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The OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions: Baby Steps

Last year, at the request of the foreign ministers of Germany, France, Poland, and Russia, institutes from each of these countries¹ co-operated on the Initiative for the Development of a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security Community (IDEAS). The result was a jointly drafted report on the prospects of a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community, a concept adopted by the OSCE Heads of State or Government at their 2010 OSCE Astana Summit meeting.²

June 2013: Founding the OSCE Academic Network

As I wrote in the 2012 edition of the OSCE Yearbook, following the conclusion of this project, we have always perceived the IDEAS project as a contribution to a network of academic institutions.³ After an intensive exchange of emails and phone calls, the first decisive step towards establishing an OSCE academic network was undertaken during the OSCE Security Days on 17 and 18 June 2013: 16 institutions from all over the OSCE area founded the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions and presented it to the OSCE community at a special meeting of the Security Days. The 16 institutions were: the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP); the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE); the CIPI Foundation; the Dutch Clingendael Institute of International Relations; the Foreign Policy Research Institute of Ukraine; foraus – Forum Aussenpolitik from Switzerland; the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) from Madrid; the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP); the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAN); the International Peace Institute (IPI), Vienna; the Kazakhstan Institute for Stra-

1 The Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS), the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), and the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University) of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

2 Wolfgang Zellner (co-ordinator)/Yves Boyer/Frank Evers/Isabelle Facon/Camille Grand/Ulrich Kühn/Lukasz Kulesa/Andrei Zagorski, *Towards a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security Community. From Vision to Reality*, Hamburg, Paris, Moscow, Warsaw 2012. Reprinted in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2012*, Baden-Baden 2013, pp. 409-433.

3 Cf. Wolfgang Zellner, The IDEAS Project: A Contribution to an OSCE Network of Academic Institutions, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2012*, cited above (Note 2), pp. 55-64, here: p. 56.

tegic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (KazISS); the OSCE Academy in Bishkek; the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF); the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM); and the University of Bath.

As time was limited and many of the members of the founding group did not know one another, little of substance could be achieved at this first meeting. There was some discussion on a mission statement, but this was not concluded. There was also talk of a project on “threat perceptions in Europe” (see below). The only concrete result was the election of Wolfgang Zellner from CORE as network co-ordinator for one year. However, the lack of achievements at this early stage did not diminish the enthusiasm to continue. The participants agreed to meet again in the autumn to establish the foundations of the network’s functioning.

October 2013: Crafting the Network’s Instruments and Identifying Initial Activities

On 30 October 2013, the 16 institutions convened again in Vienna for a one-day meeting to create working instruments for the network, decide on the “threat perceptions” project, and discuss the Helsinki +40 Process and other possible activities. Ambassador Fred Tanner, Special Adviser to the Secretary General, participated in the meeting in his new capacity as the Secretariat’s network focal point. The meeting was sponsored by Germany and Switzerland, while the IPI under its Director Walter Kemp offered the use of its marvellous meeting room in the heart of Vienna.

Mission Statement

Work started with the discussion of a draft “Mission Statement”. In a concise debate, a number of amendments were made and included in the document, before it was adopted by electronic voting procedure. The Mission Statement is available at the network’s website.⁴ It defines the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions as “an OSCE-related track II initiative”. It is open to think tanks and academic institutions from OSCE participating and partner States and “provides expertise, stimulates discussion and raises awareness of the OSCE. It contributes to the ongoing security dialogue within the OSCE framework. It helps to address common threats and challenges and contributes to the efforts supporting the Helsinki+40 process and future OSCE dialogue formats. In a more long-term perspective, the network helps to clarify the substance of and the process towards achieving the participating States’ shared vision of a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security

4 OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions, *Mission Statement*, Vienna, 30 October 2013, at: www.osce-network.net.

Community. The network is used for the exchange of expertise and the co-ordination of activities between its members.” The network’s status as “an autonomous OSCE-related track II initiative” was strongly underlined, as was the fact that it is “neither an OSCE structure nor subordinated to the OSCE or its participating States”. However, the network “co-operates with a point of contact within the OSCE Secretariat” and conducts research, provides discussion papers, and offers expert presentations on “its own initiative or upon invitation by the OSCE Chairmanship, participating States, the OSCE Secretary General, OSCE Institutions or other OSCE structures”. As the network is an informal body and should remain so, it does not need any further (founding) document than this brief one-and-a-half page Mission Statement.

Working Instruments

The paper on working instruments,⁵ which was also adopted after a thorough discussion, several amendments, and an electronic voting procedure, describes the minimal set of instruments that even an informal network cannot do without. It contains five brief sections on “Network Meetings”, “The Steering Committee”, “The Network Co-ordinator”, “The OSCE Network Website”, and “Project Co-ordinators”. The network meeting ideally comprises representatives of all member institutions, will usually convene once a year, takes decisions on the network’s activities, and elects the co-ordinator and the members of the steering committee. New members need recommendations from two existing network members. In contrast to the OSCE, network decisions are taken by an absolute majority of those present. The steering committee is a narrower body of about five members, including the network co-ordinator, that takes decisions in the periods between the network meetings. The following were elected as members of the steering committee for a period of two years (2014 and 2015): Ambassador Jim Collins (Carnegie Endowment), Sonja Stojanović Gajić (BCSP), Andrei Zagorski (IMEMO), and Wolfgang Zellner. Wolfgang Zellner’s term as network co-ordinator was also extended to a period of two years (2014 and 2015). The network co-ordinator “serves as the contact point for the member institutes, the OSCE Chairmanship, the [...] OSCE Secretariat and the participating States”, “liaises with the Press and Public Information Department of the OSCE Secretariat”, and “steers the process of fundraising for and implementing network projects”. Project co-ordinators are responsible for the implementation of specific network projects in terms of both content and budget. The latter is of particular relevance, as the network itself, which is an informal body and has no legal status, can neither apply for nor administer any funds. A decision was also taken to create a network website, and its structure and content were discussed. CORE volunteered to undertake this

5 OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions, *Working Instruments*, Vienna, 30 October 2013, at: www.osce-network.net.

task, with financial support provided by the German Federal Foreign Office. The aim was to implement basic functionality before the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Kyiv on 5 and 6 December 2013, and this was achieved. The fact that all these agenda items could be covered in roughly two hours shows how positive and results-oriented the atmosphere was among the participants.

The First Network Project: Threat Perceptions in Europe

The “Threat Perceptions in the OSCE Area” project⁶ brings together 20 network institutions from different subregions to analyse their governments’ perceptions of military, transnational, and other threats. This very first network project aimed to include as many network institutions as possible. According to the project proposal, the objective is “to analyze the threat perceptions of relevant state actors in the OSCE area” in the three categories mentioned above. Including the threat perceptions of the broader population would have been desirable, but would have gone beyond what is possible in this project. The study will analyse only governments’ threat perceptions and will not consider what any author may consider to be “objective threats”. There will also be no analysis of whether the threats perceived by this or that government are “true” or “realistic”. However, explanations by government officials and experts on the nature and quality of threat perceptions, as given in interviews, will be taken into account. The aim of the project is to provide background information to governments and “thus facilitate discussions in the OSCE’s Helsinki +40 Process”.

The project will be implemented in two stages. First, each participating institution shall write a 15-20 page country report on its government’s threat perceptions and preferred means of addressing these threats. On this basis, the project co-ordinator (Wolfgang Zellner), supported by a small editorial group, will draft a comparative report that will reveal where threat perceptions converge and thus allow joint action, and where they diverge and thus require further discussion. The draft report will be discussed and amended by all participating institutions, and their input used to produce a final report, which will be presented to the OSCE community in Vienna in co-operation with the 2014 Swiss OSCE Chairmanship. The threat perceptions project is sponsored by Switzerland, Germany, and Finland.

6 OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions, *Threat Perception in the OSCE Area*, at: <http://osce-network.net/activities.html>.

Helsinki +40 Discussion with Representatives of Present and Future Chairmanships

In a separate session of the October network meeting, the representatives of the network institutions met with members of the Ukrainian (Serhiy Dvornyk), Swiss (Andrea Rauber Saxer, Deputy Head of the Swiss Delegation), and Serbian delegations (Ambassador Sanja Milinković, Deputy Head of the Serbian Delegation) who gave presentations on the Helsinki +40 working process. The discussion ranged across issues such as the Eurasian element of the security community and the impact of developments in Afghanistan on the OSCE area. The participants also considered where the network's contributions could be included in the Helsinki +40 Process. The representatives of the Chairmanships stated that the co-ordinators of the Helsinki +40 working groups will be appointed by the end of 2013 and that liaising with them would be a good approach.

Topics for Future Projects

Finally, the network meeting brainstormed topics for possible future projects. Again, the impact of developments in Afghanistan on the OSCE area was mentioned. A proposal was also made to draft a comprehensive report on the Helsinki +40 Process. Also in the context of Helsinki +40, an oral history project was suggested. In a more general sense, it was ventured that more could be done with the OSCE Partners for Co-operation. Other suggestions concerned the problem of de facto regimes and cyber-security. One member informed the network on his plans to organize a "Next Generation Conference" in the OSCE context. The network co-ordinator encouraged the members to draft brief project proposals as a basis for decision-making on network projects and for fundraising.

Network Side Event at the Kyiv OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting, December 2013

At the 2013 Kyiv Ministerial Council Meeting, the network had its first opportunity to present itself to the track I OSCE community. On 4 December 2013, Wolfgang Zellner and Sonja Stojanović Gajić gave a presentation on the intentions and activities of the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions at a side event titled: "Taking the Pulse of Helsinki +40. Academia Meets the OSCE", and discussed these issues with representatives of the current and forthcoming Ukrainian, Swiss, and Serbian Chairmanships and some other 50 participants, moderated by Ambassador Fred Tanner, Special Adviser to the OSCE Secretary General, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier.

Looking Ahead: The OSCE and Track II Initiatives

There are several reasons why almost all international organizations and governments include a broad range of civil society organizations and track II initiatives in their work. The body of available knowledge has become so vast and differentiated that no state or international bureaucracy can master it without external support. Continuity is a huge problem in career organizations such as ministries, where incumbents change every three or four years. Processes of transnationalization have advanced so far that state actors need transnational civil-society agents to be able to follow them. And finally, legitimacy can no longer be sufficiently provided by state actors alone, but needs societal input. In brief, in order to develop more advanced approaches to governance, state and international structures have developed a variety of ways of using and including a broad range of track II initiatives.

Despite its civil-society rhetoric, the OSCE is not among the most advanced organizations in this respect, its use of civil-society organizations has been uneven and does not follow a consistent approach. The area in which civil-society participation is most developed is the human dimension. However, here too, at least at the central level, the inclusion of civil-society elements has less to do with networking and continuous co-operation than with participation in the OSCE's large human-dimension events, particularly the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings. At grassroots level, NGOs are also routinely included in the human-dimension projects of the OSCE field operations. This is also true of environmental NGOs, particularly at grassroots level, albeit to a far lesser degree. In the politico-military dimension, however, there is almost no organized inclusion of civil-society elements, apart from invitations to a rather narrow circle of experts to speak at OSCE events in Vienna and elsewhere.

Against this background, the double initiative of OSCE Secretary General Ambassador Lamberto Zannier to create a network of academic institutions and to establish the OSCE Security Days represents nothing less than a cultural shift towards the more systematic inclusion of civil-society actors. These two elements are mutually reinforcing, and, moreover, each is necessary for the other to work. The Security Days need a certain continuity of input in terms of people as well as issues, and these elements can be provided, at least in part, by the OSCE academic network. Equally, a network needs concrete events and practical projects if it is to be more than an email distribution list. In addition, both elements together can provide more continuity and institutional memory, something the OSCE urgently needs.

To make the network sustainable, changes in mentality and approach are necessary on both the supply and demand sides. On the side of the think tanks and academic institutions, there must be a readiness to engage, to invest, and to participate. They must be willing to engage in OSCE affairs even if these were not previously a focus of their work and to link these issues

with their core expertise. They must also invest time and money (where available) and not expect that everything will be paid for by third parties. Finally, the academic institutes must participate in various ways, thereby enabling meaningful intellectual and political exchanges. On the OSCE side – including the Chairmanship, Secretariat, institutions, and participating States – there must be a readiness to show interest, to give access, and to provide support. If the OSCE does not show interest in scholars' contributions, they will not regularly communicate with the Organization. And finally: In the project-driven world of today's academia, where more and more positions depend on third-party funds, the larger network projects need financial support.

Time and again during the last two decades, the inclusion of think tanks in the work of the OSCE has been spoken of. But the foundation of the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions is the very first attempt that goes beyond these sporadic discussions. It will be interesting to see how this experiment develops.