directly involved as British Ambassador to the OSCE at the time, as Chairman of the Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) from September to December 2009, and as a Corfu Co-ordinator. So I was not an impartial bystander, and my impressions of the overall Corfu Process, which are my own and do not represent official British government policy, are no doubt skewed by the role I played.

The need for a dialogue on the future of European security had become increasingly apparent in the decade before the Corfu Process got under way. The Istanbul Summit of 1999 was never all it was cracked up to be. The Charter for European Security agreed there lacked substance. The adapted CFE Treaty (ACFE), which was also signed there, took account of the realities following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact but was never ratified by the NATO countries on the grounds that Russia had not implemented its "Istanbul commitments" to withdraw its troops from Moldova (Transdniestria) and Georgia. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia, supported by a number of CIS states, diverged from the EU and NATO countries in the OSCE on a range of issues related to the OSCE commitments. In 2003 and 2004, OSCE/ODIHR highlighted election rigging in Georgia and Ukraine, which Russia blamed for the "colour revolutions" that then took place in those countries. Also in 2003, OSCE/ODIHR criticized the conduct of the Duma elections. This prompted Russia's campaign to codify the way ODIHR carried out election observation and more generally to "reform" the OSCE. In 2007 Russia effectively prevented ODIHR from observing the Duma elections, and in 2008 it did the same thing with the presidential elections. On the hard security side, Russia finally "suspended" its participation in the original CFE Treaty in 2007.

Nevertheless, no-one could have predicted the blow to mutual trust within the OSCE space that was delivered by the Georgia conflict of August 2008. Regardless of the long-term presence of OSCE monitors in Georgia and its breakaway territory of South Ossetia, Georgia bombarded the South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, and Russia invaded South Ossetia and the other Georgian breakaway territory of Abkhazia. Despite the brokering of a ceasefire by President Nicolas Sarkozy in his capacity as President of the Council of the European Union, Russia had recognized the independence of the two breakaway territories within a month. The OSCE monitors never returned to Georgia/South Ossetia, even though the Finnish and Greek OSCE Chairmen-

ships expended enormous energy in trying to come up with a status-neutral formula. The UN Mission in Georgia/Abkhazia (UNOMIG) had to leave when Russia blocked the extension of its mandate. An EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) was established but in practice this operated only on the Georgian side of the line.

It was the breakdown in trust over the Georgia crisis that gave impetus to what became the Corfu Process. In the autumn of 2008, Russia repeatedly argued that the failures over Georgia were evidence for its hypothesis that the European security architecture was broken. The EU and NATO countries rejected this, but most (including the UK) recognized that if Russia felt uncomfortable with the current architecture of European security, it was reasonable to have a dialogue on the subject. This led to the private foreign ministers' lunch that was the centrepiece of the Helsinki OSCE Ministerial in December 2008. Echoing the proposal put forward in June 2008 by President Dmitry Medvedev, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov argued that 20 years after the end of the Cold War there was no proper European security system – what was needed was a legally binding European security treaty enshrining the non-use of force and equal security in the Euro-Atlantic space. He supported the French proposal for an OSCE Summit where these issues could be thrashed out. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said that he was happy to brainstorm ideas but we had to build on the institutions we already had.

Among the assembled foreign ministers, there was widespread support for the idea that any dialogue on the future of European security must not undermine NATO or the EU. Views on the desirability of a Summit were mixed. OSCE Chairman-in-Office Alexander Stubb identified eight points in his concluding remarks:

- The OSCE was the right place for this discussion.
- No-one had objected to new ideas on European security.
- At this stage there were more questions than answers.
- Current institutions worked well – including the EU, NATO, and the OSCE, which were unique in terms of the commitments undertaken by their members.
- More substance was needed to take this forward.
- Ideas should cover all three security dimensions (politico-military, economic/environmental, and human) in a comprehensive approach including hard and soft security.
- Before inventing a new system we needed to solve existing unresolved/“frozen” conflicts.
- We needed to define the objectives we were seeking to attain before holding a full Summit – this area might be worth developing at a meeting of OSCE foreign ministers to kick off the process.

The last of these provided the pointer for the Corfu Informal Ministerial Meeting under the 2009 Greek Chairmanship. In fact, during the early part of 2009 there were several discussions within the OSCE on the future of European security, some with senior-level input coming from Russia. Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko, while acknowledging that security was multi-dimensional, argued on several occasions that the main gaps were in the politico-military dimension of the OSCE. Human-dimension issues could be discussed elsewhere, e.g. at the Council of Europe. European security needed “rebooting” through a new treaty. We needed a “Helsinki plus”, i.e. practical plans to resolve conflict with fresh ideas. In a swipe at the legacy of the Istanbul Commitments, Grushko said he could not understand why the big picture of European security was being held hostage to an ammunition dump in Transdniestria and some pensioners in a defunct airbase in Abkhazia. But throughout the discussions, Grushko and other Russian speakers stressed the OSCE principles of the “indivisibility of security” and that no state should strengthen its security at the expense of the security of other states. This emphasis, widely regarded as code for continued Russian hostility to NATO enlargement, reinforced concerns in NATO (and by extension in the EU) that the real purpose of Russia’s idea of a legally binding security treaty was to undermine and divide NATO.

There was also considerable suspicion of Russian proposals to reactivate the 1999 Platform for Co-operative Security. This was ostensibly an attempt to reassure the Western countries that the existing institutions, notably NATO and the EU, would have their role respected in the future European security architecture – albeit alongside Russia’s favoured bodies, the CIS and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Many in NATO saw this as a device to establish equivalence between NATO and the CSTO. These suspicions prompted close co-ordination among the NATO and EU countries in delivering a common response to the Russian ideas. In essence, this was: (a) acceptance of a dialogue on the future of European security as long as this was anchored in the OSCE; (b) the dialogue must respect the existing security institutions and the transatlantic link; (c) it must respect existing OSCE commitments and the autonomy of the OSCE institutions (the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights/ODIHR, the High Commissioner on National Minorities/HCNM, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media/RFOM); (d) it must cover all three OSCE dimensions, and (e) it must encompass the protracted conflicts, including Georgia.

The timing of the Corfu Informal Ministerial fitted in with the Obama administration’s objective of a “reset” with Russia. The meeting was given added lustre by the fact that it took place back-to-back with the first meeting of the NATO-Russia Council after the Georgia Crisis. This ensured a high turnout, including the British Foreign Secretary Miliband and the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, although US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was unable to attend at the last minute because of an elbow injury.

The discussion itself was along what were already well-established lines. There was considerable debate between a group led by Lavrov who wanted the dialogue to focus on security *in* Europe, and a group of EU and NATO foreign ministers led by Bernard Kouchner of France, who insisted on dealing with issues such as Afghanistan and international terrorism which lay outside the traditional OSCE framework but affected the security *of* Europe. In her closing “perception remarks”, Chairperson Dora Bakoyannis launched the Corfu Process. Its aims were to restore confidence and trust among the 56 participating States and to strengthen their capacity to address the challenges to *security in Europe* and to the *security of Europe*.

The Corfu Process proper took the form of regular informal open-ended meetings of ambassadors in Vienna backed up by relevant visitors from capital cities. The Chairs of the FSC and the three Committees (Security, Economic, and Human Dimension) were also included in the process. Russia rightly took steps to ensure that the informal Corfu Process did not detract from the work of the FSC as a decision-making body of the OSCE. In the first phase, the task of the Corfu meetings was supposedly to develop a common understanding of the main threats to European security. In practice, though, well-rehearsed positions were constantly repeated. These discussions at least pinpointed the need for greater effort with regard to the protracted conflicts, the restoration of CFE/ACFE, the promotion of democracy and human rights – including those relating to national minorities – and “new threats”, including those emanating from Afghanistan. At an ambassadorial retreat in Krems it was agreed to work towards a Ministerial Declaration that would encapsulate the broad political message of the Corfu Process and a Ministerial Decision to drive the process forward.

The Athens Ministerial in December 2009 was a watershed in the Corfu Process. On the eve of the meeting, Russia circulated the text of its long-awaited draft European Security Treaty (EST) around the capital cities. At the Ministerial, Lavrov referred only briefly to the EST, linking it with the original Medvedev initiative but not with the Corfu Process. Nearly all EU and NATO foreign ministers who spoke on the subject said that the elements in the treaty proposal should be examined within the OSCE in the context of the Corfu Process: Without Corfu there was no place to discuss the draft treaty.

At the Ministerial, agreement was reached without any significant difficulty on a declaration which reconfirmed the vision of a free, democratic, and more integrated OSCE area from Vancouver to Vladivostok, one that was free of dividing lines and zones with different levels of security. It set out three guidelines for the future of the Corfu dialogue: (a) adherence to the concept of comprehensive, co-operative, and indivisible security; (b) compliance with OSCE commitments in all three dimensions; and (c) determination to strengthen co-operation in the OSCE area and to enhance the effectiveness of the OSCE. Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev spent the Athens

Ministerial banging the drum for a Summit during the Kazakh Chairmanship: As a consequence, a carefully calibrated paragraph was added to the Ministerial Declaration “noting with interest” Kazakhstan’s proposal to hold an OSCE Summit and pointing out that it would require adequate preparation in terms of substance and modalities.

However, Russia, supported by Belarus and Turkmenistan, tried to emasculate the draft decision which sought to define the issues on which the Corfu Process should focus. At the Ministerial lunch (which I attended standing in for David Miliband), Lavrov welcomed the way in which the Greeks had directed the Corfu Process as an informal open discussion without a preset agenda. But while he accepted that it was vital to adopt a declaration, he failed to grasp why an informal process required a formal tasking through a decision. This implied that we were trying to institutionalize and restrict the process, in particular by creating a select list of subjects to be dealt with. Virtually all the other ministers who intervened supported Chairperson-in-Office George Papandreou on the need for a decision to define a Corfu Process workplan. In the end, Russia grudgingly went along with a decision which, while leaving it open to states to raise other topics, defined the main issues for the Corfu Process as:

- Implementation of all OSCE norms, principles, and commitments.
- The role of the OSCE in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation.
- The role of the arms-control and confidence- and security-building regimes in building trust in the evolving security environment.
- Transnational and multidimensional threats and challenges.
- Economic and environmental challenges.
- Human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as democracy and the rule of law.
- Enhancing the OSCE’s effectiveness.
- Interaction with other organizations and institutions on the basis of the 1999 Platform for Co-operative Security.

The Ministerial Decision also provided for an interim report that the OSCE Chairmanship was requested to submit to a joint reinforced meeting of the FSC and the Permanent Council (PC) in June 2010. A separate omnibus FSC decision gave that body a mandate that included proper discussions on the Vienna Document and ensured that the FSC and its politico-military expertise remained fully engaged with the Corfu Process.

The Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship, which took over on 1 January 2010, regarded the Corfu Process as a key test and a way to lever President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s objective of holding an OSCE Summit. The Kazakh ambassador appointed ambassadors, all except one from EU/NATO coun-

tries, as “Corfu Co-Ordinators” to drive forward specific areas (curiously known as “ticks”). These were:

- The role of the OSCE in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation: György Molnár, Hungary.
- Transnational and multidimensional threats and challenges: Heiner Horsten, Germany.
- General questions of Euro-Atlantic security: François Alabrune, France.
- Strengthening the cross-dimensional approach to security: Ian Cliff, UK.
- Enhancing the OSCE’s effectiveness, including a review of recommendations in the Final Report by the Panel of Eminent Persons and relevant proposals by participating States: Cornel Feruță, Romania.
- Implementation of all OSCE norms, principles, and commitments: Eoin O’Leary, Ireland.
- Interaction with other organizations and institutions on the basis of the 1999 Platform for Co-operative Security: Renatas Norkus, Lithuania.
- Economic and environmental challenges: Alyaksandr Sychov, Belarus.
- Role of the arms control and confidence- and security-building regimes in building trust in the evolving security environment: Mara Marinaki, Greece.
- Human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as democracy and the rule of law: Ana Martinho, Portugal.

There followed an intensive series of informal ambassadorial meetings at which a vast array of ideas aimed at reinvigorating the OSCE were discussed. Perhaps the most significant of these were:

- *Pre-positioned Consensus*
This was a US formulation designed to give the Chairmanship, the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), and the OSCE institutions greater flexibility to react in a crisis, e.g. by temporarily deploying teams of experts and observers while respecting Russia’s insistence on the principle of consensus. It was pointed out that the HCNM was entrusted with quiet diplomacy without having to revert to the PC at each step. Although there was widespread support for the idea that the OSCE was unable to respond quickly in a crisis because each step required the approval of all 56 participating states, Russia refused to accept that the Chairmanship and the OSCE institutions should be entrusted with greater freedom of manoeuvre. To a degree, the Kazakh Chairmanship’s handling of the concurrent Kyrgyzstan crisis showed what a determined Chairmanship could do under the existing rules.

- *Strengthening the Analytical Capacity of the CPC*
This was a Russian proposal which enjoyed general support. It was linked to the wider argument that the OSCE toolbox, including its various mechanisms, needed updating. Russia claimed that the Georgia and Kyrgyzstan crises stemmed in part from the failure of the CPC to recognize dangerous political trends and to report on them to the PC. A number of countries, including the UK, argued that the CPC did not need extra resources but should rather improve the integration of information received from the field missions, ODIHR, the HCNM, and the RFOM.
- *A Reinvigorated Approach to Resolving the Protracted Conflicts*
Many participating States continued to see resolution of the protracted conflicts as the main raison d'être of the OSCE. The failure to resolve the Transdniestria and Nagorno-Karabakh disputes after 20 years, coupled with the fact that Georgia had exploded, undermined the Organization's credibility. However, despite a lot of talk, the disputes remained locked into the existing processes and in the end it was the failure to agree specific language on each protracted conflict that scuppered the proposed Framework for Action at the Astana Summit.
- *Transnational Threats/Afghanistan*
The US and Russia agreed that an area where the OSCE could contribute more was in combating drugs, organized crime, and terrorism. The US linked this with a greater OSCE role in Afghanistan. A number of other NATO countries, including Canada and the UK, were keen to see an OSCE role in relation to border management in Afghanistan. Russia, however, insisted that OSCE border expertise could not be deployed inside Afghanistan, which was a Partner for Co-operation and not an OSCE participating State. This led to a greater focus on the potential for OSCE border training in Turkmenistan and especially Tajikistan, both OSCE participating States that bordered Afghanistan. The OSCE established a Border Management Staff College (BMSC) in Dushanbe, which has been attended by border police from Afghanistan as well as from participating States. The discussion also led to a focus on other areas where the OSCE could contribute to the fight against drugs trafficking and organized crime, although some participating States were concerned about overlapping with other international organizations.
- *Energy Security/Climate Change*
Throughout the Corfu Process, energy security – above all, the supply of gas from Russia to Germany and a large number of countries in Central Europe – was a key issue in European politics. Since the countries of production, transit, and consumption were all OSCE participating States, the argument was advanced that the OSCE economic and environmental dimension should have a role. However, this did not find much favour with the European Commission or Russia. A number of

countries also used the Corfu Process to press for an OSCE role in the security aspects of climate change – harking back to a discussion that had taken place at the time of the 2007 Madrid Ministerial. However, Russia insisted that climate change was an issue for the UN. In reality, the economic and environmental dimension remained on the fringes of the Corfu Process, despite widespread recognition that economic factors lay behind many of the conflicts and potential conflicts in the OSCE space. It was, however, agreed that the OSCE should do more to address water issues that were a source of tension in Central Asia, notably between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

- *Structured Follow-Up to ODIHR Recommendations*
Long-standing criticism of ODIHR by Russia, Belarus, and some countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia was firmly repudiated by the EU and NATO countries during the Corfu Process. There was nevertheless a recognition that there was often little systematic follow-up to the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw or even to recommendations by ODIHR election observation missions or by ODIHR experts on human rights. A rough consensus emerged during the Corfu Process that there should be more structured follow-up to ODIHR recommendations. Russia and its allies rejected any form of “peer review” on human rights in the OSCE. There was also considerable debate about the long-established right of NGOs to participate in human-dimension events. Some states argued in favour of vetting to ensure that only “competent and legal” NGOs took part, while others insisted that there could be no such limitations.
- *Updating the OSCE Commitments on Freedom of the Media*
The Corfu Process took place against the backdrop of growing concern about the murder of journalists in Russia and a number of other countries. The RFOM, Dunja Mijatović, did not mince her words about physical threats to journalists or a growing trend towards Government influence on the media across the OSCE space. This led to criticism of the RFOM akin to that of ODIHR. A number of countries responded that there were problems with the OSCE commitments on media freedom, but these derived from the need to update the commitments to take account of the development of electronic media and the internet since the early 1990s. This argument gradually gained a broad consensus, although precise mechanisms for updating the media commitments were not defined.
- *Making the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations Politically Binding*
One issue on which there was consensus during the Corfu Process was endorsement of the work of the HCNM. During this period, High Commissioner Knut Vollebæk was actively involved in defusing tension between Slovakia and Hungary over the rights of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and in starting to rebuild trust between Kyrgyzstan

and its Uzbek minority following the violence in the summer of 2010. Some of the Nordic countries – and indeed High Commissioner Vollebæk himself – suggested that it would strengthen the HCNM's hand if the recommendations launched at the 2008 Bolzano/Bozen conference on states' rights and responsibilities concerning minority rights abroad were adopted as politically binding commitments of the OSCE. There was vigorous debate about this in the Corfu Process, with many countries supporting the proposal outright and others asking why the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations should be given a special status above other recommendations made by the HCNM. Although the HCNM explained that the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations encompassed earlier recommendations on best practice with regard to minorities, there was nervousness in some quarters about turning these recommendations into fully-fledged OSCE political commitments.

- *Updating the Vienna Document 1999*

During the Corfu Process there were numerous calls for progress on the CFE Treaty. This did not involve all OSCE participating States directly and was the subject of a separate and ultimately unproductive process spearheaded on the NATO side by Victoria Nuland.

More central to the OSCE was the Vienna Document as one of a suite of military confidence-building measures (CBMs). Russia began calling for an update of the Vienna Document in 2007. Initially there were concerns on the part of many NATO countries that tinkering with the Vienna Document would lead to it being undermined and eventually going the same way as the CFE Treaty. At the Athens Ministerial, however, Russia was persuaded to drop its proposal for a stand-alone decision on a review of the Vienna Document in return for an omnibus decision on the work of the FSC. This enabled practical work on updating the Vienna Document to continue parallel to the Corfu Process.

- *Legal Personality*

Many countries argued during the Corfu Process that a fundamental weakness of the OSCE as a security organization was its lack of legal personality. Others suggested that this gave it added flexibility. A draft convention had already been agreed in 2007 as a result of hard graft in a working group headed by the Netherlands Ambassador, Ida van Veldhuizen-Rothenbuecher. However, Russia insisted that before this could be adopted there must be an OSCE Charter. The United States refused to accept a Charter. Despite numerous meetings on the margins of the Corfu Process, this deadlock was never resolved.

- *Freedom of Movement*

Russia argued that an OSCE commitment that was constantly ignored in the human dimension was that on freedom of movement. This should lead to steps towards visa liberalization throughout the OSCE space, especially in respect of access to the EU. This was strongly resisted by the EU.

During the first half of 2010, the Kazakh Chairmanship produced food-for-thought and perception papers on all the topics discussed in the Corfu Process. Groups of participating States produced their own food-for-thought papers. These provided the underpinning for the interim report to be submitted to the joint reinforced PC-FSC meeting by the end of June 2010. The report was then presented by the Chairmanship to the informal meeting of OSCE foreign ministers in Almaty in July 2010, where the overriding aim of the Chairmanship was to secure political endorsement of its proposal for an OSCE Summit. In reality, thanks to the divergent views thrown up in the Corfu Process, Kazakhstan – and probably Russia – would have gone along with a Summit that did little more than commemorate the 65th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the 35th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 20th anniversary of the Charter of Paris. But this was unacceptable for the EU and NATO countries, who needed substance – particularly if their leaders were to be persuaded to travel to Astana in the depths of winter.

The working sessions of the informal Almaty Ministerial were opened by President Nazarbayev, who argued that political and economic upheavals in the Vancouver-Vladivostok space since 1999, together with the situation in Afghanistan following the London Conference, necessitated a Summit with substance. For the EU, Baroness Catherine Ashton specified that an OSCE Summit would make sense if it could mobilize political will, particularly on four priority areas: (a) strengthened OSCE conflict capabilities, starting with Kyrgyzstan and going on to the protracted conflicts including Georgia; (b) strengthened arms control; (c) improved follow-up of OSCE commitments, especially in the human dimension/freedom of the media; and (d) increased engagement in tackling transnational threats, including Afghanistan.

Although Lavrov argued that the EST was the only way to improve real security, the four EU themes gained wide support and formed the basis for the Chairmanship's eventual list of eight priorities to be discussed at a "Launching Summit" in Astana:

- Development of a single and indivisible area of security, free of dividing lines and zones with different security levels – a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security Community.
- Reaffirmation by participating States of their full adherence to all OSCE commitments; strengthening implementation and follow-up (including updating as necessary).

- Strengthening the institutional basis of the OSCE and transforming it into a fully-fledged international organization.
- Strengthening the conventional arms control regimes and CSBMs (such as an updated Vienna Document 1999). Ensuring progress on restoring the viability of the CFE Treaty regime.
- Strengthening OSCE capabilities and its toolbox in all three dimensions with regard to early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation. Joint work on ways to set the protracted conflicts on the path towards peaceful settlement.
- Ensuring that increased attention will be paid to transnational threats ranging from illicit trafficking in drugs, organized crime, cyber security, and trafficking in human beings to international terrorism and others. Enhancing OSCE involvement in Afghanistan.
- Countering post-crisis economic challenges, which entails adapting the OSCE Maastricht Strategy to current conditions.
- Strengthening the capacity of participating States to tackle challenges in the human dimension, ensuring tolerance and non-discrimination, freedom of the media, freedom of movement, and others. Enhancing the ability of the OSCE institutions to follow up on the implementation of recommendations made under their mandates.

At the end of the informal Almaty Ministerial there was an informal meeting of representatives of NATO, the EU, the Council of Europe, the CIS, and the CSTO chaired by the OSCE Secretary General on the basis of the 1999 Platform for Collective Security. However, this was largely symbolic and the discussions did not get beyond generalities.

Although consensus was reached in Almaty that a Summit should be held on the basis of the eight priorities specified above, many countries were distinctly unenthusiastic about this. There were continuing concerns that it was premature and would lack substance. These were countered by the idea that rather than delivering immediate outcomes, it would “launch” a process leading to subsequent decisions on the future of European security. In practice, the final phase of the Corfu Process was marked by a frenzied attempt to give substance to the Summit. Indeed, the Corfu ambassadorial meetings were reduced to informal meetings held to prepare for the Summit. Technically, there are supposed to be Review Conferences of all three dimensions before a Summit. However, it was decided to treat the Annual Security Review Conference (plus ongoing work in the FSC) and the regular Economic and Environmental Forum as reviews of the first two dimensions. The annual HDIM in Warsaw was turned into a review of the Human Dimension, with the two final days taking place in Astana just ahead of the Summit. In reality, the Corfu Process had itself been a massive review process, albeit an unwieldy and informal one.

This is not the place for a detailed account or analysis of the Astana Summit. But planning for the Summit ultimately encompassed a “headline idea”, a draft Summit Declaration and a draft Framework for Action. The Corfu Process provided the impetus for all of these. The Framework for Action ultimately collapsed, largely because of disagreements over the protracted conflicts and concerns in Washington that whatever was agreed would inevitably be too weak. The media – apart from those in Kazakhstan – tended to dismiss the Summit as a failure because of this. But the headline idea and elements of the Summit Declaration were important for the future of the OSCE.

The headline idea was that the OSCE should move to become a “security community” in which the use of force to resolve disputes anywhere in the Vancouver-Vladivostok space would become unthinkable. This had originally emerged from a session of the Corfu Process in which Russian Ambassador Anvar Azimov argued that the NATO and EU countries enjoyed a greater degree of security than the rest of the OSCE. French Ambassador Alabrune responded that an unspoken feature of these organizations was that over time, the use of force between their member states had become unthinkable. This degree of security should be extended to the rest of the OSCE, which should become a security community.

The Astana Commemorative Declaration reaffirmed the whole gamut of OSCE commitments, including those in the human dimension. It also gave explicit Summit endorsement to key language from the 1991 Moscow Document. It reinforced the principle that human rights and democracy in one OSCE State are “categorically and irreversibly” the concern of all. This undermined arguments about non-interference in internal affairs, although admittedly Belarus advanced such arguments only a few weeks after the Summit during a crackdown on protestors. The Declaration also gave solid and vital support to work on arms control and CSBMs, including updating the Vienna Document.

Conclusion

It did not always feel like it at the time, but the Corfu Process was one of the building blocks in a slow process of restoring a degree of trust between Russia and the EU/NATO countries after the Georgia crisis. It constituted part of the “reset” but was less tangible than, for example, the new START Treaty. But the Corfu Process also vividly demonstrated the limits of what could be achieved.