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Switzerland's OSCE Chairmanship in 2014: A Challenge and an Opportunity

Introduction

On 1 January 2014, Switzerland will assume the Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).¹ Switzerland is the first country to take on this role for a second time, having already held the Chairmanship in 1996. This may suggest that the OSCE Chair is not currently considered the most prestigious position in the world of multilateral organizations.

At present, the prospects of winning laurels in this role are comparatively slim. There are few signs that diplomatic breakthroughs will be possible in the protracted conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, and South Ossetia/Abkhazia. The current geopolitical conditions are equally inexpedient for a Chairmanship. Relations between the USA and the EU/NATO member states, on the one hand, and Russia and likeminded countries, on the other, are beset by problems that include the planned NATO missile defence system, the issue of NATO's eastern enlargement, the consequences of the war in Georgia, and delicate questions concerning the EU's neighbourhood policy. Furthermore, observers have been diagnosing an institutional crisis in the OSCE for over a decade now. The normative foundations of the Organization are considered to be brittle, the East-West divide within the OSCE hampers the Organization's ability to act, and many countries consider that the OSCE has simply lost relevance compared to other international organizations.²

Despite – or precisely because of – these difficult initial conditions, the 2014 OSCE Chairmanship is a worthwhile foreign-policy challenge for Switzerland. On the one hand, the OSCE itself can profit from a carefully managed Chairmanship that avoids further polarization. Consequently, Switzerland, which is neither an EU state nor a member of NATO, will approach its task with the explicit goal of building bridges between OSCE par-

1 This contribution was completed in September 2013.

2 Cf. Terrence Hopmann, *The Future Impact of the OSCE: Business as Usual or Revitalization?* In: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2008*, Baden-Baden 2009, pp. 75-90; Pál Dunay, *The OSCE in Unabated Decline*, Analysis of the Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid 1/2007; Daniel Trachsler, *The OSCE: Fighting for Renewed Relevance*, CSS Analysis in Security Policy No. 110, Zurich, March 2012, available at: http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/DetailansichtPubDB_EN?rec_id=2025.

ticipating States.³ On the other hand, Switzerland can itself benefit from taking on this role. It will have the opportunity to raise its profile in a multilateral situation and increase the influence of its own foreign and security policy priorities. This is particularly significant for Switzerland, as the OSCE is the only European security institution of which it is a full member. Moreover, by co-operating closely with Serbia, which will assume the Chairmanship in 2015, Switzerland has an opportunity to improve bilateral relations that have been periodically difficult ever since the Swiss recognition of Kosovo in 2008.

Two further arguments are relevant here: In the first place, given the difficult background conditions and the correspondingly low international expectations, the risks to Switzerland's foreign policy reputation in connection with the Chairmanship are relatively slight. Second, the OSCE Chairmanship provides Switzerland with an opportunity to gather valuable experience for a further multilateral office to which Switzerland aspires: a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the period 2023-2024.

The first part of this contribution sketches the major role the OSCE/Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) has traditionally played for Switzerland and Swiss foreign policy. The second section analyses the significance of the 2014 OSCE Chairmanship for Switzerland and examines related foreign policy considerations. The third part presents the goals and priorities of the Swiss Chairmanship. The contribution argues that the pragmatic approach Switzerland has opted to take is a realistic and sensible strategy in view of the political and institutional circumstances.

The CSCE/OSCE and Switzerland – A Rich Tradition of Partnership

Switzerland was one of the 35 states that originally signed the Final Act of Helsinki on 1 August 1975. This was not a matter of course for a country that had developed a strict policy of neutrality in the post-war period and the early years of the Cold War. Consequently, Switzerland's foreign policy during this period was marked by caution, which led it, for instance, to reject membership of the United Nations (UN).⁴ However, after an initial period of scepticism, Switzerland became heavily involved in the CSCE negotiations from 1972 to 1975, and was an active and influential member of the group of neutral and non-aligned states (N+N states). This engagement was an expression

3 Cf. *Address by Mr Didier Burkhalter, Vice President of the Swiss Federal Council and Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, "Creating a security community for the benefit of everyone – Priorities of the Swiss OSCE chairmanship in 2014"*, Special Permanent Council of the OSCE, Vienna, 2 July 2013, PC.DEL/575/13/Rev.1, at: <http://www.osce.org/pc/103262>.

4 Cf. Daniel Trachsler, *Bundesrat Max Petipierre: Schweizerische Aussenpolitik im Kalten Krieg 1945-1961* [Max Petipierre, Member of the Federal Council: Swiss Foreign Policy in the Cold War 1945-1961], Zurich 2011.

of a cautious opening up to multilateralism and a more active Swiss foreign policy from the end of the 1960s.⁵

Switzerland played three distinct roles in the negotiations: First, it acted – sometimes in co-operation with other neutral states such as Austria, Finland, and Sweden – as an independent third party between the blocs and as a mediator during the negotiations. Second, it used its “good offices” as the host of the negotiations on the Helsinki Final Act, which were held in Geneva from September 1973 until July 1975. Third, it pursued certain concrete goals of its own, such as the inclusion of neutrality in the catalogue of principles contained in the Final Act. At that point, however, Switzerland was unable to generate sufficient support for its proposal to establish a dispute-settlement mechanism. From the current perspective, the major achievements of the neutral states – including Switzerland – in the context of the CSCE negotiations appear to be the early support they gave to the establishment of a CSCE process with follow-up conferences and their commitment to the inclusion at a later date of confidence-building measures (CBMs) in the politico-military dimension.⁶

A further milestone in the relationship between the CSCE/OSCE and Switzerland was Switzerland’s first OSCE Chairmanship in 1996. When, in 1994, Bern signaled its willingness to assume the Chairmanship, the European security system, and thus the CSCE (as it was still known) itself, was undergoing a comprehensive reorganization following the end of the Cold War. The CSCE became the OSCE, permanent institutions and operational capacities were gradually established, and the areas of early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation became the Organization’s key fields of activity. At the Budapest Summit in 1994, the new structures were approved by the participating States.

Given Switzerland’s traditional restraint in matters of foreign policy, there was nothing obvious about its assumption of the OSCE Chairmanship, especially during this transitional period, when neither the future role of the

5 Cf. Thomas Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität. Schweizerisches KSZE-Engagement und gescheiterte UNO-Beitrittspolitik im Kalten Krieg 1969-1986* [The Limits of Neutrality. Switzerland’s CSCE Engagement and Failed UN Accession Policy in the Cold War 1969-1986], Zurich 2004; Hans-Jörg Renk, *Der Weg der Schweiz nach Helsinki. Der Beitrag der schweizerischen Diplomatie zum Zustandekommen der Konferenz über Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa (KSZE), 1972-1975* [The Way to Helsinki. The Contribution of Swiss Diplomacy to the Establishment of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), 1972-1975], Bern 1996; Philip Rosin, *Die Schweiz im KSZE-Prozess 1972-1983: Einfluss durch Neutralität* [Switzerland in the CSCE Process 1972-1983: Influence through Neutrality], Munich 2013. On the role of the N+N states in general, see: Thomas Fischer, *Neutral Power in the CSCE. The N+N States and the Making of the Helsinki Accords 1975*, Baden-Baden 2009, and Thomas Fischer, *Keeping the Process alive. The N+N and the CSCE Follow-Up From Helsinki to Vienna (1975-1986)*, Zurich 2012.

6 Cf. Christian Nuenlist, Expanding the East-West Dialogue beyond the Bloc Division. The Neutrals as Negotiators and Mediators, 1969-75, in: Andreas Wenger/Vojtech Mastny/Christian Nuenlist (eds), *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965-75*, London 2009, pp. 201-221, here pp. 216f.

Organization nor developments in Europe in general were clear. Yet as in the early 1970s, this bout of active involvement in the OSCE also marked a phase of greater openness in Swiss foreign policy.⁷ In its foreign and security policy strategy documents of the early 1990s, the Swiss executive, the Federal Council, had stressed the importance of international co-operation in overcoming future challenges. This marked a significant departure from its traditional posture.⁸ The Swiss people were reluctant to give this change of strategy their unconditional support. In referenda, the Swiss people, in their capacity as Sovereign, rejected UN membership in 1986, accession to the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1992, and a proposal to allow the deployment of peacekeeping troops in support of UN operations in 1994. Switzerland also remained outside NATO. The OSCE Chairmanship was thus one of the few opportunities that Switzerland had to enable its own views to influence the debate on the shaping of European security and to demonstrate its own increased willingness to engage in international co-operation and to assume responsibility in the area of European security in practical terms.⁹ At the same time, thanks to the specific characteristics of the OSCE – e.g. its inclusive membership, the equality of participating States, the rule of consensus, the multidimensional understanding of security, and the broad spectrum of issues it covers – this policy of engagement was also capable of gaining sufficient domestic support.

In practical terms, the first Swiss OSCE Chairmanship was largely dominated by the implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Dayton Peace Agreement).¹⁰ The OSCE was mandated with implementing various aspects of the Dayton Agreement, including the preparation and execution of democratic elections, monitoring human rights, and chairing the negotiations on confidence- and security-building measures for regional stabilization. As Chair of the OSCE, Switzerland was actively engaged in these areas, and provided the OSCE

7 Cf. Flavio Cotti, Vorwort [Foreword], in: Laurent Goetschel (ed.), *Vom Statisten zum Hauptdarsteller. Die Schweiz und ihre OSZE-Präsidentschaft* [From Extra to Leading Role. Switzerland and Its OSCE Chairmanship], Bern 1997, pp. V-IX.

8 Cf. Schweizerischer Bundesrat [Swiss Federal Council], *Schweizerische Sicherheitspolitik im Wandel. Bericht 90 des Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung über die Sicherheitspolitik der Schweiz vom 1. Oktober 1990* [Switzerland's Shifting Security Policy. Report 1990 of the Federal Council to the Federal Assembly on the Security Policy of Switzerland of 1 October 1990], Bern, 1 October 1990; Schweizerischer Bundesrat [Swiss Federal Council], *Bericht über die Aussenpolitik der Schweiz in den 90er Jahren vom 29. November 1993* [Report on the Foreign Policy of Switzerland in the 1990s of 29 November 1993], Bern 1993.

9 Cf. Andreas Wenger, Die KSZE/OSZE als Brücke der Schweiz zur Mitgestaltung des europäischen Umfeldes [The CSCE/OSCE as Switzerland's Bridge to Co-shape European Environment], in: Goetschel (ed.), cited above (Note 7), pp. 9-28.

10 Cf. Andreas Wenger/Christoph Breitenmoser/Heiko Borchert, Das schweizerische OSZE-Präsidentschaftsjahr 1996 [The 1996 Swiss OSCE Chairmanship Year], in: Forschungsstelle für Sicherheitspolitik und Konfliktanalyse ETH Zürich (ed.), *Bulletin zur schweizerischen Sicherheitspolitik 1996/97* [Bulletin on Swiss Security Policy 1996/1997], Zurich 1997, pp. 4-46.

Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina with concrete assistance, including a contingent of “yellow caps” (the Swiss Headquarters Support Unit) to provide logistical support, human-rights monitors, and other experts. Nor was Bosnia and Herzegovina the only conflict that called on the resources of the OSCE and its Chair; the cases of Chechnya, Georgia, and Moldova also demanded attention. Making progress on other issues, such as the debate on a security model for the 21st century that was launched in 1994, proved more difficult. At the end of the year, the Swiss Chairmanship team drew a largely positive balance, particularly as regards the ability of a small state to make a difference in a multilateral context. Switzerland’s performance also garnered praise from outside.¹¹

The 2014 Swiss Chairmanship: Foreign Policy Considerations and the Balance of Interests

Switzerland’s second Chairmanship, in 2014, will take place under very different conditions from those that prevailed in 1996. This is largely a result of geopolitical and institutional change. The OSCE is no longer in the midst of a period of restructuring, whose outcome is uncertain, but is rather, in certain regards, mired in stagnation.

The much-discussed “crisis of the OSCE” is not the central topic of this contribution. A few brief remarks should adequately contextualize the forthcoming Swiss Chairmanship in this regard.¹² One frequent criticism is that the OSCE is paralysed by the East-West divide. The tense relations between the USA and EU/NATO members, on the one side, and Russia, on the other, are expressed in regular disagreements on what the priorities of the Organization’s work should be. This leads to disputes over the establishment and mandates of missions and field operations and to disunity in budgetary questions. The split renders substantive institutional reform difficult if not impossible, and this particularly overshadows the efforts currently being undertaken within the scope of the Helsinki +40 Process. In view of these many differences, observers complain of a “crisis of trust” and the ongoing erosion of the normative consensus among the 57 participating States. Further rea-

11 Cf. Raymund Kunz, *Die OSZE-Präsidentschaft – Lehren für die Aussen- und Sicherheitspolitik der Schweiz* [The OSCE Chairmanship – Lessons for Swiss Foreign and Security Policy], in: Goetschel (ed.), cited above (Note 7), pp. 177-188; Ortwin Hennig, *Das OSZE-Präsidentschaftsjahr der Schweiz – eine kritische Würdigung von aussen* [The Swiss OSCE Chairmanship Year – A Critical Appraisal from Outside], in: *ibid.*, pp. 153-176.

12 Numerous aspects of the crisis were addressed during the panel discussion “Revitalising the OSCE – A Mission Impossible?”, held at the International Security Forum 2013, cf. at: <http://isf.ethz.ch/isf/Programme/Programme-Guide/Panel-Discussions/Revitalising-the-OSCE-A-Mission-Impossible>. For a remarkably (self-)critical view, see Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, *Six Years as OSCE Secretary General. An Analytical and Personal Retrospective*, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2011*, Baden-Baden 2012, pp. 25-48.

sons given for the creeping loss of significance of the OSCE are disputes over competencies and competition with other institutions and organizations such as the EU, NATO, the Council of Europe, and the UN. Not all commentators take such a dark view of the OSCE's future significance. Yet there is a broad consensus regarding the existence of failings and a potential for improvement, and widespread scepticism regarding the possibility of the situation improving significantly in the near future.

Given these relatively unpromising initial conditions, why has Switzerland volunteered to take on the OSCE Chairmanship in 2014? The immediate cause is external. In 2011, Serbia announced its ambitions to chair the OSCE in 2014. In view of Serbia's policy towards Kosovo, this raised deep reservations not only in Albania, but also in countries such as the USA. This led to inquiries regarding Switzerland's willingness to stand as an alternative candidate to Serbia. And although Switzerland rejected this proposal, it signalled its openness to consecutive Swiss and Serbian Chairmanships. Serbia also proved amenable to this face-saving solution.¹³

In late 2011, Switzerland and Serbia presented a joint declaration and their agreed "principles of co-operation" to the OSCE Ministerial Council in Vilnius, underlining their desire to co-operate closely in the framework of consecutive Chairmanships, formulate shared priorities, and develop a joint action plan.¹⁴ Both countries also stressed the advantages that would accrue from greater continuity at the top of the Organization if plans could be made for two years at once. This clever move made it possible to overcome the reservations regarding a Serbian Chairmanship, while simultaneously presenting the joint candidacy to the world as an innovative means of increasing the Organization's effectiveness and efficiency. In February 2012, the participating States unanimously approved the consecutive Chairmanships of Switzerland and Serbia for the years 2014 and 2015 after a silence procedure.

What other foreign-policy considerations were decisive for Switzerland's decision to express its willingness to assume this office? Given the background to the Chairmanship, there were two obvious factors that spoke for this decision: On the one hand, Switzerland could do a favour for the countries that were concerned about a Serbian Chairmanship. At the same time, close co-operation with Serbia prior to and during their consecutive Chairmanships gave Switzerland an opportunity to improve bilateral relations

13 For more information (in German), the podium discussion held by the Swiss Helsinki Association on 21 January 2013 in Bern can be accessed (on SoundCloud) via: <http://www.shv-ch.org/de/veranstaltungen>. See also Christian Nünlist, "Die Schweiz ist eine Mini-OSZE": Perspektiven auf das Schweizer OSZE-Vorsitzjahr 2014 ["Switzerland Is a Mini-OSCE": Perspectives on the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship Year 2014], in: Christian Nünlist/Oliver Thränert (eds), *Bulletin 2013 zur schweizerischen Sicherheitspolitik* [2013 Bulletin on Swiss Security Policy], Zurich 2013, pp. 11-41, here: pp. 22-24.

14 Cf. *Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland and Serbia*, CIO.GAL/241/11; *Principles of Co-operation*, MC.DEL/62/11, Vilnius, 7 December 2011.

between Bern and Belgrade, which had been periodically troubled since the Swiss recognition of Kosovo in 2008.

Alongside these immediate reasons, there were further considerations behind Switzerland's decision. For one, Switzerland has a genuine self-interest in making a contribution to stability and security in its European environment and in the OSCE space.¹⁵ Several regions in which the OSCE is active are particularly important for Switzerland. The Western Balkans, and Serbia and Kosovo in particular, are highly relevant on account of the large number of people with Serbian and Kosovar roots that live in Switzerland. In regions such as the South Caucasus, it is not considered beyond the realms of possibility that Switzerland, thanks to its good relations and previous facilitation activities (e.g. representing Georgia's interests in Russia and Russia's interests in Georgia since they broke off diplomatic relations) could help bring about progress in confidence-building and conflict resolution.

The interests and aims of Switzerland and the OSCE overlap not only geographically but also in terms of their subject matter. Above all, human-dimension topics such as the promotion of the rule of law, democracy and human rights, peaceful conflict settlement, and minority protection closely correspond with the priorities of Swiss foreign policy. Switzerland has also gained considerable experience and demonstrated its capabilities in this area and therefore hopes to be able to make some positive contributions to the work of the OSCE.¹⁶

A further reason for Switzerland's commitment to working for and within the OSCE is that the revival of the Organization's practical and institutional relevance is particularly important for a country that is a member of neither the EU nor NATO. In Vienna, Switzerland can take part in discussions and decision-making as a full and equal participant. In view of this, the decision to take on the Chairmanship in 2014 is also likely to reflect certain opportunities that Switzerland sees to contribute its own ideas on strengthening the OSCE and its institutions to the Helsinki +40 Process.

Chairing the OSCE at this juncture also represents good timing in terms of Switzerland's current foreign-policy situation, which sees it on the defensive on several fronts. The financial sector and the Swiss banks are under heavy pressure, and the tax dispute casts a cloud over relations with the USA

15 Cf. Schweizerischer Bundesrat [Swiss Federal Council], *Aussenpolitische Strategie 2012-2015. Bericht des Bundesrats über die aussenpolitischen Schwerpunkte der Legislatur* [Foreign Policy Strategy 2012-2015. Report of the Federal Council on the Foreign Policy Priorities for the Legislative Period], Bern, March 2012; Schweizerischer Bundesrat [Swiss Federal Council], *Aussenpolitischer Bericht 2012* [Foreign Policy Report 2012], Bern, 9 January 2013.

16 Cf. Schweizerischer Bundesrat [Swiss Federal Council], *Botschaft über die Weiterführung von Massnahmen zur Förderung des Friedens und der menschlichen Sicherheit 2012-2016* [Report on the Continuation of Measures to Promote Peace and Human Security 2012-2016], Bern, 29 June 2011; Thomas Greminger, *Swiss Civilian Peace Promotion: Assessing Policy and Practice*, Zurich 2011, available at: <http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/Swiss-Civilian-Peace-Promotion.pdf>.

and various European states. In terms of EU relations, Brussels is pressuring Switzerland to resolve ongoing institutional issues as a prerequisite for further expanding bilateral relations, particularly as regards the dynamic adoption of developing EU legislation and differences in the interpretation of rules. These issues are not dealt with in the OSCE context. Yet Bern is unlikely to reject any opportunities to raise specific bilateral issues that arise through high-level contacts with Washington, Moscow, Paris, Berlin, and other capitals in the context of the OSCE Chairmanship.

One final contributing factor to the Swiss decision has so far largely been overlooked. Bern also sees the year at the helm of the OSCE in terms of preparation for the non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council that it seeks for 2023-2024. Swiss diplomacy has been attempting to generate support for its candidacy for some time now. This entails not only persuading countries to support Switzerland but also dissuading states in the same regional bloc from standing themselves. The opportunities to establish contacts and raise Switzerland's profile that will accrue by way of the OSCE Chairmanship are beneficial to both these goals. The Swiss authorities will also receive an opportunity to build up their expertise and staff for the successful performance of a leadership role in a multilateral organization in the long term.

Role, Goals, and Priorities of the Swiss Chairmanship

As a Western European country that is a member of neither the EU nor NATO, Switzerland finds itself in a relatively strong position to play a moderating role as OSCE Chair. This is only likely to be enhanced by working closely with Serbia. In general, Switzerland sees itself as playing a bridge-building role between the various state groups and power blocs within the OSCE – however, not without noting that successful bridge-building requires the existence of foundations on either side of a divide.¹⁷

Switzerland set out its priorities in terms of specific goals, geographical scope, and topics of interest in close co-ordination with Serbia in a joint working plan. These were first presented to the public on 2 July 2013 in Vienna by the Swiss foreign minister, Didier Burkhalter.¹⁸ The motto of the Chairmanship is “Creating a security community for the benefit of everyone”.

17 This was the view expressed by Raphael Nägeli, deputy head of the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA), at the podium discussion held by the Swiss Helsinki Association on 21 January 2013, cited above (Note 13).

18 For details of the Swiss priorities, see Burkhalter, cited above (Note 3). See also “Die Erwartungen an die Schweiz sind hoch”, Interview mit Bundesrat Didier Burkhalter zum OSZE-Vorsitz 2014 [“Expectations of Switzerland are High”, Interview with Member of the Federal Council Didier Burkhalter on the 2014 OSCE Chairmanship], in: Nünlist/Thranert (eds), cited above (Note 13), pp. 121-125.

In line with this statement of purpose, Switzerland is emphasizing three goals: First, it aims to foster security and stability; second, to improve people's lives; and third, to strengthen the OSCE's ability to take action. These three goals are purposefully broad and leave a lot of leeway to react to opportunities or hindrances that arise in the course of the Chairmanship. Within these areas, Switzerland defined ten potential priority issues. These are based on the OSCE's agenda and activities, current challenges and opportunities in the international environment, and Switzerland's key foreign-policy goals.

In terms of security and stability, fostering reconciliation and regional co-operation in the Western Balkans is a clear priority for Switzerland. Specific issues include improving relations between Serbia and Kosovo, the holding of elections in Kosovo, including Northern Kosovo, and the promotion of dialogue and trust between all Kosovo's ethnic groups. In consultation with Serbia, the Swiss Chairmanship will appoint a special representative for the Western Balkans with a two-year mandate. This underlines the major significance that Switzerland places on this topic. A further special representative will also be appointed for the South Caucasus. In this second priority area, the key goal will be to seek rapprochement between Russia, Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. The prospects for a diplomatic breakthrough in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh are minimal.¹⁹ Further potential areas of activity in the field of security and stability include revising and modernizing the Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures, and strengthening security-sector governance, for instance with regard to democratic control of the armed forces.

In terms of improving people's lives, Switzerland is emphasizing a more systematic implementation of commitments in the human dimension. The creation of new commitments is less important than the implementation of existing ones. This covers matters including promoting human rights, opposing torture, upholding constitutional norms even in the context of counter-terrorism activities, protecting minorities, and facilitating the holding of free and democratic elections. In addition, Switzerland will seek to contribute to improving efforts to deal with and prevent natural disasters in the OSCE area.

In terms of strengthening the OSCE's ability to take action, the Helsinki +40 Process will, as expected, be at the centre of Switzerland's efforts. Along with the 2013 Ukrainian Chairmanship and the 2015 Serbian Chairmanship, the 2014 Swiss Chairmanship was tasked by the 2012 Dublin OSCE Ministerial Council with advancing this reform process. The differences of opinion among the participating States sketched in the preceding section, however, are hardly a cause for optimism. Major breakthroughs, such

19 Cf. Anna Hess Sargsyan, *Nagorno-Karabakh: Obstacles to a Negotiated Settlement*, CSS Analysis in Security Policy No. 131, Zurich, April 2013, at: http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/DetailansichtPubDB_EN?rec_id=2478.

as resolving the question of the legal status of the OSCE, the drafting of an OSCE charter, or a substantial strengthening of the OSCE Secretary-General are unlikely. It would nonetheless represent progress if by way of the bridge-building role it seeks to play, Switzerland were to contribute to a softening of the hardened positions on such institutional questions in the run up to the OSCE's 2015 jubilee year.

Switzerland wishes to take up two further issues related to the OSCE's ability to take action: strengthening the OSCE's mediation capacity, and involving civil society and young people more closely in the Organization's work. Mediation and facilitation have long been key priorities in Swiss foreign policy. Increasing the involvement of civil society entails, in the first instance, promoting co-operation with non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and think tanks – something that is more controversial in a number of states than might at first appear likely. At the same time, Switzerland plans, during its Chairmanship, to give a platform to young people from all 57 participating States, and to make their concerns known within the Organization. The final priority is a topic that touches on all dimensions, namely combating transnational threats, such as terrorism, organized crime, and threats to cyber-security. Switzerland is currently considering the organization of relevant conferences.

This provisional working programme for the Swiss Chairmanship is pragmatic rather than visionary. Yet this proves Switzerland's realism and sense of proportion. Switzerland's efforts aim above all at consolidating the OSCE *acquis*, improving the implementation of existing commitments, and, where possible, making incremental progress. Given the current international and institutional situations, this is a sensible strategy. Whether it will be possible to carry it out as planned depends to no small extent on concrete events and developments during the Swiss Chairmanship year.

Conclusion

The Swiss OSCE Chairmanship represents a double opportunity. First, it is an opportunity for the OSCE. In 2014, the Organization will be chaired by a country that will not increase the polarization among the participating States, but has rather promised to do the opposite, i.e. to build bridges, to seek out commonalities, and to forge compromises. In his speech in Vienna, Foreign Minister Burkhalter compared Switzerland to a "mini-OSCE".²⁰ This may be an exaggeration, yet as a small country that belongs to neither the EU nor NATO, that is traditionally active in various groups of states in the multilateral environment, and whose domestic political system is strongly geared towards consensus-seeking and compromise, Switzerland is arguably very well

20 Burkhalter, cited above (Note 3).

suites, in the current context, to take on the challenge of the OSCE Chairmanship.

The forthcoming Chairmanship is also an opportunity for Switzerland itself. It is in Switzerland's own interest to contribute to promoting security and stability in the OSCE area, and to bring its abilities to bear on the human dimension, in particular. The Chairmanship also provides Switzerland with opportunities to raise its profile in a multilateral context. Right now, with Switzerland relying on other countries' willingness to talk and to show understanding on various questions, this suits it particularly well. At the same time, it can gather valuable experience of working in a multilateral context, applicable to potential future tasks.

By presenting pragmatic plans, Switzerland has demonstrated its good judgement, while also demonstrating its ability to realistically evaluate the diplomatic room for manoeuvre currently available. The unfavourable background conditions have one advantage for Switzerland: International expectations are low. Should no significant progress be made in the priority issues Switzerland has chosen to focus on, or in the matter of institutional reform, no one will hold the Swiss Chairmanship responsible. The foreign policy risks associated with the Chairmanship are therefore limited. Consequently, the overall prospects for a satisfactory Chairmanship year are solid – both for Switzerland and for the OSCE. Nonetheless, a definitive evaluation will have to wait until the end of 2014 at the earliest.