

Rory McCorley

## The 1999-2004 Georgia Border Monitoring Operation and the 2005-2009 Follow-up Projects – Lessons Learned and Potential Offerings for Future Engagement

### *Introduction*

As the tenth anniversary of the OSCE's Border Security and Management Concept (BSMC) approaches, now is an appropriate time to reflect on the Organization's engagement in border management. Drawing from my experience, with a particular focus on Georgia and reference to projects in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, this article reviews the OSCE's engagement and identifies lessons related to the management of "green borders". I will look in detail at the Border Monitoring Operation (BMO) established in Georgia in 1999 as a conflict prevention measure and the follow-on training projects that have come, whether by design or default, to be considered as examples of the Organization's ability to adapt to and address the needs of participating States.

### *The OSCE's Border Monitoring Operation*

#### *Why Was It Necessary?*

Georgia was faced with many challenges in managing its borders. It had functioned as a somewhat autonomous region since the foundation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). On the collapse of that multi-ethnic state, Georgia declared independence in 1991, and the "former administrative borders between Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation became international. But none of these borderlines have been officially delineated or demarcated."<sup>1</sup> The only exceptions this EU report identifies are borders with Turkey, which had been established in pre-independence days. This was the only border that was guarded, and it had been controlled by USSR border troops, who were a military rather than a police law enforcement agency.<sup>2</sup>

The existence of two semi-autonomous regions – Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which, on Georgia's declaration of independence, also declared their

---

1 Border Support Team of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, *Assessment Report of the Georgian Border Security System*, Tbilisi 2005.

2 Cf. *ibid.*

own independence<sup>3</sup> – complicated matters further. The Russian Federation has continued to involve itself in these regions: “Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many people in Moscow still see Georgia as an outpost of the Russian empire. The Russian government is reluctant to cede control over Georgia’s politics and external orientation”.<sup>4</sup> Other factors also influenced this approach, and the most relevant to this paper are the Second Chechen War in 1999 and the fact that “the Georgian state under Shevardnadze did not control its external borders”.<sup>5</sup> Russia also claimed that international terrorists were present in the Pankisi Gorge, close to the Chechen/Dagestan border within Georgia. Moscow accused Georgia of harbouring these terrorists and threatened to use pre-emptive strikes in Georgia to remove them.<sup>6</sup>

### *Origin and Mandate*

In late autumn of 1999, it was reported that Russian aircraft violated Georgian airspace on several occasions and opened fire on the Georgian border post at Shatili. There were also strong allegations that Chechen fighters had found refuge in the surrounding valley. Border villages were reportedly bombed by Russian forces. This fostered a situation of growing tension between the Russian Federation and Georgia based on “allegations” by both sides regarding activities on the border. Georgia feared a spillover of the trouble into their territory, while Russia accused Georgia of tolerating the presence of Chechen fighters and not securing the border with Chechnya. As a result, the tensions and accusations between Georgia and Russia escalated, and, in early December 1999, the Georgian government requested that international observers monitor the situation along the Chechen part of the Georgia/Russia border.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the OSCE BMO was established in 1999 to “act as an independent arbitrator to claims and counter claims made by the Russians and Georgians and about traffic across the border”.<sup>8</sup> The creation of the BMO was significant, as it highlighted Georgia’s inability to manage its own border while also establishing the OSCE as an organization that the Russian Federation and Georgia were willing to accept as a third party in the management of their common border. The OSCE was already involved in South Ossetia as a peace broker, where it ran a military monitoring mission.<sup>9</sup>

---

3 Cf. Mark Leonard/Charles Grant, *Georgia and the EU. Can Europe’s neighbourhood policy deliver?* Policy brief, Centre for European Reform, London, September 2005, p. 4.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

5 Dov Lynch, *Why Georgia matters*, Chaillot Paper No. 86, Paris, February 2006, p. 17.

6 Cf. Vladimir Socor, Axing the BMO, Russia menaces Georgia, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 2/2005, 3 January 2005.

7 This was highlighted in an OSCE Borders Unit review of the BMO conducted in 2011.

8 Leonard/Grant, cited above (Note 3).

9 Cf. Lynch, cited above (Note 5), p. 38.



*Georgia*

In December 1999, the OSCE Mission to Georgia, which had been active in the country since 1992, was mandated “to observe and report on movement across the border between Georgia and the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation, both by vehicle and on foot”.<sup>10</sup> It is also important to note that the Council decision stated that the monitors were unarmed, had no enforcement responsibilities and monitored only from Georgian territory. The Georgian government undertook responsibility for the security of the monitors.<sup>11</sup>

#### *The Development of the BMO*

The establishment of the BMO was logistically difficult, as the environment in which the monitors would conduct operations was isolated and harsh, lying at an elevation of between 2,000 and 4,500 metres in the Caucasus Mountains. Monitoring operations by core mission staff commenced in late December 1999, while the recruitment of 20 border monitors got underway. In February 2000, a temporary observation post in Shatili opened. This was

10 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 334*, PC.DEC/334, 15 December 1999.

11 This relationship between the Georgian Border Guards (GBG) and the monitors was to prove significant in later years, as it exposed the OSCE to the capabilities of the Georgian Border Guards and the necessity to develop a capacity-building programme.

located close to the border and the Arghun Valley route that many Chechen refugees used to flee to Georgia.<sup>12</sup>

In 2000, the first Head of the BMO, General Bernd Lubenik, recommended an enlargement of the BMO mandate to enable it to conduct operations from three bases with 42 monitors. The Permanent Council approved this in April 2000, and the BMO established two new bases at Omalo and Girevi. This expansion provided the BMO with the ability to monitor the 82 km Chechen border with Georgia by means of mobile patrols and static observation posts. During the first two years of the BMO, tensions remained high between Georgia and the Russian Federation. In October 2000, in the Assa Valley<sup>13</sup> along the Georgian-Ingush border, an incident reportedly took place involving 50-60 Chechen fighters. This prompted a discussion on the expansion of the BMO, which was acknowledged as contributing to stabilizing the area within which it operated, to the Ingush and Dagestan borders. Georgia made the request for this further expansion to the OSCE through the Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia. An evaluation was conducted in April 2001 to consider the effectiveness of the existing operation and examine the possible expansion. Two options were proposed: a permanent deployment as in the case of the Chechen sector or short deployments and regular patrols by vehicle or helicopter from Tbilisi.

The first option was adopted, and soon afterwards two patrol bases were established in the Assa Valley and the village of Sno on the Ingush sector of the border. A similar evaluation was conducted in July 2002, and the recommendation to extend the BMO to the Dagestan border was adopted in a Permanent Council decision. The patrol bases at Kabali, Akhalsopeli, Kvareli, and Napareuli were added, and the BMO was now reporting along a border that extended for 280 km (Chechnya 80 km, Ingushetia 60 km, Dagestan 140 km). Opting to establish permanent bases ensured that the BMO could contribute to achieving its mission goals in a more comprehensive manner. The resulting regular interaction with the local population and border guards increased situational awareness, security, and trust. The BMO was supported by a logistic supply base in Telavi and the Head Office in Tbilisi.

At its height, the BMO consisted of 144 international team members who carried out planning, support, and monitoring functions. The monitors were seconded from over 24 OSCE participating States. In fact, this operation did not adhere with the informal principle that neighbouring states should not participate in monitoring missions. This principle is explained as supporting “impartiality”. Yet it can be argued that if a monitor from a neighbouring state confirms a reported border crossing,<sup>14</sup> this adds credibil-

---

12 According to the UNHCR, almost 7,600 Chechen refugees fled to Georgia in December 1999.

13 The Assa Valley was to the west of the BMO's then area of operations.

14 The BMO's standard operation procedure was to use three-person teams (each member being from a different nation). This facilitated a process in which each report was supported by the agreement of at least two monitors.

ity. The BMO also employed a significant number of Georgians as local contractors to supply services such as helicopter transport (Air Tushiti).

### *Operations*

In order to fulfil its mandate, the BMO adapted a very mobile and efficient concept of operations. For this reason, border monitors were required to possess a high level of fitness and technical ability. Many, though not all, had military or police backgrounds. It is estimated that 80 per cent of the border area was not accessible by vehicle. This placed a significant reliance on air support by helicopters, which were often restricted by the weather and high mountain passes. It was not unknown for the monitors to face delays of over a week in being extracted from their patrol bases. This was a significant factor in the Ingush and Chechen sectors in terms of the morale of the monitors, and the contracting of Georgian pilots with experience flying in the area of operations was one of the main reasons the BMO was able to conduct operations in this challenging environment. Operations were tailored for summer and winter conditions. During the winter period, the number of monitors was reduced.

In 2003/2004, monitoring was conducted as follows:

<i>Patrol Type</i>	<i>Number of Patrols</i>	
	<i>Summer</i>	<i>Winter</i>
Patrol Base <sup>15</sup> (24/7)	9	9
Permanent Observation Post <sup>16</sup> (POP) (24 hrs)	77	0
Overnight Observation Patrols (per week)	20	9
Foot Patrol (per week)	63	63
Vehicle Patrol (per week)	36	36
Heli Patrol (per week)	9	9

The BMO prided itself on its ability to deliver reports with supporting film and/or pictures of incidents from the hostile mountain environment to the OSCE Chairmanship in Vienna within two hours.<sup>17</sup> While this was technically challenging, it was ultimately achieved. The BMO operated with the most advanced equipment, including MATIS thermal imaging devices,

15 A patrol base was a permanent fixture/building located close to a village from where the BMO conducted its operations in each area (Girevi, Omalo, etc). Each base was allocated 20-30 border monitors, who manned the base and conducted operations within the area for which the patrol base was responsible.

16 A POP was an observation post manned by 2-3 border monitors, who conducted observation 24 hours a day. These POPs were located in isolated areas that provided excellent observation. The POPs were not occupied during the winter months.

17 These reports were also made available to the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) and Delegations within the same two-hour timeframe.

Thuraya satellite phones, and infrared night vision devices. Narrow-band satellite, text, and voice communications were used to transmit the reports from patrols to the patrol base and onwards to BMO headquarters. The mission HQ then, after verifying the reports, forwarded them to the Chairmanship in Vienna. The importance of delivering the information so quickly was to independently confirm or deny accusations by either side, thus avoiding an escalation of tensions.

As monitoring was conducted from the patrol bases 24/7, the demands placed on the teams of monitors were exhausting. The BMO applied a policy of allowing border monitors to operate for three to four weeks in the patrol base area before rotation to Tbilisi, and the total period of service of the monitors in the field did not exceed 18 months. Maintaining high quality patrolling, monitoring, and reporting came at a price. The cost of financing the BMO grew rapidly with its expansion. In 2004, the budget for the BMO was in the region of 13 million euros. This was equivalent to ten per cent of the OSCE's unified budget for the same year. The cost of internationally contracted monitors, logistic support including helicopters, and the maintenance of nine patrol bases and communications networks were the main contributors to this expense.

Maintaining the credibility of the operation was one of the BMO's main priorities. Trying to execute patrols and monitoring activities with inferior equipment and poorly trained personnel undermines the quality and credibility of the product delivered. This principle was also applied to the other border management training programmes run by the OSCE Mission to Georgia. As representatives of an international organization, it falls on the OSCE's staff to maintain the highest standards. To do otherwise would be to fail those in need of assistance. On a point of interest, it was also my observation that the local population and local authorities were more willing to accept staff members from countries that had overcome a period of conflict in the recent past.

As the BMO was conducting operations, the political landscape in Georgia was changing. In 2003, public demonstrations in Georgia led to the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze in what is better known as the Rose Revolution.<sup>18</sup> The new government, led by the young and energetic Mikheil Saakashvili, was quick to highlight its pro-Western credentials. Saakashvili sought to involve the EU, US, and OSCE in building a democracy: "Since November 2003, Georgia has launched itself into the process of democracy and state building, led by an energetic and determined leadership, which has the support of the majority of the population. The Georgian project

---

18 For a description of how thousands of Georgians took to the streets to protest against massive fraud in parliamentary elections in November 2003, leading to the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze, cf. Dov Lynch, cited above (Note 5), p. 9 and 23.

is important because it reflects the core challenge of crafting democracy in a dysfunctional state embedded in a conflict-ridden region.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Closure*

Georgia’s pro-Western turn was to have an impact on the OSCE. The BMO was to become the first victim in the political standoff over Georgia. The Russian Federation’s Delegation in Vienna indicated that it would not agree to the BMO mandate extension in April 2004. It argued the BMO was inefficient and ineffective. “It is our belief that the OSCE observers have fulfilled their task on the Georgian-Russian border. With Russian-Georgian security cooperation on our common border being successfully fostered, the OSCE monitoring, having not been distinguished by particular effectiveness, has ceased to influence the state of affairs in this field”.<sup>20</sup>

As the 2004 mandate was nearing its end, there was a period of intense diplomatic effort to ensure the OSCE Permanent Council would agree to the extension of the BMO in 2005. Many views were put forward: “In Georgia, the OSCE’s Border Monitoring Operation is contributing to stability on a sensitive border, and its mandate should be extended for another year.”<sup>21</sup> As Vladimir Socor points out: “At the Sofia conference, however, Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov suddenly changed the argument. He now claimed that the BMO has fulfilled its tasks, managed to improve the situation on the border, is therefore no longer needed, and is too expensive in any case.”<sup>22</sup> Dov Lynch argued that Russia has vital interests in securing the Russian-Georgian border, and the withdrawal of the BMO “left Georgia facing Russia alone on its northern border without the transparency that the OSCE had provided”.<sup>23</sup> This situation raised the possibility of Russian pre-emptive strikes, Lynch argued. Vladimir Socor believed that Russia had three reasons not to extend the BMO:

- First, the impartial and effective BMO did not substantiate – thus indirectly disproving – Moscow’s allegations about armed groups using Georgian territory for operations in Russia.
- Second, the BMO had confirmed Russian air raids over Georgian territory, despite Russia’s denials.

---

19 Ibid, p. 10.

20 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Russian MFA Information and Press Department Commentary Regarding End of OSCE Observers’ Stay on Georgian-Russian Border*, 31 December 2004, at: [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/452118](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/452118).

21 U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman (Sofia, Bulgaria), Remarks by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell to the Ministerial Meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Sofia, 7 December 2004, MC.DEL/52/04, 7 December 2004.

22 Vladimir Socor, Russia Exploits the OSCE to Pressure Georgia, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 146/2004, 13 December 2004.

23 Lynch, cited above (Note 5), p. 48.

- Third, the BMO's presence relieved the political pressure that Russia could bring to bear on Georgia through those *casus belli*-type accusations. The BMO's presence, in effect, deterred the Russian military from threatening to move into Georgian territory under "anti-terrorism" pretences. The BMO, described officially as a confidence-building operation, in fact played this deterrent role as well.<sup>24</sup>

The OSCE Mission to Georgia proposed three reduced options to extend the BMO that were never given any real consideration, as it was clear that the decision to end the operation had been taken by the Russian Federation. Georgia was made aware that their northern neighbour still had vital interests and could influence matters in Georgia. Just how much would be demonstrated in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the years to come. The issue of the BMO's mandate was but one aspect of this and laid down a marker to the international community. This clearly demonstrates that where the "full support or ownership" of the host nations<sup>25</sup> is lacking, a mandate is undermined.

I was surprised by the arguments regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the operation. In my personal opinion and based on experience in conflict zones, the BMO was in fact a highly adaptable operation that achieved results beyond its expectations. This was highlighted during the closure process, when the population of villages such as Girevi and Shatili along the Chechen border expressed their opinion that they were being abandoned, despite the presence of the Georgian Border Guards (GBG). On 1 January 2005, with no consensus on a mandate extension, the Mission to Georgia commenced preparations for the closure of the BMO. This decision had two key effects; it would:

- prompt the EU to begin work on establishing a border management team (the Border Support Team of the EU Special Representative/EUSR BST);
- lead the OSCE to instigate a training programme for capacity-building of the GBG.

#### *What Solution for Georgia?*

In response to the withdrawal of the OSCE BMO in 2005, "the EU started to assist the Georgian government in the reform of its Border Guard service".<sup>26</sup> Dov Lynch argued that this would be positive for both Georgia and Russia and would facilitate the enhancement of their relations. However, according to Mark Leonard and Charles Grant, the Georgians claimed the contingent

---

24 Cf. Socor, cited above (Note 22).

25 In the case of the BMO, the Russian Federation and Georgia.

26 Lynch, cited above (Note 5), p. 75.



sent by the EU was too small, consisting of “a mere three officials (with a promise to provide ten more border guard ‘mentors’ later in 2005)”,<sup>27</sup> and that the EU were also unable to monitor the border themselves in the area where the OSCE had operated and were unwilling to train and equip the GBG to do so on the scale required.

A number of meetings were held between representatives of the BMO and the EU team, during which the former explained how it conducted operations and what infrastructure was required to maintain a mission of this kind. There were high expectations on the Georgian side that the EU would deliver a monitoring mission that would replace the BMO while not being exposed to the perceived weakness of the OSCE – the dependency on consensus: “Moscow has now demonstrated that it can hold the OSCE generally, and the BMO in particular, hostage both politically and financially. The security of Georgia cannot be entrusted to an organization whose security functions depend on Russia’s sufferance”.<sup>28</sup> The EU did deploy a team that quickly set about assisting the GBG to reform. The feeling in Tbilisi at the time was that the EU could launch an operation free of Russian interference and input and the need for Moscow’s approval. However, this was not the case, and the need for Georgia to engage with the Russian Federation was never more evident. When this did not occur, the consequences were disastrous, as we eventually witnessed. The EU did not deliver in the expectant eyes of Tbilisi, and responsibility for monitoring the border fell to the GBG.

### *The Role of the European Union*

In 2005, with assistance from the EUSR Border Support Team, the GBG elaborated a set of border-related reform proposals,<sup>29</sup> and the State Border Defence Department of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) published a white paper. This was the first such document published by the Georgian MIA, and clearly outlines the policy and direction the border service should follow:

State Border Security System should correspond to the national interests of Georgia, guarantying security of Georgian state border and EU requirements according to Georgian Euro-Atlantic course. The requirements are strict principles defined by the EU as a precondition for successful border management and like the strict requirements of the

---

27 Leonard/Grant, cited above (Note 3), p. 4.

28 Socor, cited above (Note 22).

29 These reforms were prioritized in the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan for Georgia (2006), cf. e.g. [http://www.eas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/eu\\_georgia/political\\_relations/political\\_framework/enp\\_georgia\\_news/index\\_en.htm](http://www.eas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/eu_georgia/political_relations/political_framework/enp_georgia_news/index_en.htm).

Schengen Agreement, represent critical factors for candidate countries [...] that would like to join the EU.<sup>30</sup>

This document highlights two important components to the development of the GBG service. The first is security; the second is compliance with EU standards and regulations, and particularly the Schengen regulations. This linked Georgia's border security strategy with the EU's neighbourhood policy. The approach a state takes to securing its border determines whether the borders can be categorized as soft or hard. These terms describe the borders that exist between countries that comply with the 1985 Schengen Agreement and those that do not. Soft borders promote trade and movement. Hard borders are guarded and regulated to such a degree as to hamper trade and movement. As the EU's borders expand, "being 'just neighbours' is also complicated by a certain asymmetry in power between the EU and its bordering states; the EU's economic, institutional, and geographic weight creates incentives that make non-compliance with EU approaches costly to ignore or resist".<sup>31</sup> Many of the EU's neighbours are certainly keen to comply, and this includes Georgia. The white paper was helpful, as it outlined the vision for the future. The focus was towards soft borders managed by a border police force rather than paramilitary border guards. Nonetheless, I felt that, as far as Georgia's attempt to gain greater support from EU member states for its candidacy was concerned, the elephant in the room remained the issues it faced in solving its border disputes and securing its northern border. In a meeting in 2005 with General Sir Garry Johnson<sup>32</sup> and Ambassador Roy Reeve, the Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, I was asked for my opinion in relation to the capacity of the GBG. I stated that they lacked investment, implemented outdated procedures, and lacked the basic skills to patrol and monitor and manage their borders effectively, particularly the northern border. Ambassador Reeve agreed with the assessment and stated that much of Georgia's resources for security were being invested in the military and the border service had been neglected.

#### *Later OSCE Engagement*

On 13-16 December 2004, a fact-finding mission from the OSCE Secretariat's Borders Unit in the Conflict Prevention (CPC) Centre visited the OSCE Mission to Georgia, holding meetings with the Mission leadership, the GBG, and other international actors in the field of border management. This

---

30 Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Border Defence Department, *Conceptual View of Development*, Tbilisi 2005.

31 Joan DeBardeleben, Introduction, in: Joan DeBardeleben (ed.) *Soft or Hard Borders? Managing the divide in an Enlarged Europe*, Aldershot 2005, pp. 1-21, here: p. 3.

32 General Sir Garry Johnson was working with the International Security Advisory Board at the time.

visit was important, as what transpired sowed the seeds for the follow-up OSCE programmes. It is worth remembering that this engagement was conducted in the absence of the OSCE's Border Security and Management Concept (BSMC), which was only published almost a year later. The fact-finding mission's recommendations included assistance with developing:

- a national action plan;
- quick impact projects;
- new legislation;
- a cross-border co-operation programme;<sup>33</sup>

However, this report focused on police training and little was done to address the immediate gap that would present itself on the closure of the BMO. As a result, the Mission staff began intensive engagement with the GBG, jointly preparing a proposal that would meet the immediate needs of the service. As the OSCE representative participating, it was clear to me that the immediate need was to fill the void left by the departure of the BMO. There was a requirement to develop a programme to transfer the skills and equipment necessary to the GBG to monitor the Chechen/Dagestan/Ingush border. It was also clear that there were other arrangements being put in place at the bilateral level, including on border law (Germany), communications (US), and in other areas, where Turkey, Finland, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) were engaged. The efforts of this small community are an example of successful co-operation and co-ordination that I have not witnessed in other missions. This work was fundamental for the progress of the GBG from being a stagnant organization to one embracing change. Many of the senior officers within the GBG recognized the benefits.

The OSCE Mission to Georgia has implemented the following capacity-building programmes in the area of border management. These were a logical development based on the inability of the GBG to replace the OSCE BMO in terms of training, skills, or equipment. The core training staff of all projects were border monitors with expertise in conducting observation and patrolling activities in the Caucasus Mountains as well as a background in training.

*Training Assistance Programme (TAP):*

The OSCE Mission to Georgia's Training Assistance Programme (TAP) commenced in May 2005. It consisted of ten different modules of four weeks each presented in four locations (Lilo, Omalo, Lagodekhi, and Kazbegi). The staff was composed of 30 former border monitors and 20 local staff. 800 Georgian border guards were trained during the twelve month period.

---

33 Cf. *InterOffice Memorandum, border fact finding mission report*, Georgia, 13-16 December 2004.

*Capacity-Building Training for High-ranking Georgian Border Police:*

This follow-up programme was aimed at training senior management in operational planning, decision-making, rapid response planning, and field exercise training. Three hundred officers were trained in an effort to address the capability gap in the management's ability to plan and conduct operations.

*Search and Rescue Training (SART):*

The SART programme was designed to provide training for the newly created Emergency Management Department of the Georgian MIA. Building on the experience of the BMO and using the resources at its disposal, the OSCE was able to provide helicopter and mountain area search and rescue training. The team was much smaller than the TAP staff, limited to a project manager, three international staff and three local assistants. Russia was initially reluctant to have such mission deployed close to its territory.

*Transitional Institutional Support Programme (TISP):*

The 2008-2009 Transitional Institutional Support Programme had the twin purpose of supporting the transition from a military to a police border guard system and fostering good relations with neighbouring Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Cross-border workshops were conducted at different places and on various subjects (falsified documents; human rights; radiation defence and weapons of mass destruction; counter-terrorism; smuggling in the Caucasus region; narcotics identification and testing; veterinary/phytosanitary threats; targeting, profiling, and selectivity; illegal migration; trafficking in human beings).

In many instances, these programmes were considered a first for the OSCE, and aspects of them have since been used as the basis for training courses on similar topics run by OSCE field presences in Albania, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. There is a genuine potential for the OSCE to extend its influence through such projects. Security services, including border services, are suspicious by their very nature and reluctant to grant access to and engage with outsiders. To expose themselves to "external" actors is to open their service to scrutiny that is often unwelcome. Training projects are a positive first step in building relations between the OSCE and national border services when deal with hard security issues. They establish credibility and trust that can facilitate additional assistance that can be more substantial.

## Conclusions

### *The OSCE's Border Security and Management Concept*

The OSCE has been involved in border issues since its inception. This was reaffirmed in the Border Security and Management Concept adopted at the 2005 OSCE Ministerial Council in Ljubljana. The BSMC states that “participating States reaffirm the norms, principles, commitments and values enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act [...] the Copenhagen Document 1990, the Helsinki Document 1992 and the Charter for European Security 1999. They recall the action plans, decisions and other relevant agreed OSCE documents which address border related issues”.<sup>34</sup>

By adopting the BSMC, the OSCE has demonstrated that it has the capacity to achieve its main objective of co-operation between states. The 1999 decision to deploy the BMO resulted in the OSCE's biggest single and most successful operation in the sphere of security to date.<sup>35</sup>

According to Victor-Yves Ghebali, “the 9/11 terrorists attacks dramatically increased the relevance of border security and management issues within the OSCE”.<sup>36</sup> He continues that the “*OSCE Border Security and Management Concept* recommends that participating states promote ‘open and secure borders in a free, democratic and more integrated OSCE area without dividing lines’”.<sup>37</sup> This could be considered idealistic. Georgia has particular issues, and, within the European context, “distaste for the old defence role of border guards has been replaced by the perception that guarding is a technically-focused subset of policing that does not deserve specific attention”.<sup>38</sup> This is the EU's overall focus but it is not applicable to all OSCE participating States. The OSCE must define its own role in the ever-changing environment of border management, noting the peculiarities of each border, now more so than ever. The threat to the borders of EU member states has increased in recent years with the rise of Islamic militants and the refugee crisis. The OSCE has a leading role to play in assisting its participating States, particularly by developing its capacity in border management in this evolving environment.

---

34 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Ljubljana 2005, *Border Security and Management Concept*, MC.DOC/2/05, 6 December 2005, p. 1, at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/17452>.

35 Cf. Vladimir Socor, BMO RIP; TAP Stillborn, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 74/2005, 15 April 2005.

36 Victor-Yves Ghebali, The OSCE's SSR Operational Activities: A Piecemeal Approach with Limited Results, in: David Law (ed.), *Intergovernmental Organisations and Security Sector Reform*, Geneva 2007, pp. 123-136, here: p. 125 (emphasis in the original).

37 Ibid.

38 Alice Hills, Towards a Rationality of Democratic Border Management, in: Marina Caparini/Otwin Marenin (eds), *Borders and Security Governance. Managing Borders in a Globalised World*, Geneva 2006, pp. 41-57, here: p. 42.

### *Considerations for Future Engagement*

The OSCE should maintain the capability to deploy border-monitoring missions such as the BMO. Its operational strategy has been fine-tuned through years of experience in a harsh environment. This means that future missions will start on a solid footing. It has become evident to me from my experiences in the Middle East, Balkans, and more recently as an evaluator of border-training projects in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, that border services in transition or faced with conflict along their borders need assistance in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and capacity building. Each border has its own unique characteristics, and, where conflict arises, needs its own unique solution. The OSCE has such a depth of engagement that drawing on these experiences to find solutions is the way forward. It is important that missions engage with the Border Security and Management Unit and with other missions that already have this experience. This reach-back capability demonstrates the Organization's efficiency. I would suggest that the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe (BMSC) also has potential to facilitate such knowledge transfer.

The OSCE does not operate in a vacuum; there are always other international actors present. Yet the OSCE's strength is its reputation as a transparent and inclusive pan-European organization with a focus on regional issues. The OSCE's experience in Georgia involved various actors in border management working in a co-ordinated manner. Dialogue and support were the key ingredients to its success. With the exception of the IOM, those participating in the development of the Georgian border service belonged to the OSCE. The Mission to Georgia facilitated this co-operation, which resulted in many positive outcomes, including the purchase of equipment that allowed OSCE-trained GBG personnel to monitor the border 24/7.

My research and experience has identified the following checklist of best practices for engagement in green border management projects by the OSCE:

- acceptance and ownership by the host authorities;
- co-operation:
  - international co-operation;
  - bilateral co-operation;
  - co-operation and co-ordination between adjoining countries;
  - inter-agency co-operation;
- threat and risk assessment;
- needs assessment;
- effective chain of command;
- a joint structured plan of action;
- respect and trust;
- continuity of personnel;
- effective logistics.

These points can be adapted for application to a wide range of border management topics, including legislative reform, capability development, and the establishment of monitoring operations.

While the OSCE Border Security and Management Concept goes a long way to identifying the Organization's intentions in the area of border management, now is possibly the time, ten years after the concept was adopted, to reflect and build on its strengths by reinforcing its relevance and role. The development of border management in the region for the next ten years needs the OSCE's leadership. The OSCE offers significant experience and expertise as well as credibility gained from successful engagement. Such co-operation would benefit both the Organization and, more importantly, the participating States.