

Jafar Usmanov

OSCE Field Operations in the Helsinki +40 Process: A Case Study on the Presence in Tajikistan

Introduction

A basic factsheet on the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) identifies the field operations as enabling the Organization

to tackle crises as they arise, and to play a critical post-conflict role, helping to restore trust among affected communities. More broadly, they foster the capacity of their host countries through concrete projects that respond to the needs of participating States and their societies.¹

OSCE practitioners and researchers often concur that the Organization's distinctive approach to security as a comprehensive and co-operative effort is best supported by the existence of its network of 15 field presences.² The OSCE's field operations have even been called the Organization's "crown jewels".³ Some basic statistics underline the importance of field operations for the OSCE: The vast majority of people employed by the Organization are stationed in field operations. Of a total of 2,690 staff working for the OSCE in 2013, 2,119 were engaged in its 16 field operations in South-eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Field operations are funded via the Unified Budget, yet many also receive large extra-budgetary contributions to implement projects in specific areas.

Despite their significance, there is no unified understanding among the OSCE participating States of the purpose and role of a field operations. Some regard the field operations as institutions that "grew out of the need to deal with intra-State conflicts in the period of post-Communist transition".⁴ Others consider field operations to be "an important instrument of multilateral diplomacy in the areas of conflict prevention and crisis management".⁵ Many

-
- 1 OSCE, *Factsheet: What is the OSCE*, available at: <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/35775>.
 - 2 OSCE statistics are available online, see: OSCE, *Where We Are*, at: <http://www.osce.org/node/108301>. The Special Monitoring Mission at Ukraine and the Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk are not included in the figure of 15 field presences given above.
 - 3 Stephanie Liechtenstein, *What is the future of OSCE field operations?* Security and Human Rights, Netherlands Helsinki Committee, 24 August 2013, at: http://www.shrblog.org/blog/What_is_the_future_of_OSCE_field_operations_.html?id=399.
 - 4 United States Mission to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Field Operations*, at: http://osce.usmission.gov/archive/misc/infoosce_field.html.
 - 5 Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Germany to the OSCE, Vienna, *OSCE Missions and Field Operations*, at: http://www.wien-osze.diplo.de/Vertretung/wienosce/en/03/OSCE_Missions_and_Field_Operations.html.

view field presences as institutions whose aim is to support the host countries in strengthening domestic and regional security and stability by promoting the implementation of OSCE commitments and standards. A common view of field operations that links back to the security-oriented mission of the OSCE describes them as key instruments in early warning, conflict prevention, conflict management, and post-conflict reconstruction.

The debate on OSCE field operations has been ongoing since 2002 and continues as part of the current Helsinki +40 Process. It tackles a number of dimensions of their functioning, ranging from formats and mandates to tools, modus operandi, and the results they have delivered. The fact that this debate was part of the comprehensive reform discussions of the OSCE did not lead to a significant reform of the Organization as such, but produced changes to the mandates of several field operations and introduced new managerial rules and procedures that effectively transformed the way OSCE field operations function today.

This contribution discusses the particular case of the transformation of the OSCE field operation in Tajikistan, which has gone from being a “matter of serious concern” for the government of Tajikistan⁶ to a “future role model for decision-making in other regions of the world”.⁷ It places this transformation in the broader context of OSCE reform discussions, particularly the discussions of field operation reform that took place from 2002 to 2006. It also considers the local context of the OSCE presence in Tajikistan. It concludes with a call to continue investigating the form of a potential “fourth generation” of OSCE field operations as a key means of promoting the OSCE’s relevance in the future, particularly in Central Asia.

The Chronology of the OSCE Field Operations Debate

The debate within the OSCE about the purpose and role of field operations has gone through various stages – from rather tense discussions in 2002 to a more moderate exchange of views during the current Helsinki +40 Process. At the 2002 Ministerial Council in Porto, the participating States recognized the significant contribution of the OSCE institutions and field operations in “putting into practice the goals and principles of our Organization, in co-operation with host States”.⁸ At the same time, the participating States tasked the Permanent Council “to consider, as appropriate, ways of further improv-

6 *Statement of the Tajik Delegation in response to the Annual Report of the Head of OSCE Centre in Dushanbe to the Permanent Council*, PC.DEL/434/06, 11 May 2006

7 Hamrokhon Zarifi, *Tajikistan – OSCE: Dialogue and Co-operation*, Dushanbe 2009, p.31.

8 Porto Ministerial Declaration, Responding to Change, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Tenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 6 and 7 December 2002*, MC.DOC/1/02, Porto, 7 December 2002, pp. 3-5, here: p. 4, at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/40521>.

ing the functioning and effectiveness of field operations”.⁹ Following on from this Ministerial Council Declaration, discussions on improving the work of the field operations were launched in 2003 within the framework of the Informal Open-ended Group of Friends of the Chair on Improving the Functioning and Effectiveness of OSCE Field Operations (the Group was chaired by the Canadian delegation to the OSCE). The disagreements among the participating States with regard to field operations comprised the following issues: the geographic imbalance of field presences East and West of Vienna, the lack of equal partner status between the participating States, and most of all, the perceived interference of field operations in internal affairs of the host countries. The dissatisfaction over the role and purpose of field operations was led by the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) participating States, including the Russian Federation, which saw the root causes of the crisis in the field operations’ “efforts to influence the political processes in a number of sovereign states, which was rightly considered as interference into internal affairs of these countries”.¹⁰

The key points of contention raised by the delegations of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia concerned the lack of transparency in budgetary and extra-budgetary procedures, the “unjustified autonomy” of heads of field operations and their appointment without the prior consent of the hosting states, and the unclear practice of political background reporting by field operations.¹¹ The debate peaked in 2005, during the work of the OSCE Panel of Eminent Persons on Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE, which was tasked to “give new impetus to political dialogue and provide strategic vision for the Organization in the twenty-first century”.¹² In its final recommendations on field operations, the Panel re-confirmed, perhaps to the dissatisfaction of some participating States that the “field operations remain an innovative and operational aspect of the OSCE’s work and [...] where possible should be even further improved”.¹³ The Panel’s recommendations presented the conclusions, reached by consensus, of the discussions on the role and functioning of field operations, where the relative autonomy of the heads of field missions was balanced by strengthened accountability and political oversight by the Permanent Council.

9 Ibid.

10 Delegations of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, *On the Issue of Reform of the OSCE Field Activities – A Food-For-Thought Paper*, PC.DEL/986/03, 4 September 2003.

11 Cf. *ibid.*

12 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Sofia 2004, Decision No. 16/04, Establishment of a Panel of Eminent Persons on Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE, MC.DEC/16/04, 7 December 2004, in: *Common Purpose – Towards a more effective OSCE. Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons On Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE*, 27 June 2005, Annex II: The Panel’s Mandate, reprinted in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2005*, Baden-Baden 2006, pp. 359-379, pp. 377-379, here: p. 378, also available at: <http://www.osce.org/cio/15805>.

13 *Common Purpose – Towards a More Effective OSCE*, cited above (Note 12), p. 372.

The acuteness of the debate on field operations already fell significantly in 2006, as key participants became increasingly unenthusiastic about pushing for another round of contentious discussions. In Brussels that year, the participating States decided rather to pursue efforts to strengthen the effectiveness of the OSCE.¹⁴ The field operations continued to be addressed beyond 2006, though with less tension and confrontation than had previously been the case.

The topic of OSCE field presences was addressed by the thematic groups within the OSCE Corfu Process in 2009; however, the matter was not singled out for a specific dialogue format or group. Except for a few food-for-thought papers produced by participating States during the Corfu Process and a short session devoted to discussion of the field operations in 2010, the issue has not received much attention in recent years. During the preparations for the 2010 Astana Summit, the EU members of the OSCE pledged their full support to the existing format and functioning of field operations. In its Statement on Executive Structures presented at the OSCE Review Conference in 2010, the EU, joined by a number of states hosting OSCE field operations in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, held that:

For the last 18 years, the OSCE Field Operations have been instrumental in assisting the OSCE and its participating States in translating political agreements into operational activities. Let us underline here that we see no need for a major overhaul of the system of Field Operations, particularly their reporting lines or working methods. However, certain adjustments could be beneficial.¹⁵

At the same time, the issues related to the OSCE field operations raised by the CIS states in 2003 were reiterated during the Corfu discussions. In a food-for-thought paper on Enhancing Effectiveness of the OSCE Field Operations produced by the delegations of Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, and Tajikistan, criticism was again raised concerning the field operations' monitoring of the internal political situation in host countries, cases of failed conflict management, spending not in line with the mandate, and geographical imbalance in field-operation staffing.¹⁶ Furthermore, the Russian Federation proposed the adoption of guidelines for OSCE field activities that would regulate the activities of a field operation, its relationship with the host country, the freedom of state authorities to host or discontinue the field pres-

14 Decision No. 19/06, Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE, MC.DEC/19/06 of 5 December 2006, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Fourteenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 4 and 5 December 2006*, Brussels, 5 December 2006, pp. 58-62, at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/25065>.

15 *EU Statement on Executive Structures*, OSCE Review Conference, Vienna, 21 October 2010.

16 Cf. Delegations of Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan, *Enhancing Effectiveness of the OSCE Field Operations*, Food-for-Thought Paper, PC.DEL/406/10, 2 July 2010.

ence, the functions it is allowed to perform, and the evaluation of its performance.¹⁷ The format and formulas proposed by the Russian Federation and other CIS states did not find support among the rest of the OSCE participating States; however, there did not appear to be serious objections to the idea of guidelines for field operations as such.

In the run up to the Astana Summit, a simple majority of OSCE participating States were apparently in favour of continuing the field operations without any radical changes in their role and functions. After 2010, discussions on the future of OSCE field operations remained relatively low key. These discussions continue today in the framework of the Helsinki +40 Process, though with less enthusiasm and energy than before, and focus on a few key issues.

The Core of the Issue

The fundamental fault line between the proponents and opponents of the OSCE field operations concerns the dilemma of whether a field operation should be seen as a service provider or a political actor on its own account. As mentioned above, there is no unified understanding among the OSCE participating States of the purpose and role of field operations. The differing views of what a field operation should do and how it should accomplish this stem from two opposing approaches. One side argues that field operations have the task of supporting the hosting country in implementing its requests. The other sees field operations as fulfilling a political mandate and performing monitoring and advocacy for the Organization's commitments and standards.

Participating States that host field operations tend to expect a field operation to prioritize the host country's needs in designing and implementing its programmatic activity. Some of these participating States attach negative connotations to the presence of a field operation in the country – arguing that a field presence implies there are serious problems in the country. At the same time, those participating States that do not host OSCE field operations tend to insist that field operations should not only implement projects agreed with the host country, but should also undertake initiatives deemed relevant by the field operations themselves. These diverging views are often framed as a decision between *needs* and *priorities*, i.e. whether a field operation should support the host country's priorities or pursue its needs.

It has been argued that the most recent decade in the Organization's history was marked by a “steady replacement of politically mandated missions by service-providing field presences with rather apolitical mandates”.¹⁸

17 Cf. *ibid.*

18 Frank Evers, *Appropriate Ways of Developing OSCE Field Activities*, CORE Working Paper No. 22, Hamburg, April 2011, pp. 3-4.

As a result, OSCE field activities are said to “often deal with issues of secondary importance”.¹⁹ Other scholars point out that narrowing the gap between the two diverging views on the field operations will remain one of the main challenges for the Organization in the future.²⁰ A diplomatic compromise would suggest that each and every field presence should maintain a balance between encouraging the host country to meet its OSCE commitments, on the one hand, and preserving good relations with that host country, on the other.

The second dimension of the debate on field operations can be perhaps called “generational”, as it concerns the notion that field operations have evolved through a number of generations. Most OSCE field operations were originally opened in response to a certain crisis or conflict situation and were primarily mandated with crisis response, conflict management, and conflict resolution functions, such as supporting political negotiations and bargaining peace agreements, and monitoring conflict zones and ceasefire agreements. In fact, first-generation field operations were rather diplomatic missions with a political mandate and a high degree of autonomy in the host country. This type of field presence is considered to represent the first generation. However, over the years, some OSCE field presences have grown and changed their mission, with post-conflict rehabilitation becoming a major task. These are usually referred to as second-generation field operations. Since about 2001, a third generation of field operations has started to take shape, whose focus has been more on assistance, capacity-building, and development co-operation, and whose work has been based on projects.

If we consider the ongoing debate on the OSCE field operations through the generational lens, it becomes clear that the contention among the participating States is basically about the third-generation type of field presences. The functions of this type of field operation have already caused OSCE missions in a few participating States to be downsized (e.g. Uzbekistan, Ukraine) or have meant that they have had a very low political profile (e.g. Turkmenistan). It is this context of the debate on field operations that turns the case of the OSCE presence in Tajikistan into a subject worth closer examination for lessons learned and future implications.

The Transformation of the OSCE Presence in Tajikistan

The OSCE has maintained a presence in Central Asia for the last 20 years. The first OSCE field presence in the region – the OSCE Mission to Tajikistan – opened in 1994 at the time of that country’s brutal civil war. In 1995, the OSCE opened a Central Asian Liaison Office in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and

19 Ibid., p. 4.

20 Cf. Kathleen Samuel, *Fostering relations with a host country: A case study of the OSCE and Tajikistan*, in: *Security and Human Rights* 4/2009, pp. 339-345, here. p. 344.

OSCE centers followed in three other Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. Of the five OSCE field operations, only the one in Tajikistan experienced significant expansion in the scope of its work and allocated budgets. The OSCE presence in Tajikistan was deployed as a small-format mission, whose mandate was primarily to support United Nations efforts as part of the peace process and, to that end, to “facilitate dialogue and confidence-building between regionalist and political forces in the country [...] and assist in the development of legal and democratic political institutions and processes”.²¹ The field operation in Tajikistan is thus the oldest in the Central Asian region and, indeed, one of the oldest in the entire OSCE area.

By 2002, the mandate of the field operation had already changed, which was also reflected in the change of its name to the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe.²² Following the generational approach, it may be argued that the new format of the field presence in Tajikistan represented a shift from a first-generation type that dealt mainly with crisis response and conflict resolution to a second-generation type that focused more on post-conflict rehabilitation and institution-building.

The last and most recent transformation of the format took place in 2008, when the field operation was turned into the OSCE Office in Tajikistan.²³ The new mandate was widened to cover many issues pertaining to the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions and also included a few crucial points on the activities being implemented “on the basis of mutual understanding and [...] common agreement”.²⁴ It can be argued that the new mandate represented a logical continuation from a focus on post-conflict rehabilitation to one based more on development cooperation and capacity-building and hence represented the evolution of the field operation into a third-generation type. However, the background of the mandate change does not necessarily confirm this assumption. The transformation of the format was in fact a response to criticism of the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe by the host country.

In 2006, in response to the annual report of the Head of Mission of the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe to the Permanent Council in Vienna, the delegation of Tajikistan to the OSCE delivered a statement that heavily criticized the Centre in a number of regards: concern with the consistency of the field

21 CSCE, Fourth Meeting of the Council, Rome, 30 November – 1 December 1993, Decisions of the Rome Council Meeting, in: Arie Bloed (ed.), *The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Basic Document 1993-1995*, The Hague, 1997, pp. 195-214, here: p. 200, also available at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/40401>.

22 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 500/Corrected reissue, Mandate of the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe*, PC.DEC/500/Corr.1, 31 October 2002, at: <http://www.osce.org/pc/12764>.

23 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 852, Mandate of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan*, PC.DEC/852, 19 June 2008, at: <http://www.osce.org/pc/32467>.

24 Ibid.

operation's activities with the host country's priorities; uncertainty regarding the effectiveness and impact of activities; a marked lack of an overall concept, co-ordination, and long-term planning of activities; a failure to adapt activities over time to changing realities; and questionable transparency.²⁵

Later in 2006, the Tajik delegation to the OSCE reiterated its concerns over the transparency and accountability of the field operation in Tajikistan and repeated its belief in the need to improve both. It also referred to the unequal geographic distribution of OSCE institutions and field operations and expressed Tajikistan's willingness to host an OSCE institution. Prioritizing regional need for co-operation in trade, transportation, and the economy in Central Asia, Tajikistan proposed convening the annual OSCE Economic Forum in Dushanbe rather than Prague. It also proposed the establishment of a regional centre on either aridification or transportation issues under the auspices of the OSCE in Dushanbe. Furthermore, Tajikistan expressed its desire to change the mandate of the OSCE field presence in the country to reflect the changes that had occurred in the ten years since the signing of the 1997 peace agreement by changing the format of the field presence from the Centre in Dushanbe to a project co-ordination office to better meet the country's priorities and focus more on economic development.

Back in 2006, even against the background of ongoing tense discussions over OSCE reform, including reform of the field operations, the proposals made by the Tajik delegation to the OSCE were a "wake-up call"²⁶ for many participating States, the Chairmanship, and executive structures, and triggered internal reflection. The immediate reaction was confusion over whether the OSCE could or should implement any or all of the proposals made by Tajikistan. A round of consultations with the participating States was initiated by the 2007 Spanish Chairmanship in response. Later in the year, the Chairmanship reported that the ideas of permanently convening the OSCE Economic Forum in Dushanbe and of establishing a regional center on aridification or transportation issues did not find substantial support from the participating States.

The discussions in 2007 on the establishment of an OSCE regional body in Tajikistan and those on changing the mandate of the OSCE field operation in the country were closely interlinked. While the ideas of establishing a regional centre on aridification or transportation and moving the OSCE Economic Forum to Dushanbe were finding very little support among the participating States, attention was moving towards the ideas proposed in early 2006 by the Tajik minister of foreign affairs on establishing an institution to support border security. In 2006, Tajikistan addressed the international community, including the OSCE participating States, with a request for assistance in strengthening the security of its borders with Afghanistan. The request for

25 Cf. *Statement of the Tajik Delegation in response to the Annual Report of the Head of OSCE Centre in Dushanbe to the Permanent Council*, PC.DEL/434/06, 11 May 2006.

26 Samuel, cited above (Note 20), p. 340.

border-security assistance was also advanced in the context of discussions among the participating State on the OSCE contribution to security in Afghanistan. These discussions ultimately precipitated in the 2007 Ministerial Council Decision on OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan,²⁷ which still guides the Organization in its border security and management activities.

In view of the discussions on the OSCE's contribution to security in Afghanistan, the calls from the Tajik delegation to establish a regional institution in Dushanbe leaned increasingly towards a border-security agenda. At a meeting between representatives of the OSCE Chairmanship, the OSCE Secretariat, and the Tajik authorities in Dushanbe in 2007, it was concluded that the Tajik proposal could be realized in the form of an OSCE centre on border security.²⁸ This conclusion reflected the recognition on the part of many participating States that Tajikistan faces challenges arising from its long border with Afghanistan and could play a key role in expanding OSCE efforts to contribute to security in Afghanistan. The result was a multi-year project to establish and maintain the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, which was opened in 2009 and continues to operate.

Discussions on changing the mandate of the OSCE presence in the country were not as simple and clear cut as those on establishing an OSCE institution in the country. The latter required enhanced engagement on the part of Tajikistan itself and closer co-operation between the Organization and the host country. However, the proposed change of mandate raised concerns among some participating States that there could be deep divergences between Tajikistan's understanding of the role of a field operation and the views of the majority of participating States. As already mentioned, the Tajik side argued that the new mandate of the field presence should be aligned to the host country's priorities and focus primarily on economic development. As a role model for revision of the mandate, the Tajik side referred to Uzbekistan, which, by the middle of 2006, had succeeded in pushing for the revision of the mandate of the OSCE Center in Tashkent, turning it into the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan, which has limited autonomy and an agenda driven mostly by projects on request. For some participating States, transforming the OSCE field operation in Tajikistan on the model of the Organization's presence in Uzbekistan while also requesting a new mandate that would focus more on economic activities suggested a desire to reduce the political autonomy of the field operation in relation to the host country and ultimately to turn it into a mere service provider. Furthermore, the years since the adoption of the new mandate have shown that the worries of some participating States about changing the focus of the field operation to

27 Decision No. 4/11, Strengthening OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan, MC.DEC/4/11 of 7 December 2011, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Eighteenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, Vilnius 2011, 6 and 7 December 2011*, Vilnius, 7 December 2011, at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/88839>.

28 Cf. internal report of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan.

economic development, as outlined above, were not correct, as the host country has supported expansion in all three dimensions.

Throughout 2007, negotiations and consultations between, on the one hand, the OSCE, its Chairmanship, and the participating States and, on the other, the government of Tajikistan did not produce any meaningful results. Both sides were in search of an acceptable format that could be a consensus solution for the new mandate. In 2008, the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship continued the consultations with a strong commitment to finalize the issue in that year. In spring 2008, a number of high-ranking delegations from several participating States visited Tajikistan, along with the Chairperson-in-Office. During the meetings with Tajikistan's leadership, the issue of clarity regarding the kind of field presence was raised. It was communicated that many participating States saw the field operation in Tajikistan as having a mandate to support the host country in implementing OSCE principles and commitments in all dimensions, possessing a certain autonomy vis-à-vis the host government, and reporting directly to the Permanent Council and the Chairmanship. In a way, Tajikistan was "convinced" that keeping the existing format of the field operation would represent its continued commitment to the values and principles upheld by the OSCE. At the same time, the need to retain the format was tightly connected to the then ongoing discussions on establishing a regional institution in Tajikistan.

While both second- and third-generation field operations were under discussion for Tajikistan, the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe (though operating on a 2002 mandate, which represented a drift away from a first-generation type of field operations) was still functioning in the spirit of the classical field operations launched in the early 1990s in states that had experienced civil wars and major disruption to state structures, e.g. in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Tajikistan itself.

The challenge in negotiating the new mandate of the OSCE field presence in Tajikistan was to devise a format that could accommodate both positions – enhancing the host country's engagement in the planning and evaluation of field activities, on the one hand, and maintaining a degree of political autonomy and focus on all three dimensions, on the other. The bargain that needed to be struck over the new mandate would have to satisfy both the government of Tajikistan and at least the majority of the OSCE participating States.

The solution was found in the form of a set of instruments and mechanisms of co-operation between the field operation and the host country with the following key elements:

- a joint consultative mechanism between the OSCE and the government of Tajikistan to discuss the strategic framework of field activities in the country;

- improved transparency and accountability for the utilization of funds allocated to the field operation;
- improved strategic planning and reporting on results through the introduction of new programme-management tools.

Yet the most important ingredient of the proposed solution was the emphasis placed on mutual understanding and common agreement as a foundation for the field operation's activities, as well as a reinforced commitment to build the national capacity of the host country. The former element was quite revolutionary in the history of OSCE field presences in Central Asia, as nowhere else were mutual understanding and common agreement with the host country defined as basic principles for the work of a field mission. This compromise not only demonstrated how flexible the OSCE can be towards the demands of participating States that host field operations, it also underlined the need to raise the quality of co-operation between the OSCE and a participating State to the level where the country would be deeply engaged in processes in all three dimensions and could fully benefit from its intensified contacts with the Organization. The exact wording adopted in the text of the new mandate is as follows:

The activities of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan are conducted on the basis of mutual understanding and are carried out on the basis of common agreement. The OSCE Office in Tajikistan will perform its tasks and activities with full respect for the national legislation of Tajikistan, and report on them in a transparent manner.²⁹

The emphasis on national capacity-building serves to remind the participating States and the host country that the field operation will eventually hand over its tasks to national structures and will not stay in the country forever. It also reflects the participating States' earlier decision to "facilitate an efficient transfer of the tasks of the operation to the host country" and close the field operation.³⁰

At the same time, the solution devised for the new mandate of the OSCE field presence in Tajikistan did not exclude its political autonomy under the Organization's Permanent Council. Neither did it sacrifice any of the three dimensions for the sake of the others, as the field operation was tasked to promote "the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments" as well as "the co-operation of the Republic of Tajikistan within the

29 *Mandate of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan*, cited above (Note 23), p. 2.

30 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Charter for European Security*, Article 41, reprinted in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 1999*, Baden-Baden 2000, pp. 425-443, here: p. 437, also available at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/39569>.

OSCE framework, with special emphasis on the regional context, in all OSCE dimensions [...]”³¹

The new mandate of the OSCE field operation in Tajikistan was finally approved in June 2008, and, to the surprise of those concerned that the result would be merely a scaling down, the field presence was in fact transformed into a third-generation type of field operation – the OSCE Office in Tajikistan – but with a mandate to address a wide range of issues in the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions of security. Overall, the key to solving the field operation crisis in the case of Tajikistan was to limit the political autonomy of the field mission by linking it to the co-operation of the host country, thus embedding the interests of both the host country and the OSCE at a fundamental level in the new mandate.³²

The 2014 Ukraine Crisis: Implications for the Field Presence

The solution to the field operation crisis in the case of Tajikistan has received praise from the host country and many participating States over the last six years. A former foreign minister of Tajikistan referred to the model of co-operation between OSCE and Tajikistan as a “future role model for decision-making in other regions of the world”.³³ The host country has expressed its satisfaction with the OSCE field presence each year since 2009 during annual consultations between the OSCE executive structures and the government of Tajikistan.³⁴ The merits of the principles guiding the OSCE field operation in Tajikistan have also frequently been pointed out by various OSCE delegations to have visited the country. Yet after six years of mutual understanding and common agreement, the shining accord in OSCE-Tajikistan relations currently seems somewhat strained.

Throughout 2014, the OSCE presence in the country was criticized by local partners, who questioned the Organization’s relevance to a certain extent. Critical comments are indeed welcome and critique per se is regarded as a normal and useful practice. However, two elements in the most recent criticism of the OSCE field presence in Tajikistan seem to go further than usual and require additional attention. Firstly, the criticism came from both sides – representatives of the government and civil society. It is not often that the field presence is criticized by both “camps”. Secondly, the criticism was

31 *Mandate of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan*, cited above (Note 23), p. 1.

32 The 2008 mandate of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan remains in effect today. Between 2007 and 2013, the unified budget of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan grew by 70 per cent, and the number of thematic units increased from seven to 17.

33 Hamrokhon Zarifi, *Tajikistan – OSCE: Dialogue and Co-operation*, Dushanbe 2009, p.31.

34 Cf. the addresses given by Tajikistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the annual OSCE-Tajikistan Task Force Meetings.

clearly influenced by events in Ukraine, with the OSCE being condemned for failing entirely to bring democracy to the countries it works in.³⁵

A few months later, a respected Tajik newspaper asked whether perhaps the OSCE presence in Tajikistan should be closed as a result of its inability to bring tangible change in the host government's commitment to democratic elections.³⁶ The article argued that the OSCE seems to have been transformed into a geopolitical instrument, thus drawing comparisons with events in Ukraine, where the OSCE's contributions to conflict resolution look vague to an external observer. The same critical article pointed out the tendency for participating States to "take note" of OSCE statements at best, or simply to diplomatically ignore messages coming from the Organization. The latter point resonates with a more general criticism of the OSCE for shortcomings in reaching out to the general population and for its failure to criticize human rights violations.

It would be wrong to overemphasize the criticism there has been of the OSCE field presence in Tajikistan, but it is important to draw attention to the fact that for both groups – governmental officials and local civil society – the Ukraine crisis clearly involved a failure of Western policy in general and OSCE policy in particular. There is little likelihood that this criticism will undermine the current principles that guide the work of the OSCE field operation in Tajikistan. Yet linkages (however assumed and imaginative) between the OSCE's field activities and events in Ukraine subtly drawn by the OSCE's local partners in Tajikistan may have certain implications for the field presence in the future. Mistrust towards and uncertainty about the field operation's activities, which had been reduced by means of a lengthy bargaining process, may return if the common interpretation of the OSCE's efforts in Ukraine continue to be projected onto the field presence in Tajikistan.

Prospects for the OSCE Presence in the Field

It can be claimed with a high degree of confidence that the debate on the OSCE field operations will continue beyond the Helsinki +40 Process. As pointed out, the two major diverging views on the role and functions of the field operations are still contested by the participating States with no unanimity yet on the horizon. It may be argued that the debate over field operations will continue as long as consensus on the key principles of OSCE reform continues to be contested by participating States East and West of Vienna. It may therefore be expected that the crisis of field operations will re-

35 Cf. Humairoi Bakhtiyor, *VIDEO: Izhoroti Shukurjon Zuhurov ziddi Sozmoni Amniyatu Hamkori dar Avrupo (OBSE)* [Video: Statement by Shukurjon Zuhurov against the OSCE], Ozodagon, 24 April 2014, available at: <http://www.ozodagon.com/15910-izhoroti-shukurchon-zuhurov-alayhi-sozmoni-amniyat-va-hamkori-dar-avrupo-obse.html>.

36 Cf. Siyovush Qosimzoda, Korshinos: SAHA-ro dar Tojikiston boyad bast [Expert: The OSCE in Tajikistan should be closed], in: *Ozodagon*, 3 September 2014.

main subject to the resolution of the larger crisis of the OSCE's identity and relevance.

Yet a crucial point to take into account with respect to OSCE field operations is that activities on the ground often cannot wait for the larger consensus to be reached. Both the needs and priorities of the countries hosting the OSCE field presences are dynamic; changes on the ground tend to outpace the Organization's response to these changes. If this tendency continues, the OSCE's field operation crisis may well expand from an issue concerning the individual perception of some participating States into a major challenge with serious implications for the identity and relevance of the Organization, particularly in Central Asia.

It is imperative to devise a new generation of field operations that can bridge the gap between the two major diverging views. A few ideas about the type and format of future field operations are being voiced at the moment by participating States in the context of the Helsinki +40 Process. Some suggest establishing small and flexible missions that could be quickly deployed and supported by experts from the OSCE's main institutions. Others propose focusing on co-ordinated exit processes for some field missions and the establishment of clear strategies for handover to national institutions. There are also suggestions that more should be invested in establishing and maintaining a smaller number of regional offices or thematic institutions that could serve one or more OSCE regions (on the model of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek or the Border Management Staff College). Most recently, it has also been proposed to take advantage of the possibilities of status-neutral field operations to enable them to work in the territories of de facto regimes in the future.³⁷

The next generation of field operations needs to take into account all the challenges facing the OSCE in the field and in Vienna. This new type of field presence may be mandated to support regional security; however, it should not be downgraded into merely the training of dog handlers, planting trees, or training law enforcement to control crowds. The OSCE must remain a flexible political organization that is able to overcome the biases and concerns of participating States both East and West of Vienna.

Furthermore, with the inclusion of Mongolia as the 57th participating State and Mongolia's request to establish a field operation,³⁸ the OSCE has received a unique chance to devise a fourth-generation type of field mission that would absorb all the positive experiences of the preceding generations.

37 Cf. OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions, *The Future of OSCE Field Operations (Options)*, Vienna 2014.

38 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, *Decision No. 2/12, Accession of Mongolia to the OSCE*, MC.DEC/2/12, 21 November 2012, at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/97736>.