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The Hungarian Chairmanship and the Chechnya Conflict

Hungary has paid close attention to the OSCE since the seventies. This was no coincidence. It is true that Hungarian foreign policy in the seventies and the first half of the eighties was far more orthodox than were economic and domestic policy, but Hungary recognized at an early stage that the then CSCE offered a small but important opportunity for taking more or less independent political steps, thereby improving the credibility and reputation of the communist government, but also the life of the people. Thus the commitments within the CSCE, which no communist country had taken seriously, provided a welcome way of justifying a number of relatively significant measures such as the introduction of a passport with world-wide validity and the toleration of "family reunification" of Germans on Lake Balaton. The Cultural Forum of 1985 in Budapest also contributed to giving our country the reputation of being the most liberal in the communist camp, largely without political risk and without any serious confrontation with the Soviet Union. The Hungarian people, too, were given the impression that despite existing taboos their government remained the most liberal and that it was doing its best to satisfy the needs of the population. This policy not only helped to stabilize the political situation in Hungary but contributed to improving stability in Europe, within the existing structures.

The CSCE was of even greater importance for the internal democratic opposition in Hungary. It was the most important point of reference for the democratic opposition in its struggle, which at that time appeared hopeless. The CSCE was in a position to take the Hungarian government at its word and to "call it on the carpet" for failing to implement in Hungary the fine commitments of the Helsinki Document, especially those in the area of human rights. Because Hungary was in fact much more liberal than the other communist states, the party and the government were unable to ignore this.

CSCE commitments served the relatively liberal Hungarian government as a kind of "excuse" in its dealings with the much more restrictive governments and parties of the "brother countries" - GDR, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and, prior to Gorbachev, the USSR. It could refer to the CSCE and to

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international pressure in connection with a number of improvements it introduced.

The CSCE also made it possible to demonstrate to the West that Hungary was different, thus building up in the West a certain amount of good will, which the Hungarian government greatly needed. After the historic change there was also in Hungary the sense of a new beginning, and there were illusions. We too thought for a time that the end of all conflict in Europe had arrived and that all we needed was an international structure - the CSCE - to serve as a framework for cooperation. This optimism, and the illusions as well, are reflected in the Charter of Paris which, in the form in which it was presented, could not be implemented. Disappointment over this has had negative consequences for the CSCE. Europe turned away from the CSCE and seriously underestimated the significance of the Organization. It took a number of years for the European governments to understand that the limited possibilities of the CSCE were urgently needed and that the Organization, for its part, had to adapt to new requirements.

This insight found expression in the decisions of the Budapest Summit of 1994 when the CSCE was renamed OSCE and a number of steps were taken to enhance the effectiveness of the Organization. For example, the position of Chairman-in-Office, which is always held by the incumbent Foreign Minister of one of the participating States, was strengthened and its holder received new decision-making authority and new options which, to be sure, are still not enough to accomplish everything that is needed but nevertheless give him/her the possibility of taking effective steps - if the Chairman has the will and the courage to do so.

Following the Summit, the Hungarian Chairman scarcely had time to analyse the new situation that had arisen there and to prepare himself for new challenges because immediately after the Summit Meeting we were confronted by such a new challenge - the war in Chechnya.

It was nothing new in Russian history. Chechnya had always caused headaches for Russian governments. When the Tsar took that territory over in the 19th Century he had to carry on a war that lasted for more than half a century. At its height more than a third of the Russian army of that time was involved in the war against Chechnya. Even Stalin was unable to get the upper hand on the Chechens. He accused them of having collaborated with the Germans - which was of course not true - and through a surprise action he transferred the population and tried to settle Russians in Chechnya. Only after decades were the Chechens permitted to return to their homeland, which since that time they have tried even harder to defend against the Russians, whom they fear.

When the Soviet Union fell apart at the end of 1991 Chechnya, a country 16,000 square kilometers in size and with a population of about a million

(predominantly Muslim but with a Russian minority), did not join any of the successor states but declared itself independent. Dzhokhar Dudayev, a former general of the Soviet air force, took over the presidency and tried to make his country increasingly independent of Moscow. He eliminated the inherited structure of the country, regarded as a Soviet legacy, and along with it largely got rid of the state in the modern sense of the word, relying more and more on his own aggressive power structures and justifying the process by the need to strengthen traditional forms of power and to introduce Islamic law. The Russian minority, feeling that they were being discriminated, began to rebel; but resistance to Dudayev began to grow in parts of the Chechen population as well. This led in 1994 to open armed resistance which was supported by the Russians but nevertheless collapsed.

It was in this situation that the Russian army intervened. At a stroke it changed the internal political situation in Chechnya. The Chechen people and a large part of the political elite expressed solidarity, if only for a time, with Dudayev, who became a national hero. This made it possible to organize a national resistance in which Dudayev's excellently armed and trained troops were supported by the large mass of the people, in part with weapons.

Just a few days after the Budapest Summit we heard from a number of capitals that they wanted to involve the OSCE in order to offer the support of the international community of states in bringing the bloody war to an end. Hungary was likewise determined to use its new position in the interest of a peaceful settlement of the conflict. We needed a few days, however, to work out how the influence of the OSCE could best be brought to bear. In the course of consultations it was suggested to us that one of the existing OSCE mechanisms, either the so-called Moscow or the Berlin mechanism, should be used. We were opposed to this, however. We felt that these mechanisms still had a confrontational character and that Russia would regard their use as an anti-Russian provocation rather than as an attempt to help. For that reason, we sought new approaches.

It took two weeks to find a formula acceptable to both sides. What the Russian side accepted - surprisingly, to many people - was that an international organization should participate in crisis management. It did this on the basis of the OSCE principle which states that gross violations of human rights are not exclusively the internal affair of a state. It is an irony of history that Soviet diplomacy of the Gorbachev era took the lead as an advocate of this principle. In order to convince the Russian side, we asked for the broadest possible international support. We were in daily contact with the French Presidency of the European Union, the United States, and the heads of state of numerous other countries all of which, through their own channels, sent the same message to Moscow - that the role of the OSCE should be accepted.

When we arrived in Moscow we found ourselves facing a rather rigid front. It was only with great resistance and after long and heated internal debate that the role of the OSCE was accepted and tolerated in a form limited to humanitarian and human rights issues. We received support from the Russian Foreign Ministry but the ability of our colleagues there to act was extremely limited because the conflict itself was viewed as an internal affair of Russia. Help came from the place where we least expected it: the first glimmer of hope became visible when we met with the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Oleg Lobov, who was generally viewed as a conservative - apparently a very short-sighted view. To our great surprise he asked, with unexpected frankness, why the OSCE was not taking on a political role in the crisis. Naturally we seized on this idea with great pleasure and kept our contacts to Lobov and his circle strictly secret. This approach turned out to be extraordinarily useful. Without the assistance of Oleg Lobov we would never have been able to define for the OSCE a role as broad as the one that in fact emerged when the mandate was worked out.

The following basic elements underlay our thinking:

1. We must make clear to the Russian government that the international community cannot and will not remain silent. Either it will work together with Russia, to the extent that Russia is willing, and use its influence on behalf of a peaceful settlement of the conflict; or, if Russia is not prepared to cooperate, it will find other more confrontational ways of exercising its influence.
2. Russia cannot be forced to cooperate. It is too big, powerful and important for that. In the interest of success, therefore, we must support moderate elements within the Russian leadership, taking care, *inter alia*, not to call certain taboos into question. We cannot go so far as to approve the terrible atrocities of the Russian armed forces in any way, but we must also do nothing that would endanger cooperation with Russia.
3. For that reason, our initial goals must be modest and our operations expanded step-by-step. A good starting point was the OSCE principle which stipulates that serious violations of human rights are no longer merely an internal affair and that the participation of the international community of states in solving such problems is a legitimate international concern. For this principle embodies the two fundamental elements of our approach: it confirms that the conflict as such is an internal affair of Russia but at the same time makes clear that the OSCE must play a role in settling the conflict.

On the basis of these considerations the Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister László Kovács, decided to send a Personal Representative to Moscow to

discuss the possibility of OSCE cooperation in a peaceful settlement of the conflict. I was named as the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office. During my first visit to Moscow I sensed great resistance against any form of "interference in the internal affairs of Russia". Many people still cherished the illusion that the conflict could soon be put to an end by military force. Most had still not recognized the danger that this war represented for the situation in the country and the development of democracy in Russia. In my opinion, the hawks around the President were deliberately misleading him about the actual situation -- consistently and over a long period of time. Decisions were being made, in avoidance of legal procedures, by a few people in the President's office and in the military leadership. The President's instructions were being ignored by these "politicians" and they put the responsibility for their actions on the enemy. As a consequence the war widened greatly. There was no chance to bring about an armistice. The Russian government was wrongly informed and as a consequence drew the wrong conclusions.

There was a light at the end of the tunnel, however, in the sense that the Russian press was permitted to report freely; this meant not only that they could direct public opinion against the war but that there was hope that the political leadership could not long remain in ignorance about the true situation. A number of human rights experts, above all Sergei Kovalev, also helped to ensure that the truth could not be denied for long.

But the other side was not much better. The Chechen leadership was no less authoritarian than the Russian. On the contrary, the structure of a people still involved in nation-building made it easy for the leadership to exercise power without democratic controls. The Russian attack impelled even those forces which had been in the opposition to support General Dudayev. Moreover, the political attitude of the people and the Soviet-communist character of the training their elites had received throughout their lives were hardly calculated to promote a compromise solution. The Russian leadership was likewise not particularly inclined to go along with compromises of any kind.

Under these conditions our initial goals could only be modest but we wanted in any event to refrain from actions that might preclude a later expansion of our activity. For that reason, we avoided at the beginning setting out the concrete goals - and hence the limits - of our activities. We hoped that it might later become possible for us to take on an active role in the political negotiations, should that point ever be reached.

Thus our first step was to send a mission to Chechnya with the objective of finding out about the situation and, on the basis of this knowledge, working out proposals for OSCE policy. It was not easy to persuade the Russian leadership to allow this trip. A joint and fully coordinated action by the Hungarian Chairman together with the other members of the OSCE Troika and,

in particular, with the Presidency of the European Union as well as the government of the United States of America was needed. In the meantime, we had managed to get approval to visit Chechnya. The OSCE Mission under my direction, which included Hungarian, French, Finnish and British diplomats (one each), arrived in Grozny on 29 January 1995. There were desperate battles going on in the city on that very day. A Russian unit had succeeded just a few days before in conquering the Presidential Palace. Most of the city lay in ruins. Corpses were strewn over the streets. Shots from handguns and artillery could be heard constantly. The Russian escorts of our Mission were absolutely horrified, especially the Minister of Justice, Valentin Kovalev, who increasingly came to sympathize with the OSCE and helped us more and more (he was the third key figure in working out the OSCE's role, along with our colleagues in internal affairs and Oleg Lobov). It was clear that even the Minister of Justice was now, for the first time, getting direct information that had not been sanitized by the military leadership and the secret service. It was typical of the Russian generals in charge of the fighting that they behaved toward the government in Moscow in a way that bordered on insurrection. They accused it of corruption, criticized it for lacking factual knowledge and claimed that it concealed the truth and neglected the fighting troops.

Right here I feel compelled to mention the secret of our success as it is a lesson which all international organizations and all governments should take to heart and always bear in mind. It was only through coordinated action by the international community, through a decision to bring the OSCE's influence to bear and not to permit that influence to be weakened by competition from various international organizations, and through combining the application of pressure from several important countries (especially the European Union and the United States) with offers of cooperation from the OSCE that it became possible to convince the Russian government.

The Mission which visited Chechnya at the end of January, shortly after the conquest of the Presidential Palace, found horrible evidence of a cruel war. After a few weak attempts to move in the opposite direction the Russian leadership became extremely cooperative and gave us access to all the information we felt we needed. We were even able to visit Grozny and the Presidential Palace, where some fighting was still going on. Unfortunately, we did not succeed on that occasion in establishing contact with the leaders of the Chechen resistance. But we had extensive talks with their representatives in Moscow and abroad.

The Mission landed under extremely tight security arrangements at the municipal airport, which had just been reopened. From there delivery vans took us into the center of town amidst the constant roar of artillery fire. We "parked" a few hundred meters behind the Presidential Palace and about the

same distance from the front line. We had a terrible experience. My generation, happily, had no experience of war. I myself have been in a number of countries scourged by conflict, but Grozny was not even comparable to Sarajevo. For me, the only comparable experiences were the pictures of Dresden and Coventry from the Second World War. Downtown there was not a building left intact for miles. Not a one. The streets were full of ruins. At every step there were dead animals and corpses. The horrible odors of burning buildings, gunpowder and decomposing bodies spread through the air. Old people - they were almost the only ones, on both sides, who had survived or been unable to escape - were using miserable fires in front of their houses to cook roots, dogs, cats or crumbs given them by soldiers. The number of dead is still not known. I am convinced that tens of thousands fell victim to the fighting in Grozny alone. By an extraordinary twist of fate, most of them were of Russian nationality because the center of the city, where the most desperate battles took place, was inhabited almost exclusively by Russians.

On the spur of the moment Mr. Kovalev invited me into the Presidential Palace. Only I and two TV camera teams - one of them Hungarian - were permitted to accompany him. We donned bullet-proof vests and helmets and, surrounded by about a hundred soldiers, ran to the Palace under steady cannon and small weapons fire and exposed to the dangers of mines. One mine exploded very close to us as we ran. We had to take care to stay in the footsteps of those in front, not just to avoid stumbling over the corpses that were strewn about but also to avoid the anti-personnel mines which had been hidden in the most improbable places. In the Presidential Palace an unimaginable scene of destruction awaited us. Parts of several stories had fallen, the stair case was hanging in the air and we thought that at any moment it would collapse. The roof of the great meeting hall was full of holes; the chairs were intact but covered with debris. The giant crystal chandelier was still hanging there but later fell down. The whole place exuded the unmistakable atmosphere of war.

We returned in a depressed mood to the airport where we experienced a take off under genuine battle conditions. Four helicopters were protecting the airport. Dozens of rocket flares were fired to ward off the heat-seeking missiles and the gigantic plane, a TU-154, climbed as steeply as a fighter plane. At least that is the way it felt to us; and it was no wonder - the pilot was fighting for his own life and for ours as well.

After our return we made no attempt to conceal our condemnation of the Russian attack, even though we had never called the territorial integrity of Russia into question.

We had also acknowledged that the conflict as such was an internal affair because Chechnya had never been recognized by any of our participating States

and was regarded as a part of Russia. But we stated clearly, publicly and to the press as well as privately, that the maintenance of Russia's territorial integrity did not justify the disproportionate use of military force or the serious violations of human rights, even if comparable human rights violations could also be observed on the other side.

At this point I must allow myself another small digression to say a few words about the role of human rights in preventing, managing and settling such conflicts and how, in my view, they should be dealt with.

Human rights, as they are embodied in OSCE documents, constitute the foundation of every democratic society. When a state does not uphold them (which also signifies that the state in question is not keeping its OSCE commitments) it means that the conditions for a conflict have been created. That means, in turn, that the OSCE is a kind of "early-warning system for conflicts" as it would be unthinkable to ignore violations of human rights, i.e. the violation of commitments undertaken in the OSCE. That is the earliest point at which the international community can and should react. But in most cases it does not do so. Why? Because it is not in the interest of certain states to involve themselves quickly in such cases.

And one must admit that in the classical sense of the word it really is not directly in the interest of states to "intervene" in potential conflicts of this kind. I am convinced, however, that national or state interests have to be defined differently in today's Europe. Stability is an indispensable condition of security in Europe. If security is really indivisible - and it is - then any serious threat to stability in Europe constitutes a threat to the security of all countries on the continent. That means that potential or already evident conflicts which without doubt put stability at risk are also a threat to the security of all states in Europe and hence to their national interests.

In the final analysis it is not difficult to understand that serious violations of human rights in a participating State of the OSCE, because they can precipitate violent conflict, also threaten the national interests of all OSCE participating States. Therefore, it should be possible to mobilize the international community of states in such cases. The OSCE would be an ideal forum for this purpose as it makes it possible to "intervene" in conflicts in such a way that no individual state is particularly exposed.

And now, back to the crisis in Chechnya. It took another month, after the first conversations in Moscow, for us to reach agreement with the Russian authorities. The trip undertaken by Prime Minister Gyula Horn and Foreign Minister László Kovács at the beginning of March 1995 provided the occasion for the next step. We proposed that the OSCE set up a long-term mission in Chechnya and that it be given a mandate to participate in the political and military solution of the conflict. We had discussed these proposals previously with our partners in the West. They thought them an excellent idea but did

not believe they had much chance of success. We, to be honest, were also not convinced that they would work. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister managed to convince Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in a long session that lasted well into the night. When I look back on it, it seems to me that what they hoped for from cooperation with the OSCE was probably a reinforcement of their own point of view - which is what they got. Agreement was actually reached. The OSCE Mission began its work in Grozny in April. László Kovács, the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, appointed my deputy and friend, Sándor Mészáros, to be Head.

The Mission began its work under the most difficult circumstances. It was almost impossible to create acceptable living conditions, let alone accomplish any normal work. Despite this, we succeeded in establishing contact with Dudayev's side and starting talks on a possible armistice. We received little support in this. The Russian side was convinced that the Mission ought not to intervene in Russia's internal affairs and, despite all protestations to the contrary, many of them, especially in the military leadership, regarded our activity as such an intervention. It was also difficult to convince the Chechen side that an armistice would be a good compromise and that it would even be possible before the big issue of independence was solved. Even so, we succeeded in convincing both sides and in obtaining the agreement of both military commanders that military actions should be stopped. That occurred on the very morning when Shamil Bassaev began his terrorist attack. It is wrong to assert that Bassaev brought the armistice about by force. It happened as a result of the efforts of the OSCE Mission and the rational behavior of both sides. Terrorism has never yet led to peace - not even in Chechnya.

Difficult negotiations ensued but they were completed successfully by the end of July and capped by the signing of an agreement to end hostilities. It should also be mentioned that a political agreement was ready for signature. It was General Dudayev who failed to give approval to the work of his own delegation and prohibited and prevented them from signing the treaty. By so doing he squandered an opportunity to put a quick end to the conflict and at the same time condemned the military agreement to failure.

By fall it became clear that the Russian side too had lost its interest in implementation of the agreement. The hawks in Moscow presumably concluded that the parliamentary elections called for tougher behavior. That was a bad mistake. It not only failed to produce the desired election results but led to a resumption of the war.

Right now we are witnessing a repetition of the same events that occurred last year. Another armistice agreement has been signed, virtually the same one as in July 1995. Its success or failure will depend on whether a political

solution can be found, whether both sides will continue to have - or once again show - an interest in a peaceful solution of the conflict. It is to be hoped that they will learn from the failure of the agreement in 1995 and not repeat the same mistakes.

The OSCE, too, must learn lessons from this undertaking. In my view, they are as follows:

1. One must interfere in a conflict at the earliest possible stage. But we should also not shy away from playing an active role at a later stage.
2. Traditional principles of peacekeeping lose their validity in conflicts such as these. An armistice cannot be made a precondition for international participation in conflict management. Rather, one must act to achieve an armistice, not only through political declarations but also through mediation. It is worth the risks.
3. One should not give up too quickly. Peacemaking is a protracted business which calls for much patience.
4. If possible, international organizations should not openly confront the parties to a conflict. That does not mean that violations of human rights can be tolerated. But the stress must be on cooperation. The necessary pressure must come from the member states in coordination with the international organization involved.
5. International organizations must remain neutral. Any political or personal sympathies should be suppressed. International organizations should develop no interests of their own other than obtaining success in their mediation efforts.
6. A few diplomats and military experts can accomplish miracles. Peacemaking and peacekeeping often do not require hundreds or thousands of troops, if the political objectives and methods are the right ones.
7. The OSCE works very cost-effectively. But a certain standard has to be assured. The Secretariat must be able to provide full support for the missions. Today, it cannot. The Secretariat - read: Conflict Prevention Centre - does not have the size of staff it needs, the missions are not financed in such a way that they can work effectively and financial matters are handled much too bureaucratically.