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Supporting Reform, Dialogue, and Crisis Response in Ukraine

The mandate of the Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine (PCU) – to promote OSCE principles and commitments in partnership with Ukrainian institutions – has been constant since its establishment in 1999, but the nature of our work has undergone a sea change with the Euromaidan revolution and the conflict in and around Ukraine.

Since 2014, the PCU's unified budget has grown by about a quarter, to 3.6 million euros, while our staff remains a modest 50 people, including just three internationals, but our effectiveness in terms of strengthening Ukraine's adherence to OSCE commitments has grown many fold.

I attribute this to three factors, summarized below and elaborated further in this article.

First, Ukrainian institutions are themselves pushing for change. The reform agenda is difficult and complex, but in many areas, some of which I will detail below, it can be a challenge for international actors to keep pace with reformers inside the government. The PCU's approach, dictated by its mandate, of only implementing projects that have been requested by Ukrainian partners, has at times been seen as limiting. Yet, over the past two years, it has also proven to be an asset, as it allows us to address priorities and fill gaps identified by the partners themselves.

Second, we have set strategic objectives to:

1. support sustainable reforms,
2. promote dialogue,
3. contribute where possible to the OSCE's conflict response, and
4. support efforts by other international actors and OSCE institutions in meeting the first three objectives.

Without explicit objectives, the nature of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security and the PCU's broad mandate might militate against focused programming. Yet setting objectives allows the PCU to be more strategic in choosing areas of intervention and in communicating what is and is not considered effective programming to partners, while preserving the ability to work across the breadth of the three dimensions.

Third, we have restructured our office. Programme managers, all of whom are Ukrainian, have been empowered to identify opportunities and propose responses of greatest impact. Programme evaluation is being strength-

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Note: The views contained in this contribution are the author's own.

ened, and, in the near-future, we will enhance our public communications by adding social media and increasing Ukrainian-language communications material.

Helping Partner Institutions Meet OSCE Commitments

The PCU's mandate requires that projects be designed in co-operation with local partners and approved by the host country prior to implementation. Without this request and approval process, a project cannot begin, and these requirements, which apply to the PCU and other field missions with similar mandates, can thus be seen as restrictive. However, in Ukraine's current environment, I view this largely as a healthy mechanism that guarantees local buy-in, ensures that the PCU's programming meets the needs of partners, and reduces the risk of duplication, all within the framework of strengthening adherence to OSCE commitments.

Our budget is relatively small compared to those of other international organizations, but this has several advantages. First, we promote long-term partnerships. With institutions ranging from the ministry of education to the state emergency service, these relationships span more than a decade and will likely continue as long as the PCU exists. Second, our funding is flexible. Within a project's objectives and expected results, we are always ready to modify activities to better match needs. Third, we don't need to claim ownership for results, but can rather take pride in supporting those who do.

Several project areas illustrate this relationship:

- *Civil Society:* The PCU's approach to civil society has always stressed strengthening the enabling environment rather than providing direct support to NGOs. In 2014, we focused on helping the State Registration Service streamline the registration of NGOs.

  In 2015, a new opportunity emerged to support the development of a civil society strategy initiated by the Presidential Administration in collaboration with a group of civil-society organizations. Using the flexibility of unified-budget funding, and responding to requests by local partners, we reoriented our approach. Part of the revised approach included familiarizing a government-civil society working group with the approach of other post-Communist countries, most notably Croatia, which see such strategies as critical to a sustainable shift from authoritarianism to democracy. We also supported a series of regional seminars to allow NGOs and government officials across the country to contribute their ideas.

  The result of this combination of international experience and broad local consultations has been a new strategy, approved by the President in 2016, which encompasses several mechanisms, including a

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development fund, overseen jointly by civil society and government officials, to promote the development of the third sector. Following the strategy's endorsement, the PCU is supporting its realization.

- *Police:* In 2015, the ministry of the interior embarked on police reform, giving clear indications that it was committed to providing quick wins in a highly visible and critical area of state-society relations. Many international organizations had difficulty matching the government's pace, including the PCU, which had not specifically planned on supporting police reform in its unified budget for that year. However, we were able to reorient support for countering human-trafficking and gender-based violence into training for 9,000 police patrol officers. As trainers were entirely Ukrainian nationals, and as the OSCE already had an established approach to these topics, the training fitted within a modest unified-budget project.

  In 2016, we are broadening our support for police reform, taking on full responsibility for the education of the cyber-police and anti-trafficking police, who provide critical responses to growing challenges throughout the OSCE region, and of 15,000 neighbourhood police, whose task is to strengthen community security and co-operation between state and citizen.

- *Demining:* Since 2006, the PCU had been helping Ukraine deal with the legacy of World War II munitions and Soviet-era stockpiles by training and equipping government deminers and supporting the education of children about the hazards of explosives. This work positioned the PCU well to reorient and respond quickly to the new hazards resulting from the current conflict.

  Most notably, the PCU shifted its assistance from supporting capacity-building for emergency response to helping the Ukrainian government prepare for large-area humanitarian demining. To illustrate, in peacetime, the State Emergency Service responds to calls from individuals who believe they have found an explosive remnant of war. Now, this service, together with the ministries of defence and infrastructure and international NGOs, are working together to survey and clear many thousands of hectares.

  The PCU provided international expertise to a draft law on mine action, and will support the development of a new institutional framework to allow for co-ordinated mine action. We helped introduce a digital map that is critical for tracking the survey and clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance. And we are propagating international mine standards through training and seminars. At the same time, we have curtailed our support for mine-risk education, as this was quickly taken up by several international NGOs and UNICEF.

- *Chemical Safety and Security:* The threats and risks of unauthorized use of chemicals or attacks against chemical installations pose a serious

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challenge to security, the economy, health, and the environment in Ukraine, especially under the current circumstances. The concern is that the unstable security situation increases the threats of misuse of toxic chemicals and attacks against chemical plants, transportation of dangerous goods, and energy carriers.

In response to this, in 2015 the OSCE commissioned the Comprehensive Review of Chemical Safety and Security in Ukraine. The Review revealed major gaps and shortfalls in the level of Ukraine's preparedness for potential chemical security risks. The next step was to develop projects targeting specific areas, and improve the overall national system of preparedness for chemical safety and security threats. The key areas of our involvement are improving the legislative and regulatory basis for safe and secure management of chemicals, increasing awareness of chemical safety and security, and strengthening enforcement capacities to control cross-boundary movement of hazardous chemicals

Objective-Setting

Every OSCE mission and institution sets programme objectives each year, and, below each objective, details expected outcomes and outputs. This is indisputably a good practice; however, there is a fundamental challenge in setting sound objectives given the breadth of the OSCE's goals, which began with the Decalogue and have since expanded with each new set of commitments. The PCU's mandate, to implement projects that "may cover all aspects of OSCE activities"[1] in co-operation with relevant authorities, is equally broad. This is not to say a broad mandate is inappropriate. On the contrary, it underscores the fundamental principle that security requires a comprehensive approach, and has allowed the PCU to evolve over 17 years, without changing a word of the mandate. But it does not provide much guidance for setting objectives and subsequently prioritizing programming.

To address this, I set three cross-cutting goals in 2016, after broad consultations with Ukrainian stakeholders and participating States:

First, the PCU should help the government implement reforms that strengthen its OSCE commitments. This means we should look for projects that support new areas of reform, rather than merely providing support to ongoing activities. To take an example, which is elaborated further below, we are shifting from conducting human-rights advocacy events to helping the Ministry of Education inculcate a human rights-based approach in schools.

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1 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 295*, PC.DEC/295, 1 June 1999, at: http://www.osce.org/pc/29031; *Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Concerning the Creation of a New Form of Co-operation*, Vienna, 13 July 1999, Article 1, at: http://www.osce.org/ukraine/37928.

Second, we should promote dialogue among various sectors of society. In addition to our explicit dialogue programming, we are also emphasizing public consultations and interchange between various actors across our projects.

Third, we will assist in the overall response to the crisis in eastern Ukraine. The Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) is of course the lead OSCE entity operating in the east of the country. At the same time, there is need and opportunity for a range of programming, ranging from mine action to helping former combatants safely return home.

A fourth goal was implicit, and will be added in 2017: to align and co-ordinate whenever possible with other OSCE offices and international donors and organizations.

As one of many OSCE actors, the PCU is trying to re-emphasize a key phrase in its mandate by not only conducting its own projects, but also assisting with other efforts "involving the OSCE, its institutions and the relevant Ukrainian authorities".[2] What does this mean in practice? It translates into increased consultation with OSCE institutions and structures, so that we can better align our office's programming with their work in Ukraine. As a small example, the PCU houses representatives of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) in our office; and we provide administrative support to election observation missions. In 2014, the PCU played a key role in resolving the logistical and administrative issues that allowed the SMM to launch without delay.

We have also increased our consultations with other international partners, such as the Council of Europe (CoE) and the United Nations (UN), and have signed memoranda of understanding with several of them to formalize our co-operation. Within our office, I have asked all our officers to include information on how their projects intersect with the efforts of others, to help ground general pledges of co-operation in our day-to-day work.

These four objectives have been met with support from Ukraine and other participating States. While they are admittedly still broad, making them explicit provides a framework for selecting and evaluating activities, communicating with our partners and providing guidance to PCU's project officers.

Some examples may serve to illustrate:

- *Dialogue:* Following Euromaidan, the OSCE set a goal of promoting dialogue. In March 2014, two efforts were launched concurrently: A

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2   Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, *Participation of Ukraine into the activities of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*, at: http://mfa.gov.ua/en/about-ukraine/international-organizations/osce.

"National Dialogue" project run by the PCU, and the SMM, whose mandate explicitly includes dialogue facilitation to reduce tensions.

Dialogue is considered by many to be critical to reducing tensions. Aside from the explicit mentions of dialogue in the SMM's mandate, the UN also notes that "of particular importance is the notion of trust building and reconciliation; bringing various groups together to overcome differences and grievances through dialogue."[3]

The PCU's work in the area of dialogue touches upon all four objectives. First, it explicitly promotes an exchange of views about the government's reform agenda, in partnership with the National Reforms Council under the President of Ukraine. Periodic dialogue forums in government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts give communities in areas affected by the conflict an opportunity to voice their priorities for reform and allow central government officials to explain their vision and approach. At the same time, capacity-building has helped the Ukrainian National Reforms Council to better communicate its vision and incorporate the views of the general public into the reform agenda.

In addition to our direct programming, the PCU has taken the initiative in providing a platform for co-ordinating the actions of other international organizations and NGOs engaged in dialogue promotion, and we will soon be working with others to establish a set of voluntary principles for assistance providers in the area of dialogue.

- *Media:* The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM) is a unique advocate among international organizations, and as part of our effort to align with other OSCE institutions, the PCU has taken up the Representative's call to improve the safety of journalists.

In 2015, the PCU provided international hostile-environment training for 85 combat journalists, and supplied each of them with a trauma kit. In a follow-up survey, participants working in the conflict area said they directly applied lessons from the training in emergency situations to minimize risk to themselves and others. A notable aspect of the training was the provision by the Ukrainian ministry of defence of training facilities, equipment, and personnel, which helped to make the training as realistic as possible. The PCU will work with the ministry to enable it to continue to offer affordable training courses of this kind to Ukrainian journalists in the future.

The PCU has also supported dialogue between journalists and the various branches of state security, including the police, the armed forces, and the state security service (*Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrayiny*, SBU).

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3   United Nations Ukraine/European Union/The World Bank, *Ukraine: Recovery and Peace-building Assessment. Analysis of Crisis Impacts and Needs in Eastern Ukraine*, Volume II, Full Component Reports, March 2015, p. 111, at: http://www.un.org.ua/images/UKR_RPA_Volume_II_Component_Reports_FINAL_for_PDF_04_17__15.pdf.

In 2014, we conducted a series of dialogues between police and journalists on behaviour at mass events. This promoted mutual understanding of the police's need to protect and journalists' need for access, and elaborated on several tricky issues, such as the sometimes thin line between journalists and activists in the age of social media.

In 2015, the PCU provided training to brigade commanders on journalists' rights, at the request of the ministry of defence; and in 2016 we began working with the SBU to help them conduct their relations with journalists on the basis of respect for international norms and commitments on freedom of speech.

In addition to promoting the safety of journalists, we have also helped them to improve their contribution to community security and conflict resolution through propagating principles of conflict sensitivity. By avoiding stereotypes and divisive language, journalists can help build peace while improving their professionalism.

- *Former Combatants:* For around ten years, the PCU assisted the ministry of social policy in helping retired military personnel adjust to civilian life, primarily through vocational training. With the outbreak of conflict, Ukraine now has large numbers of combat veterans for the first time in 70 years. The needs of former combatants vary from the original target group of career military personnel in several ways. First, most are seeking to return to their former lives and jobs, so the need for vocational training is less. Second, many have lingering psychological needs that may manifest in behaviour that makes them a danger to themselves and to those around them.

  To reorient its approach, the PCU worked with the ministry of social policy and the armed forces in 2015 to train psychologists in working with stress disorders, based on the experience of OSCE Partner State Israel, which, as is well known, has decades of relevant experience as well as a pool of psychologists who had emigrated from the former Soviet Union. In 2016, the PCU is engaging in more systemic activities to help the ministry to develop a comprehensive approach to reintegration of former combatants, with a particular focus on the threat of gender-based violence. Thus, the PCU is switching from support for ongoing job training to supporting reintegration in other ways, including conducting research, supporting expertise, and holding policy dialogue.

- *Human Rights and Legal Education:* The PCU has helped the ministries of justice and education promote legal and human-rights education for about a decade. However, in the past two years our emphasis has shifted from sponsoring activities to helping the ministries and academic institutions to inculcate new approaches aligned with international standards.

  Beginning in 2014, the PCU has been helping law schools shift to a standards-based approach from one based on a list of subjects. While

this may sound like a technical change, it is seen by education and legal professionals as fundamental to raising the quality of the legal profession. Currently, to graduate, law students are required to complete all their courses, but there is no overall check of their skills or knowledge. This in turn means that law schools have little incentive to provide a high-quality education, as each school determines for itself whether its students are qualified.

Shifting to a set of unified standards means that law schools will have greater latitude in deciding how and what they teach, while subjecting all their varied approaches to a standardized test of quality. One school might emphasize classroom time, while another focuses on self-study. Both approaches would be welcomed, as long as they produce high-quality graduates. The PCU is also helping to introduce standardized entrance exams for law students, and is helping the ministries develop a long-term strategy for further reform of legal education.

In addition, the OSCE is helping the ministry of education to introduce human-rights based education in Ukraine's schools. In the past, the PCU's intervention tended to focus on supporting "Human-Rights Day" type events. Now, with roughly the same level of effort, we are promoting a sustainable policy that will affect youth across the country.

Restructuring

Behind the scenes, the PCU has undergone several organizational reforms to increase its efficiency and responsiveness, allowing us to do more with our budget and mandate.

The first step was to create new programme manager positions. Before 2016, the PCU had programmes, but in reality they were little more than baskets of activities, with only a single person, the senior project officer, answerable for objectives and outcomes across the entire range of programming.

Now, each programme manager is responsible for the objectives and outcomes outlined in the unified budget, and has more latitude to propose and adjust projects accordingly. By empowering programme managers who have a deep understanding of their topic area, and by using the four strategic objectives of our office, we are already seeing smarter, more effective interventions.

At the same time, we reviewed and reduced the number of objectives and outcomes in our unified budget by more than half in 2016, so that each programme has one, or at most two high-level objectives.

To further sharpen the focus on objectives and outcomes, we added a dedicated evaluation officer, one of the few in any field mission, whose job is to coach project staff in refining their activities and data collection to demon-

strate outcomes. We likewise built external, independent evaluations into flagship projects on demining and dialogue; these are the first to be commissioned in the history of our office.

In addition, we rewrote the job descriptions for all project officers so that they essentially match the lifecycle of a project, as described in the OSCE project management manual, to underscore that project management is not only about implementing activities, but also about evaluation, which in turn supports the identification and design of subsequent projects.

Our next challenge is to improve our public communications. Until recently, the PCU has not emphasized public communications – we don't, for example, have a dedicated communications officer. However, two things have changed recently. First because of the prominence of the SMM, the OSCE has become a household word in Ukraine. However, media coverage generally and understandably focuses on a narrow slice of what the OSCE is and does, undermining understanding of the OSCE's core principle of a comprehensive approach to security. Thus, by promoting the full spectrum of the PCU's activities, we hope to promote the multi-dimensional nature of OSCE's work. Second, participating States, including Ukraine, have asked us to improve our public communications to better realize the value of transparency, which we constantly promote in our programme work, also within our organization.

We are currently formulating a strategy for communications, but it is safe to say there will be several elements. First, we should take fuller advantage of existing channels, by, for example, improving website content and updating factsheets. Second, we should better emphasize results, shifting where possible from reports that begin "a conference was held …" to highlighting what was achieved. Third, we have established a social-media presence on Facebook, and are considering Twitter, to promote engagement and dialogue, rather than monologue.

The PCU still has much work to do. Our programming can be made more effective; our strengthened approach towards evaluation is still in its infancy; and our efforts to improve public communication are even newer. But I believe that by establishing objectives, committing to improved evaluation, and being open to constructive criticism we will better fulfil our mandate and come closer to living up to the high expectations placed on us by participating States and Ukrainian society.