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Helsinki from Below: Origin and Development of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (HCA)

The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (HCA) is a trans-national movement resting on a coalition of citizens' action groups from forty countries. By the choice of its name it demonstrated its determination to influence the policies of governments and international organizations such as the OSCE.

The HCA was founded in October 1990 in Prague. In October 1995 it held its fourth General Assembly in Tuzla, Bosnia. The second took place in Bratislava in March 1992, the third in Ankara in December 1993. Between 800 and 1,000 representatives of social groups from almost all OSCE countries participated in the first three. 600 participants travelled to Tuzla despite the difficult conditions there.

The numbers of participants at the General Assemblies and the organization's distribution over forty OSCE countries show that the HCA, as "Helsinki from below", has won the respect its initiators intended when they developed the idea as a joint project in the second half of the eighties. These initiators were independent groups in Eastern Europe supporting human rights and democracy - "dissidents", among them especially the Charter 77 group - and peace groups from the West that managed to come together, sometimes under very difficult conditions. The Helsinki Final Act and the CSCE served them from the very beginning as a point of reference for creating and developing the HCA.

However, the HCA has in the meantime taken on a form and orientation different from those imagined by its originators. Their idea had been to exert pressure "from below" to eliminate the division of Europe. Through a common programme for détente and disarmament, social groups in East and West, working closely together, should help to end the Cold War. This goal, it is true, had been largely achieved by the time of the HCA's founding. But a deliberate decision was made to proceed with the establishment of the HCA, in part to maintain continuity with the past and partly because the Helsinki Final Act pulled together a number of issues that were of importance for overcoming the division of Europe. Thus "Helsinki" provided a framework for a "CSCE from below" without the necessity of settling right away on a specific issue. The members could go to work and subsequent developments would show what concrete problems they should tackle.

The locations of the last two General Assemblies, Tuzla and Ankara, made clear that the most important issue for the HCA had become the contribution the society might make to preventing and ending violent conflict in the OSCE area.

In this sense, the task of today's HCA does not differ much from that of the OSCE.
However, the events since the HCA's founding have a historical background that began back in the seventies.

Historical Background

Present at HCA's birth were the Czechoslovakian group "Charter 77" and the Dutch "Inter-Church Peace Council" ("Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad/IKV"). Both organizations had launched a long-term campaign in 1977 - Charter 77 in the struggle for recognition and respect for human rights in the CSSR and the IKV through demonstrations for nuclear disarmament and the demand that this be begun by the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from the Netherlands. Both actions, however, were also aimed at gaining international support for their campaigns and both of them had programmatic goals reaching beyond their own country. It is also noteworthy that both initiatives started in the period of détente confirmed by the Helsinki Final Act which their protagonists in Prague and The Hague felt to be a time of paralyzing passivity. Its great success in its own country gave the IKV an international leadership role amongst Western peace movements which together supported the "Appeal for European Nuclear Disarmament" published in 1980 by the END (European Nuclear Disarmament) group of Professor E.P. Thompson. From 1982 on the END group organized annual END congresses for the peace organizations which were very well attended.
The Charter 77 group's first reaction to the END appeal at the beginning of 1981 was negative. It rejected the appeal's vision of a Europe free of nuclear weapons. Western weapons were necessary, it argued, to maintain freedom in Europe and strengthening these weapons would provide direct support for the Eastern European dissidents. Soon, however, Charter 77 came to view the END appeal as an opportunity for co-operation between the campaigns in East and West and called for a joint strategy for democracy in Europe.
The Western peace groups that had the strongest interest in co-operation with the Eastern European dissidents - IKV and Pax Christi in the Netherlands, END and War Resisters International in Great Britain, the GRÜNEN (Greens) in the Federal Republic of Germany and CODENE in France - did not however break off the contacts they also had with the government-supported "peace councils" in the East, and indeed most of the peace councils continued to seek contacts and co-operation with them. Thus IKV and the other organizations developed a double-track policy towards Eastern Europe. On the one hand they cultivated co-operation with the independent groups, on the other they maintained relations with the governments and government-dependent organizations like the peace

councils. In this way they sought to supplement and strengthen the accomplishments of "détente from above" by "détente from below". It was owing to the strong and indispensable positions that organizations like Charter 77 and the IKV had built up in their own countries that the gap between the independent groups in the East and the peace groups in the West could be bridged and that each side opened up to the other. The IKV remained in the van in actions in the Netherlands between 1983 and 1985 against the short range missiles even though a large part of the Dutch peace movement outside of IKV and Pax Christi did not agree with their policy towards Eastern European.

Bridging the programmatic gap proved to be possible especially because Charter 77 from the very beginning accepted the Helsinki Final Act as a framework for a joint programme and, at the same time, as a promising development for the future of Europe. It was relevant as a framework because of the connection the governments had established between security, economic co-operation, cultural exchange and human rights. The Final Act became all the more attractive for co-operation between citizens' movements because the governments did so little after 1975 to make good on the promise they had given their peoples through the Final Act. Charter 77 helped to enlarge the already existing opening of its Western partners by convincing them that the Helsinki Final Act provided an excellent frame of reference for a joint programme and for joint activities of human rights groups in the East and peace organizations in the West.

The cautious rapprochement between 1980 and 1985, when the "détente from below" movement was taking form, showed that the movement's participants in both East and West needed to do more to open themselves for co-operation and a joint programme. The fact that the partners on both sides viewed détente as an ideal and rejected existing conditions made it possible to generate that openness to contacts. The reaction of the Western organizations to the prohibition of the Polish Solidarnosc movement also played a role. The way in which the Western partners, as a consequence, distanced themselves from the government-controlled peace councils made it easier for the dissidents in the East to view these Western "peaceniks" as genuine partners.

The idea of the HCA took concrete form between the END Congress of 1985 in Amsterdam and 1990, when HCA was founded. Two elements were created during this time: a joint programme that was introduced in November 1986, and the draft design of an organization, which Charter 77 presented in June 1988. Thus the contacts that had been developed produced quick results. The initiators began to feel the wind at their backs, especially in Eastern Europe where the emerging political changes altered the organizational context for them as well. Because of the dialogue they had been carrying on they were able to react more quickly than many Western governments and parties could. Initially, the latter saw nothing of (or in) "détente from below" but their interest grew when they began to notice that something was changing in Eastern Europe. Representatives

of the peace movement were asked to help them with their reorientation vis-à-vis Eastern Europe. Relations between movement and state changed even more spectacularly in Eastern Europe. Various regimes had to give up their resistance and swear to the human rights organizations that they would pave the way to democracy. The rapid and widespread political opening in East and West left little time for the partners to reflect on and plan their joint activities. Nevertheless, the programme set up in 1986 provided a framework for the dialogue that developed with political forces and within the respective societies.[1]

The final text of the programme, entitled "Giving Real Life to the Helsinki Accords: A Memorandum to Citizens, Groups and Governments of all CSCE Countries", was presented in November 1986 in Vienna at the beginning of the third CSCE Review Conference and bears the clear stamp of Charter 77. The Memorandum calls for intensification of the Helsinki Process from "above" and from "below" and appeals to governments to open themselves to "détente from below" by removing obstacles to contacts between citizens and creating opportunities for deepening such contacts. Relations and co-operation between different social groups in Europe are, it says, of great importance for "our common efforts to build a new and peaceful Europe".[2] The Memorandum stresses not only the linkage to "Helsinki" but the inseparability of its "baskets", i.e. the relationship between peace and freedom. It follows the lines of the Helsinki Final Act by touching on all of the themes discussed in that Act. The last chapter states, among other things, that Europe should be shaped non-violently through peaceful and gradual change and recognition of the territorial status quo.

With this Memorandum, the authors had formulated in 1986 a programme which saw the signs of the times far more clearly than most politicians in East and West did. They gave a strong boost to the Helsinki process by refusing to leave the promises of the Final Act up to reality and by not reducing their objectives to "patience and realism". Much of the credit for this must go to the opposition in Eastern Europe. Once a coalition had been established with the Western peace movement - and not with those who favoured arms build-up, as the initial reaction of Charter 77 to the END-Appeal seemed to indicate - the two most important dimensions of the Helsinki process, human rights and security, remained linked. The Helsinki process continued to be aimed at détente and disarmament. Credit must go to the Western peace movement for recognizing at an early stage the importance of co-operation with the opposition in the East. Thus "détente from below" became a joint East-West project and the indivisibility of the Helsinki process was strengthened. By using the political

1 European Network for East-West Dialogue, Giving Real Life to the Helsinki Accords: A Memorandum to Citizens, Groups and Governments of all CSCE Countries, Berlin 1986.
2 Ibid.

opening in the East and the efforts at "détente from below" in the West, the initiators were able to give the HCA the organizational basis for decisively influencing the course of détente.

The authors of the Memorandum had the further political development on their side. In June 1988, Charter 77 invited the Western and Eastern signatories of the Memorandum to Prague for a conference on the form and objectives of a common organization. The conference was a success - police interference notwithstanding - and the participants succeeded in discussing the idea of a "European Parliament for Peace and Democracy" which had been worked up by Charter 77 and the "Independent Peace Association". This "Parliament" was to become a permanent forum to support all positive aspects of the Helsinki process from below.

This idea was subsequently discussed at various meetings of the European Network for the East-West Dialogue and in June 1989 at Budapest its founding was announced under the name of "Helsinki Citizens' Assembly". The Assembly was to be a forum for individuals and institutions independent of the established power structures and its job was to represent civil society as comprehensive and with as much variety as possible. The representatives were to be sent by national associations of the HCA and by working groups, both of which still needed to be established. The Assembly was to meet at least every two years and lay out the main lines of its politics. In addition, permanent working groups of specialists and activists, which would constitute the backbone of the HCA, were to be set up. Co-ordination and the practical organizational work were to be in the hands of an office, to be established in Prague, and a group of spokespersons, who would be elected as leaders. The first meeting of the HCA was to be in October 1990 in Prague.

Ideas about the actual organization and methods of work remained vague on many points - either not fully worked out or open to further discussion; but the intent to found an organization was firm. Once again, time was working for the organizers. In Poland and Hungary both government and opposition were talking about free elections and the communist parties gave up their monopoly on power. In Poland elections were already held in June of 1989. In Czechoslovakia a people's movement came into being. The united opposition groups created the "Citizens' Forum" in the Czech area and in Slovakia the committee "Public Interest against Violence" which, under the chairmanship of Vaclav Havel and in consultations with the communist government, managed a smooth transition to democracy. When "below" in Prague became "above" one of the first initiatives of the new government was to support the founding of the HCA. The founding assembly of the HCA was prepared with its assistance.

Establishment and Change

There was great euphoria at the founding assembly of the HCA in October 1990 in Prague, not least because the HCA's goal had actually already been reached. But on the other hand there was great confusion because a new mission had to be found. This became clear during the discussion of the form the organization was to have. Problems stemming from the variety of views on the organizational structure were only solved over time. The transformation of the political environment and the reactions of HCA participants contributed substantially to this. The HCA developed more and more into an organization that took on significance in the prevention and solution of violent conflicts in the new Europe.

Activities that particularly contributed to the reputation of the HCA were peace projects in the Balkans and Transcaucasia. The grass roots work of the HCA was taken over by groups in the regions themselves, who found in the HCA a suitable trans-national network for the support of their peace efforts.

It was neither to be taken for granted nor predictable that the prevention and solution of conflicts would become the HCA's main task. During the preparatory phase the founders intended to have a broadly based HCA, a "CSCE from below", in which all parts of society and all ideological currents would be represented and all aspects of the Helsinki process taken into account. This striving for broad and comprehensive pluralism found expression during the preparation of the first Assembly - thematically through the Prague Appeal (on which agreement had been reached in Budapest in February 1990), organizationally in the permanent committees of experts and activists that were to be established, and socially in the guidelines for the make-up of the national delegations to the Assembly.

The subjects to which the HCA wanted to devote its attention through permanent committees with an international composition were: disarmament and peace policy, economics and the environment, problems of nationalism and federalism, human and minority rights, civil societies and the institutionalization of European integration. Finally, a permanent committee on women's affairs was set up to ensure that women and women's issues were well represented in the HCA. The first Assembly was organized around these subjects and committees. The national contact persons were asked to send delegations representing the broadest possible range of social groups and political currents. The desire was to see civil society as fully represented as possible in the HCA so that it could become a discussion platform capable of reaching a widely supported consensus. This ambitious goal was reached only in some cases. It was hard to tell at the first Assembly just how broad the HCA really was. Most of the participants came from the West and the Western delegations had a very heterogeneous

composition. Both during and after the first Assembly it became clear that the broad range of subjects was overtaxing the HCA. A number of issues - relating to the environment, trade unions and the churches, for example - were hardly touched on. Civil society was for the most part still unorganized in Central and Eastern Europe and, to the extent that it existed, was above all preoccupied with building democracy in its own country. Thus in the Central and Eastern European delegations, particularly the Czechoslovak one, the relationship between "above" and "below" was still confused.

In the election of the Presidium and of the Chairman for the first meeting of the International Co-ordinating Committee in February 1991, a decision was made in favour of an independent HCA. This decision was informed by the experience of how difficult it was to create a broadly based HCA in such a short time and in a European environment that had changed so drastically. The decision of the International Co-ordinating Committee that the HCA was to serve as a citizens' forum in which they could express their views independently of their governments and that HCA activities should be focused on the issues dealt with in the permanent committees meant that the HCA's identity would to a large extent depend on the subjects that were preoccupying its participants. Among these were to be rising nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe and in the successor states of the Soviet Union. Conflicts in Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union and the problem of protecting minority rights were issues that were already on the HCA agenda in 1991. The HCA was asked to take a position against the threatening war in Yugoslavia and to send observers both to the Baltic states, which had withdrawn from the Soviet Union, and Turkey, in order to make the conflict with the Kurds politically negotiable.

The change of course was clearly reflected at the HCA "affiliates". The Dutch HCA observed in May 1992 that the HCA now had a clear mission: it would focus its efforts on solving conflicts in areas where tensions between population groups lead to violence and civil war, or threatened to do so (e.g. Yugoslavia, Turkey, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, Caucasus). The problems of minorities in Europe played an important role as did the defining of human rights and respect for those rights. The Netherlands' affiliate accepted this tendency and began to focus its own attention more closely on this aspect of the threat to peace. And so the idea of a broad range of issues for the HCA was abandoned. And with regard to the method of work it was decided in the Netherlands to loosen the ties between social and political organizations on the one side and the HCA on the other. The organization's leadership was given an independent core group supported by an advisory council, in which various organizations take part.

Involvement in the prevention and solution of violent conflicts in the OSCE countries became the HCA's defining issue. This became evident from the reorganization of the permanent committees, of which four remained after Bratislava in 1992: civilian approaches to a policy on conflict and peace; democracy

and citizenship; economy and the environment; and women. Of these, it is mainly the first two that concern themselves with HCA projects and missions related to violent conflicts and minority problems. The work in these areas, a combination of local and international activity, is only possible as a result of the co-operation between HCA representatives in the regions with members who are active in the Presidium, with the permanent working groups, the Secretariat in Prague and interested national affiliates. This co-operation succeeds on the basis that the HCA has chosen - playing the role of a "conscience" - and, in so doing, appealing to the values to which the OSCE countries have committed themselves. The building of an undivided, democratic and peaceful Europe remained a goal of the HCA because its members feared that governments would no longer take this objective very seriously. The main issue of the Assembly in Ankara, "Where does Europe end?", illustrates this concern. Both the tensions between Turks and Kurds, which received a lot of attention while the HCA was in Ankara, and the inability of the international community - and particularly of the European Union - to end the war in former Yugoslavia, turned this into a "question of conscience". Clearly the HCA participants wanted to give a different answer than did their governments. Their commitment to solving conflicts was made even more evident by the fact that the HCA held its fourth Assembly in 1995 in Tuzla. Even the name of the conference, "Unite the Citizens, the Nations" was an appeal. This appeal not only made reference to the fifty year existence of the United Nations but called for support of the HCA's efforts to bring people from the various parts of Bosnia and former Yugoslavia together in order to create a basis for open and multi-ethnic states.
The HCA's projects in the Balkans and the Transcaucasian region provide a concrete illustration of how the organization works.

The Balkan Project

In view of the obvious danger of war in Yugoslavia in February 1991, the HCA sent a letter to the governments of Yugoslavia and the six republics with the request that they find a peaceful solution to their disputes. This was also a signal for the formal constitution of an HCA affiliate in Yugoslavia. It came into being in May 1991 in Sarajevo as a network of groups throughout Yugoslavia that were prepared to work for peace and democracy. Scarcely a month later, on 7 July 1991 - ten days after the war in Slovenia began - the Yugoslav HCA, together with the international Secretariat, organized the first International Conference in Belgrade. It was an attempt to halt the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia by means of European integration.
While the meeting was under way, preparations began for an international peace caravan to move through all of Yugoslavia in order to publicize Yugoslav and international opposition to the war. It was hoped that this would help prevent the

spread of the war to Croatia. The peace caravan was carried out in September 1991 when the war in Croatia was already well under way.

Following the peace caravan, the HCA developed its activity on two tracks. After discussions with HCA activists, intellectuals and politicians from the region, the HCA proposed as a response to the Vance-Owen plan that Bosnia and the UN-controlled territories in Croatia be put under UN administration. As a first step, the idea of "safe havens" was proposed and 300,000 supporting signatures gathered, which were given to Owen. However, he rejected the proposal. After the failure of UN-EU-mediation the UN Security Council decided in May 1993 to establish six "safe areas". In the opinion of the HCA this undertaking was too late and too uncertain.

On another track, the HCA wanted to involve local administrations in the curbing of violence and the prevention of expulsions.

In Ohrid in November 1992 both HCA approaches came together at the "Citizens' and Municipal Peace Conference". The campaign for "safe havens" was launched there and the "Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE)", closely tied to the Council of Europe, was drawn into the communal peace work in former Yugoslavia. This led in 1993 and 1994 to a large number of local initiatives in communities both inside and outside of Yugoslavia. In this way, "from below" came to have multiple meanings.

In 1995 numerous participants in HCA activities came together in Tuzla during the fourth Assembly. As became evident there, the HCA had succeeded in setting up "from below" a network that extended over all of former Yugoslavia and had ties to other Balkan regions (Albania, Greece, Macedonia, Bulgaria) and of course to the rest of Europe. HCA activity led to close co-operation between communities which was further strengthened after the Dayton Agreement. In Tuzla and Banja Luka, with the help of UNHCR and the World Bank, so-called "Micro-Business" projects came into being for groups that were particularly at risk such as women, refugees and demobilized soldiers. In Osijek (Eastern Slavonia) the HCA set up a "local-democratic Embassy" which, with the support of foreign cities, promotes reconstruction and democratic development. In general, the HCA involves itself mainly in implementing the civilian portions of the Dayton Agreement. For this purpose regional offices were opened in 1995 in Sarajevo and Tuzla and in 1996 work began on setting up a third in Banja Luka. These offices serve as meeting places for local and international groups that are working for better co-operation between the residents of various parts of Bosnia so as to create a lasting foundation for democracy and peace.

The Balkan project was not able to hold up the war but it has made an impact despite its limited means. It has also made a contribution by providing a podium for voices in the region that speak out for peace and against ethnically motivated expulsions and by helping to maintain independent reportage on the war. It

demonstrates the desire and the opportunity for co-operation in a unified and democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina and thus keeps alive the Dayton Agreement's promise of lasting peace and democracy.

The Transcaucasia Project

The HCA began to concern itself with the conflicts in the Transcaucasian region thanks to representatives of the Russian "Memorial" Association who attended the first Assembly. In December 1990, Memorial organized a meeting of intellectuals from Armenia and Azerbaijan in the border area between the two republics. Following the meeting in Bratislava, the representatives from Armenia and Azerbaijan established HCA affiliates in their countries which jointly prepared for the visit of an international HCA mission in August 1992, a mission which was joined by a Georgian HCA group that had been created in the meantime.

The HCA groups began right away with the exchange of information on prisoners of war and with mediation to obtain either their release or arrangements for visits of family members. The success of the regional HCA affiliates in Armenia, Azerbaijan and even in Nagorno-Karabakh itself provided an example for the HCA activists in Georgia. This led to the founding in 1994 of the "Joint Task Force Hostages", a joint initiative of HCA affiliates in the Transcaucasian region which has undertaken to determine the identity of prisoners of war, hostages or missing persons and to work for their release. Unfortunately, these signals of a desire for peace from elements of the society were ignored by the OSCE Assistance Group, which appears to be paralyzed by political disputes, particularly between Russia, the United States and Turkey.

The HCA groups were closer to the people and knew how tired they were of war. Along with their work on behalf of prisoners of war, hostages and missing persons, they developed a plan to create a "peace zone" in the border region. The Balkan project which had been developed at the beginning of 1992 provided a model for this. In 1995 the dialogue was continued through reciprocal visits by young peace activists in Nagorno-Karabakh and Baku. The HCA groups from Armenia and Azerbaijan also met at women's conferences in Baku and Erevan. These initiatives showed that the population is tired of war and ready for dialogue and reconciliation. Young people from the HCA groups gave expression to this feeling by developing the "peace zone" into a meeting place for dialogue partners from all areas of conflict in the Caucasus. This proposal was also an indication of the intensified contacts between HCA activists in the whole Transcaucasian region since 1991. In August 1995 they met for an "organizational workshop" in Tbilisi. Representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Chechnya, as well as the international HCA designed a programme for confidence-building and establishing

peace. For the first time groups from Abkhazia and South Ossetia appeared in the HCA network. In 1996 the HCA opened a regional office in Tbilisi which serves as a meeting place providing information for local HCA groups and other local initiatives as well as international groups. With its support the local HCA groups have carried out the programme they developed in 1995, especially through initiation of the process of "Peacebuilding through Refugees' Self-organization".

Independently of this programme, the international HCA has maintained contact with Chechens since the beginning of 1995. The HCA has tried, without much success, to persuade the OSCE to undertake a more active policy in this conflict.

The two projects described show the advantages of trans-national networks for local peace work. They exchange ideas and, through their international ties, create space for a political and social dialogue beyond the limits of the individual societies. As a result, the HCA was able to bring opponents in conflicts together as citizens - something that had not been possible at the political level.

But there are substantial differences between the Balkan and Transcaucasian projects. The Balkan project is at the centre of political and social attention while the activities in the Transcaucasus play themselves out in the shadow of European politics. There, any progress is far more dependent on the work of local activists and it is much more difficult to get the needed money. Still, it is an encouraging sign for the future of citizens' diplomacy that these activists have been able to keep the peace process going "from below" and that the example they have set is being imitated in the region. This project also helps to give expression to the HCA's function as a "conscience". It demonstrates to the OSCE that it is possible to work for peace in the region.

HCA and OSCE - Institution or Conscience

The Charter of Paris contains a tribute to the NGOs and the promise to support their work. The Heads of State or Government declared: "We recall the major role that non-governmental organizations, religious and other groups and individuals have played in the achievement of the objectives of the CSCE and will further facilitate their activities for the implementation of the CSCE commitments by the participating States. These organizations, groups and individuals must be involved in an appropriate way in the activities and new structures of the CSCE in order to fulfil their important tasks."[3] However, it does not

3 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, Paris, 21 November 1990, in: Arie Bloed (Ed.), The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Analysis and Basic Documents, 1972-1993, Dordrecht/Boston/London 1993, pp. 537-566, p. 548.

emerge clearly from the Charter and its annexes just how the OSCE intends to include the NGOs in its work and in the new structures.

The HCA Board sent a letter to the Heads of State or Government on the eve of the CSCE's Paris Summit in November 1990 in which it offered to help them with the integration of Europe by institutionalizing the Helsinki process "from below" and establishing a working relationship between the CSCE and the HCA. But the development of the HCA's identity did not proceed so much in the direction of institutionalizing European civil society - in the sense of a "broad" HCA - as it did in the direction of a rather loosely organized social movement to support the values that "Helsinki" stands for. Thus it is also not surprising that the development of working relations with the CSCE has not enjoyed the highest priority on the HCA's agenda. Some attention was paid to these relations, but mainly in order to optimize conflict prevention work, in which the HCA became more and more heavily involved.

In 1995, at the request of the Budapest Summit, the OSCE Secretary General published a "Study on the Enhancement of NGO Participation". The study says that many improvements have been made since 1990 and that the presently existing situation appears to provide a good basis for ties between the OSCE and NGOs. The study concludes that it is just a question of carrying through on them. It also notes that close co-operation in conflict prevention is both necessary and desirable. The field missions make this especially clear and the governments participating in the study (23 in number) are in agreement on this point. The Secretary General's recommendations in this area meet the desires of the HCA in part. They are as follows: Together with the HCNM and the ODIHR, the Secretary General should organize regular meetings with interested NGOs that are active in the field of conflict prevention in order to discuss additional possibilities of co-operation. OSCE field missions should be encouraged to seek and maintain permanent contact with appropriate NGOs working in the country of their assignment.

But the support and the resources the HCA had asked for were not forthcoming. The OSCE acknowledged the role of the NGOs and wanted to make use of their assistance but did not see it as its task to help the NGOs in their work directly. The NGOs could not, by definition, be included in decision-making, the Secretary General observed, because the OSCE was an inter-governmental organization.

The HCA's development into a social movement rather than an "institution" prevented a break in relations between the HCA and "Helsinki". As in the eighties, the HCA's most important function is that of a "conscience" for the states that signed the CSCE Final Act. That in turn presupposes a certain distance which, in the event of institutionalization, might be lost. Relations with the OSCE are different than they were in the eighties. They are characterized more by complementarity and co-operation than by differences. But even in that kind

of relationship a certain distance is desirable if the NGOs do not want to turn into sub-contractors or fulfil an alibi function. An NGO becomes a sub-contractor if it takes on a job at the behest of states without the possibility of making its own critical input. NGOs fulfil an alibi function if governments exploit or misuse NGO work to legitimate their own inactivity. Both of these risks are inherent in situations in which government bodies and NGOs are working together and the latter are asked to prevent or put an end to violent conflicts. The HCA has been able to avoid these traps by keeping its distance from government bodies and, at the same time, orienting itself towards the values and norms to which the countries committed themselves in the Helsinki process. Much of the work that the HCA has accomplished in past years would have been impossible without that distance and the appeal to common values. Both are essential for the fulfilment of the role of a "conscience" which is the HCA's objective; but they are also needed as a bond to make co-operation possible between activists from very different societies and cultures. The necessary distance does not mean that no support - including that of a financial kind - would be possible from the OSCE. There are many examples of governments that support critical groups without wanting to control them. The reason for such support is that a democracy needs a "conscience" in order to function well. For the OSCE such a conscience is important as well. That was true in the eighties and it remains true today.