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A Stronger OSCE for an Uncertain Future

Introduction

When I took up my post as OSCE Secretary General in July 2011, just a few months after the 2010 Astana Summit, which called for achieving a shared vision of a free, democratic, common, and indivisible security community, I saw a need to reinvigorate the Organization's role and to raise its profile as a key platform for inclusive security dialogue and co-operation in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian space. At that time, the Organization hardly recognized the need to increase trust and confidence among participating States.

Six years later, the picture is quite different. The OSCE region faces an array of difficult challenges to security, and the level of trust and willingness to co-operate are both very low. Yet the OSCE is widely acknowledged as an irreplaceable actor that can bring to the table all the players in the region and mobilize them to joint action when needed. This reputation has been earned mainly due to the OSCE's rapid response to the crisis in and around Ukraine, which took many by surprise in early 2014. But with most of the Organization's energy and resources absorbed by the crisis, there has been little space for discussion about making the Organization more effective and efficient and adapting it to the challenges of the 21st-century security environment.

In the run-up to the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2015, the first few years after the Astana Summit were characterized by challenging yet constructive discussions on the future role of the OSCE, taking place first within the framework of the V to V Dialogues and later in the Helsinki +40 Process. However, the unfolding crisis in and around Ukraine made this process superfluous and deprived it of practical significance. The annexation of Crimea in early 2014 and the subsequent fighting in eastern Ukraine marked a turning point for the OSCE. Without a doubt, this represents one of the largest challenges the Organization has faced since the end of the Cold War. On the one hand, it has demonstrated the Organization's enduring relevance as well as its ability to respond rapidly, flexibly, and effectively to a crisis situation. Swift mobilization of the OSCE's instruments and mechanisms, in particular the deployment of the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine, has prevented a larger conflict, and the OSCE now plays a key role in international efforts to de-escalate the situation and achieve a peaceful resolution. The SMM monitors the situation on the ground, particularly the implementation of the ceasefire agreed in Minsk and the related withdrawal

Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and should not be attributed to the OSCE or any other organization. The author would like to thank Mr Juraj Nosal for his assistance during the preparation of this contribution.

of heavy weapons, assists the local population by facilitating the repair of critical infrastructure and the crossing of the contact line, and helps to broker local ceasefires. On the other hand, the conflict has significantly undermined trust and co-operation among OSCE participating States, replaced dialogue with tension and confrontation, and placed enormous pressure on the Organization's capacities and resources in other areas of its activity. It has also exposed persistent shortcomings and gaps in how the OSCE functions.

Against this backdrop, the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian region is facing a growing number of cross-dimensional and interconnected security challenges that cannot be solved without mutual co-operation and joint action. These challenges include radicalization and violent extremism, terrorism, climate change, large movements of people, and threats to cyber-security – issues, which increasingly dominate international politics as well as the OSCE agenda. The Organization has already been playing an active role in addressing many of them by strengthening its capacities, for instance by creating a Transnational Threats Department in the Secretariat in 2012, as well as through programmatic activities. However, if the OSCE is to remain an important player and an effective platform for security dialogue and co-operation on these new challenges in the future, it needs to increase its impact and adapt to the new realities of the international security environment in the 21st century. The growing complexity of today's security challenges calls for more effectiveness and stronger cross-dimensional and cross-institutional co-operation. This will require not only new capacities but, first and foremost, reconsideration of some of the fundamental policies and structures that underpin OSCE operations. In the current tense and confrontational climate, which is still influenced by the ongoing crisis in and around Ukraine, there is little space for this sort of debate and perhaps even less for meaningful progress. Nevertheless, it is essential for the future of the Organization, and in today's rapidly changing world, the OSCE participating States need to have such a discussion sooner rather than later since it will be a gradual process that will require a lot of time and political effort.

Drawing on my experience at the helm of this unique Organization over the past six years, this contribution offers my personal views and suggestions for how to make the OSCE more effective, efficient, and resilient. Many ideas outlined here are not new, and some might seem more radical than others. Nevertheless, any efforts to change how the Organization operates should be a gradual process rather than a revolutionary transformation as it is often small steps rather than big leaps that have a sustainable and long-lasting impact.

Decision-Making in the OSCE

One of the defining features of decision-making in the OSCE is its consensus rule. While it can be difficult and time-consuming to reach agreement among all 57 participating States, it is crucial for inclusiveness and the legitimacy of decisions in a political body such as the OSCE. The problem with the consensus rule is not its existence but the fact that it is interpreted in absolute terms and applied to almost all aspects of the Organization's work. This often leads to intense micromanagement of the executive structures by participating States and enables individual countries to block activities, which has a negative impact on the Organization's operational capabilities. Some issues, such as the Organization's annual budget, the mandate for a new field operation, and the appointment of the Secretary General and Heads of Institutions, should indeed be decided by consensus. But there is little rationale in applying the same principle to other aspects of the Organization's work, such as the dates and agenda of annual OSCE meetings or budget-neutral adjustments to post tables or the organizational structure. The first should be within the authority of the OSCE Chairmanship, while the second should come under the authority of the head of the relevant executive structure. Participating States should explicitly define which areas are of strategic importance and thus require a decision by consensus. This would strengthen the Organization's efficiency and autonomy in the remaining areas while retaining the engagement of participating States on the most important issues.

Another procedural issue that in my view requires reconsideration is the selection of the annual OSCE Chairmanship. The system whereby participating States choose a Chairmanship by consensus is rather presumptuous and creates a discriminatory situation as it separates states into two groups: those who are allowed to chair the Organization and others who are not considered qualified for the job. This approach is quite unusual, and virtually no other major international organization has anything similar. A system whereby Chairmanship countries rotate in alphabetical order would give more ownership to all participating States and distribute the financial burden of heading the Organization more equally. It would also strengthen the role of the OSCE executive structures, as most participating States would need to rely more on their support and expertise. Furthermore, shortening the duration of the Chairmanship from one year to six months might further increase engagement and significantly reduce the overall costs of this exercise for individual participating States.

Changing the duration of the Chairmanship would also require a discussion about the frequency and timing of Ministerial Council meetings. The current practice of holding one big Ministerial Council meeting at the end of each year with the aim of adopting as many decisions and declarations across all three OSCE dimensions as possible usually proves to be very ambitious and difficult, with results that almost never fulfil the Chairperson-in-Office's

expectations. This model could be relatively easily replaced by a system of two smaller Ministerial Council meetings per year, one in the summer and one in the winter. In fact, such a model would not be completely unprecedented, since some Chairmanships have organized informal Ministerial meetings before the December Ministerial Council in the past (e.g., Austria in July 2017, Germany in September 2016, Kazakhstan in July 2010, and Greece in June 2009). The advantage of twice-yearly ministerial meetings would be threefold. First, the agenda could be reduced to two or three key issues based on the Chairmanship's priorities, which would allow for more focused and in-depth discussions and negotiations that might result in the adoption of more substantial decisions, though there would be fewer of them. Second, more frequent Ministerial Council meetings would foster sustained engagement by capitals and their delegations, increasing the sense of ownership and interest in the Organization. And third, this system would align better with the OSCE's budget cycle, since the outcomes of a summer ministerial meeting could be reflected in budget negotiations that commence in the autumn.

The functioning of the regular OSCE decision-making bodies should be reconsidered as well. Weekly meetings of the Permanent Council (PC) in Vienna have become highly formalized over the years, and genuine discussion and engagement have been replaced by parallel monologues consisting of formal written statements prepared in advance. There is little appetite for proper discussion and debate. The increasingly confrontational and polarized environment of recent years has also contributed to this atmosphere, and the space available for real dialogue seems to be shrinking. It is necessary to return to the old method whereby countries are the protagonists of the debate and take responsibility for the Organization. I have tried to help by introducing a new platform, the OSCE Security Days,¹ to facilitate informal debate and bring in new voices and fresh ideas. These events have clearly shown that an informal setting allows for more open and honest discussion, stimulates further deliberation and can even lead to concrete action, as demonstrated by the Security Days event on migration in Rome in March 2016. Based on this experience, I believe an informal segment should be introduced into the work of the PC. The formal part could continue to provide a platform for hosting high-level guest speakers, adopting decisions and presenting various OSCE-related reports as prescribed in relevant mandates or rules and regulations, with interventions by delegations circulated in written form. This part could then be followed by an informal segment in which heads of delegations would have an honest and open discussion on current issues, without relying on statements prepared in advance.

Likewise, the functioning of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) could be slightly amended. An informal segment could also be introduced to the work of this body, and its agenda should be expanded so that the Forum

1 For more information, see: <http://www.osce.org/sg/secdays>.

can also discuss non-military issues relevant to the politico-military dimension. The relationship between the Forum and the Security Committee, a subsidiary body of the PC, should also be rethought in order to strengthen mutual synergies and complementarities.

Turning to subsidiary bodies, the Chairmanships of the three committees (the Security Committee, the Economic and Environmental Committee, and the Human Dimension Committee) could rotate in a similar way as the Chairmanship of the FSC (i.e., every four months), which would increase the engagement of participating States, strengthen their ownership and require fewer resources than a one-year Chairmanship. Alternatively, should the rotation mechanism and duration of the OSCE Chairmanship be changed, chairing the three committees could be among the responsibilities of the incumbent OSCE Chairmanship.

The Role of the Secretary General

Compared to that of other international organizations, the mandate of the OSCE Secretary General (SG) is relatively restrictive. Since the responsibility for political guidance of the Organization is entrusted to the Chairmanship, the SG has only a limited political role and functions mainly as Chief Administrative Officer of the whole Organization.² Although my experience has taught me that the SG can play an effective but discreet political role if he or she builds a good level of trust with Chairmanships and participating States, it always depends on interpersonal relations and mutual chemistry. However, the growing complexity of the challenges the Organization faces calls for greater effectiveness, stronger cross-dimensional and cross-institutional co-operation, continuity in operations, as well as the de-politicization of certain procedures. This in turn requires formally enhancing the autonomy of the SG in certain areas.

The SG is mandated to provide early warning to participating States by bringing to the PC's attention any situation of emerging tension or conflict in the OSCE area and suggesting possible options for a timely and effective response.³ However, early warning is usually not sufficient, as most crisis situations evolve very rapidly, and without early action conflict prevention is likely to fail. Therefore, the SG should have the authority to take limited but swift measures and steps to ensure that early warning is followed by concrete action on the ground, such as dispatching a small fact-finding, monitoring, or

2 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Sofia 2004, *Decision No. 15/04, Role of the OSCE Secretary General*, MC.DEC/15/04, 7 December 2004.

3 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Vilnius 2011, *Decision No. 3/11, Elements of the Conflict Cycle, Related to Enhancing the OSCE's Capabilities in Early Warning, Early Action, Dialogue Facilitation and Mediation Support, and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation*, MC.DEC/03/11, 7 December 2011.

mediation team.⁴ This would also help the Secretariat to be better informed about these situations and improve its ability to develop relevant policy options and contingency plans for consideration by the participating States.

The decentralized structure of the OSCE sometimes makes it difficult for the SG to fulfil his/her role as Chief Administrative Officer. In practice, all OSCE fund managers have a great deal of autonomy, both financial and political. This is true not only for the three OSCE institutions – the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), and the Representative on Freedom of the Media – but also for all OSCE field operations. They promote and negotiate their activities directly with participating States and defend their budgets and seek extra-budgetary funding on their own. Only when the annual Unified Budget is being prepared do the SG and the Secretariat have a say in the overall dynamics. While a certain level of decentralization is often positive, too much can hinder effectiveness and prevent certain key issues, including some that might be seen as “administrative”, from receiving appropriate political attention. The SG should therefore be entrusted with broader and clearer administrative competencies in running the OSCE’s operations and activities. Given the multi-dimensional nature of today’s security challenges, which requires all OSCE executive structures to work together, the SG should adopt a co-ordinating role across the entire Organization, while fully respecting the mandates and political autonomy of the OSCE institutions. In the case of field operations, the SG should have the authority to appoint Heads of Mission, which is currently the responsibility of the Chairmanship. Given the limited duration of a Chairmanship, the SG is undeniably better suited to take into account the Organization’s long-term interests by choosing the right candidate. Heads of Mission should go through the same competitive selection process as Directors in the Secretariat and be appointed by the SG with the consent of the Chairmanship. Consequently, they should be officially accountable to the SG and report to him or her not only on administrative but also on political issues. Heads of Mission would still report to the PC, but it might be useful to shift the focus from country-centric reports to thematic or regional issues.

Strengthening the role of the SG in some areas should naturally translate into greater accountability towards the participating States. The SG should be given a more active role at weekly meetings of the PC beyond simply delivering a report on the Secretariat’s activities. The SG should be given an open and informal platform to discuss any relevant issues or challenges with the delegations, either through an informal segment of the PC (as suggested

4 Enhancing the autonomy of the SG in early warning and early action was also recommended by the 2015 Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project; cf. *Lessons Learned for the OSCE from Its Engagement in Ukraine. Interim Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project*, June 2015, p. 9, available at: <http://www.osce.org/networks/164561>.

above) or in another format. I have tried to do this through a regular “Hour with participating States”.

Last but not least, I believe the Organization would benefit from having a Deputy Secretary General. The SG is often overloaded with administrative work, and having a Deputy Secretary General could reduce some of this burden and make the whole process faster and more effective. Furthermore, a Deputy Secretary General could take over the function of Chief Administrative Officer when the SG’s post is vacant or serious health or personal reasons temporarily prevent the SG from exercising his or her mandate. Especially in times of crisis, the role of the SG is essential, and should a crisis arise during his or her absence, it could have grave consequences for the Organization’s operational capability to react and respond, significantly undermining its credibility. The recent experience of the lengthy process of selecting my successor, when the Organization was left without a SG for several weeks in July 2017, has made clear that such a situation is not hypothetical. I already proposed creating the post of Deputy Secretary General back in 2011, but the participating States rejected this suggestion. Perhaps it is time to reconsider it.

Legal Personality

The lack of a formally recognized legal personality has posed a major risk to the Organization since its creation. Despite the 1993 Rome Council Decision, in which the participating States agreed on the “usefulness of legal capacity being granted to the CSCE institutions in the territories of all CSCE participating States”,⁵ there has been little progress in its implementation over the past 25 years. In 2007, a Draft Convention on the International Legal Personality, Legal Capacity, and Privileges and Immunities of the OSCE was agreed by the appropriate expert group but was not adopted by the participating States.⁶ The issue has remained at an impasse since then, despite the best efforts of the Informal Working Group on Strengthening the Legal Framework of the OSCE.

The rapid deployment of the SMM to Ukraine in March 2014 demonstrated once again the very practical consequences of this situation. For several weeks after the Mission was created, OSCE monitors were operating

5 CSCE Fourth Meeting of the Council, Rome 1993, Decision on Legal Capacity and Privileges and Immunities, CSCE/4-C/Dec.2, Rome, 1 December 1993, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision Nr. 383, Report on OSCE Legal Capacity and on Privileges and Immunities to the Ministerial Council*, PC.DEC/383, 26 November 2000, Attachment 1 to Annex, SEC.GAL/20/00, 6 March 2000, pp. 12-19, here: p. 12, available at: <http://www.osce.org/pc/24379>.

6 Cf. Decision No. 16/06, Legal Status and Privileges and Immunities of the OSCE, MC.DEC/16/06, 5 December 2006, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Fourteenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 4 and 5 December 2006*, Brussels, 5 December 2006, pp. 50-51, available at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/25065>.

without the privileges and immunities required for the fulfilment of their functions. They had no security guarantees from the host country, and the Organization could not properly exercise its duty of care as an employer. The Mission's effective operation was also hampered as the lack of legal capacity prevented it from opening bank accounts, entering into contracts, and importing much-needed equipment. Fortunately, this situation did not last too long, and a Memorandum of Understanding with Ukraine was negotiated, signed, ratified by the Ukrainian parliament, and entered into force in just twelve weeks – almost record time for this kind of international document. However, this agreement covers only SMM staff, so no other OSCE officials, including the SG, enjoy any official status when they travel on OSCE business to Ukraine.

It is also worth mentioning that the Organization's lack of international legal personality would make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to conclude, for instance, a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the OSCE and any participating States that would be willing to provide certain military capacities on loan to an OSCE field operation, such as unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles and unarmed military personnel to operate them. This would also render impossible the implementation of any potential PC decision to deploy peacekeepers or military equipment under OSCE auspices. This is not a purely theoretical consideration, as the 1994 Budapest Summit decision⁷ actually authorizes deployment of OSCE multinational peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh, following agreement among the parties on cessation of the armed conflict.

These examples illustrate just a few of the problems stemming from the OSCE's lack of agreed legal status. This issue is discussed almost exclusively by a specialized, technical audience and is not commonly studied by academics or well understood (or even known) by political leaders and the general public. Yet broad recognition is urgently needed of the huge challenges the Organization faces due to the lack of legal personality in its operations, particularly in the case of rapid deployment in conflict and post-conflict areas. All these risks could be substantially alleviated throughout the OSCE region if the legal status of the Organization were recognized and confirmed through the adoption of a legally binding multilateral agreement by all participating States, as decided in Rome in 1993. If this were to happen, the OSCE would not need to negotiate these matters with host countries on an ad hoc basis, and the OSCE's ability to react rapidly to crisis situations when requested by participating States could be based on a firm legal footing.⁸

7 CSCE, *Budapest Document 1994. Towards a Genuine Partnership in a New Era*, 21 December 1994, Budapest Decisions, II: Regional Issues, pp. 5-9, Intensification of CSCE action in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, pp. 5-6, here: p. 6, available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/39554>.

8 This step was also recommended by both the 2005 Panel of Eminent Persons on Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE and the 2015 Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project. Cf. *Common Purpose – Towards a More Effective OSCE*:

Although the participating States have not yet been able to reach consensus on this issue, the Organization is in fact acquiring its own de facto legal personality through Memoranda of Understanding and Headquarters Agreements concluded over the last few decades with participating States that host an OSCE field operation, institution, or the Secretariat. These instruments have resulted in undeniable recognition of the OSCE's capacity as a legal entity in the international sphere. During my tenure, I also started seeking bilateral standing arrangements, which would fill the gaps in legal status and privileges and immunities for the Organization and its officials while carrying out their duties until an overall multilateral solution can be reached. A number of participating States have expressed willingness to enter into such arrangements. However, this is not equivalent to a legally binding multilateral agreement by all 57 participating States. In the future, the OSCE, as a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, should become a fully-fledged international organization with a legal personality, legal capacity, and privileges and immunities at the level customarily enjoyed by other international organizations.

Budget and Resources

Extensive delays in passing the annual Unified Budget, which have become common in recent years, undermine the Organization's efficiency and effectiveness. Participating States are increasingly using the budget process to thwart each other at the Organization's expense. During my mandate, I saw not only national interests but, unfortunately, sometimes even personal interests at play when everyone should have been working together to secure our common future. The growing number of challenges the OSCE region faces can only be addressed through co-operation and joint action. Participating States need to be open to compromise and focus on the larger strategic picture rather than micromanaging the Organization's budget and fighting over marginal issues.

In this regard, I believe there should be an independent evaluation of the Unified Budget process and the role of the Advisory Committee on Management and Finance (ACMF). Multiyear budgeting could be introduced for certain activities to ensure continuity of crucial operations, and there should be greater delegation of management responsibilities to key officials, beginning with the Secretary General. An essential change I would recommend is to move responsibility for chairing the ACMF from the Chairmanship's hands to the Secretariat. The rationale for the current model, in which the

Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE, 27 June 2005, pp. 19-20, available at: <http://www.osce.org/cio/15805>; *Lessons Learned for the OSCE from its Engagement in Ukraine. Interim Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project*, June 2015, p. 11, available at: <http://www.osce.org/networks/164561>.

ACMF is chaired for the first part of the year by the current Chairmanship and in early autumn shifts to the incoming Chairmanship, is probably based on the assumption that the incoming Chairmanship can reflect its priorities in the Unified Budget for the upcoming year. In fact, however, the current OSCE budget cycle does not allow for this, as most work on the Programme Outline for the upcoming year is actually done well before the incoming Chairmanship even defines and presents its priorities. Instead, the Programme Outline is based on a Programme Budget Performance Report from the previous year and reflects operational priorities, not Chairmanship priorities. Moreover, budget negotiations are quite a complex and technical operation, and despite everyone's best efforts and dedication, having a new ACMF Chair every year makes things more complicated and time-consuming. Given the role of the Secretariat in preparing the Programme Outline and its long-standing experience and capacities in this area, it would make more sense and be more effective if the ACMF were chaired by the Secretariat.

However, what is even more damaging to the functioning of the Organization in the long term is the policy of "zero nominal growth" that has become more prevalent in budget negotiations in recent years. In practical terms, this means a gradual decline in resources, as inflation cuts deeper and deeper. This trend is simply not sustainable if the Organization continues to be tasked with new commitments every year. Almost all Ministerial Council decisions tasking the OSCE with new activities adopted in recent years include the proviso "within available resources". This is not always realistic. While we need to remain cost-conscious and transparent when spending public funds, the ambitions that the participating States have for the Organization need to be backed up with sufficient resources. Compared to many other multilateral institutions, the OSCE is a very cost-effective organization that is capable of high performance with modest resources. There are limits to what it can do, however, and if this trend is not reversed by the participating States, the OSCE slowly but surely risks losing its credibility and effectiveness, and could eventually become irrelevant.

Another closely related issue is the neglect of financial commitments and obligations by some participating States. For instance, at the time I left my post, some countries were more than three years behind in their payments to the Unified Budget, and one participating State was even threatening to make only selective payments. This is something that should not be accepted by other participating States, and there should be a mechanism that would put pressure on those countries that do not meet their obligations. This could be done, for instance, through suspension of their right to participate in consensus decision-making.

An increasing number of OSCE activities are supported through extra-budgetary projects that are funded by voluntary contributions from participating States. While this model cannot and should not replace the annual Unified Budget, it is a beneficial supplement that gives the Organization ad-

ditional means to seek funding and grants participating States the flexibility to allocate resources depending on their individual priorities. However, the growing proportion of extra-budgetary funding needs to go hand in hand with greater transparency and accountability for how these resources are received and utilized, not only in relation to individual donors but for all OSCE participating States.

The OSCE's experience with the crisis in and around Ukraine has underlined the need for the Organization to diversify its resources. Unexpected and immediate financial requirements related to the deployment of the SMM to Ukraine naturally resulted in a rapid shift in budget priorities on the part of many participating States, which has had significant consequences for the Organization's work in other key areas. The OSCE has already started exploring new sources of funding, such as private and public foundations, development banks, and philanthropic organizations. After all, the Organization's core mission and activities are of interest to many more stakeholders than just governments. But this will be a long-term effort that will require a change of mindset as well as the development of a fundraising strategy and necessary capacities in the Secretariat. A code of conduct and clear rules and regulations should be adopted to ensure complete transparency and accountability in both seeking and accepting financial contributions from such entities.

The Future of OSCE Field Presences

The OSCE is primarily a field-based organization. OSCE field presences have a strong track record in supporting participating States in implementing their OSCE principles and commitments and in carrying out OSCE's tasks related to the conflict cycle. While discussions about OSCE field presences in previous years have mostly focused on strengthening their effectiveness and operational capacities, it is time to identify new approaches that can enable the Organization to respond effectively to a rapidly changing environment, including through the possible establishment of new types of presence in different parts of the OSCE area. It is obvious that the specific needs and conditions of various participating States and regions have evolved significantly since the early 1990s. This is not to say that there is a crisis of OSCE field presences on the ground (in fact, quite the contrary), but rather that an old method needs to be updated. Another issue is a certain sense of imbalance whereby some countries feel they are being scrutinized by others. We need to progressively move away from such a perception.

The OSCE should retain field operations that have been deployed in response to complex conflict or post-conflict situations. As demonstrated by the crisis in and around Ukraine, this model remains one of the Organization's key tools for crisis management and conflict resolution. Such robust

operations still need to be based on strong mandates that are approved by consensus. At the same time, we should begin to think about introducing new approaches to the OSCE's field work that would allow for more flexibility and adjustability based on local needs and requirements.

One option could be lighter assistance missions, which would help participating States implement their OSCE commitments and focus on one or more specific issues. In principle, such missions would function as project/programme offices, and their activities could be tailored to the specific needs of a host country. They would not require a mandate by consensus but would be initiated upon the request of a host country and funded on a case-by-case basis (e.g., through extra-budgetary contributions, host country sponsoring, etc.). Such presences could also be located West of Vienna. To a certain degree, we can see such a model slowly emerging in the development of project packages by the Secretariat and institutions for Belarus and Armenia, which are administrated at headquarters level and do not have a field-based component.

The OSCE should also invest more in centres of excellence. The Organization already has two successful examples: the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. These operate as de facto centres of excellence in their respective fields, although they are not explicitly designed as such. Thematic expertise that the OSCE has acquired in many areas over the years could be used to establish other stand-alone bodies, on topics such as water management, combating trafficking in human beings, good governance, or security sector governance. More engagement through centres of excellence, however, can only be achieved with strong support, including financial support, from participating States.

Partnerships

The growing complexity of current security challenges calls for greater co-operation among all relevant actors. It is becoming more necessary than ever to join forces and look for synergies and complementarities in our activities. As a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the OSCE's relations with other international, regional, and sub-regional organizations are of crucial importance. During my tenure, I tried to strengthen the Organization's existing partnerships and create new ones. My priority was in particular to deepen co-operation between the OSCE and the UN, and the establishment of the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Vienna was a tangible outcome of these efforts. The Office has significantly increased and strengthened working-level contacts between the two organizations and has enabled the OSCE to benefit from favourable UN procurement arrangements. Based on this positive experience, I believe the OSCE could greatly benefit

in the future from posting a liaison officer to the headquarters of its most important partners, including the UN, the EU, NATO, the CSTO, the CIS, and the Council of Europe.

In recent years, the OSCE's Mediterranean and Asian Partnerships for Co-operation have grown in terms of their political profile and practical co-operation. Yet their potential is still to be fully tapped, and mutual interaction needs to become more action-oriented. Internal constraints, in particular the "out of area" restriction and strict rules on the use of the Partnership Fund, prevent the OSCE from implementing activities for the benefit of its Partners without consensus approval by participating States. As a result, the executive structures have not been able to meet some of the technical assistance expectations of the Mediterranean Partners, which in my view is a missed opportunity. The participating States should reconsider the rules concerning engagement with OSCE Partners for Co-operation and make them more flexible to allow for more operational and result-oriented interactions in the future.

In addition to traditional partners, the OSCE should embrace innovative forms of multilateral co-operation that complement traditional intergovernmental dynamics. Fostering the Organization's engagement with civil society and academia was one of my personal priorities as Secretary General, and I am pleased that several of the initiatives I introduced, namely the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions and the New-Med Track II Network, have taken root and are flourishing. The Organization should maintain this engagement and search for additional ways to feed valuable analysis and fresh ideas and recommendations into its security debate. At the same time, the OSCE should explore building coalitions and strategic partnerships with other non-traditional actors such as municipal governments, philanthropic organizations, and the private sector. These players can help us to confront transnational and global challenges more effectively and can over time contribute new resources to sustain our activities. Local governments in particular are often at the forefront in addressing many of today's security challenges, and we should draw on their unique experience.

OSCE Staff

The best resource of any organization is its staff, and the OSCE is no different in this regard. Having worked for and with a wide range of international organizations, I can confidently say that the OSCE staff ranks among the most committed and efficient. Yet the Organization's employment conditions are not competitive when compared to other similar international organizations. Putting aside the issue of the remuneration package itself, the Organization's strict term limits on service for professional staff is the main weakness of the OSCE's human resources policies. It leads to accelerated staff rotation, which translates into greater costs for participating States and ineffi-

ciency and loss of institutional memory for the Organization. As a result, many staff members, especially senior managers and those with excellent performance records, leave the Organization well before the end of their contract to take up posts elsewhere. A reform of term limits for professional staff, without changing the non-career policy of the Organization, would improve overall effectiveness.

The OSCE also relies heavily on staff seconded by participating States in many of its activities, particularly in the field. But the current model of the secondment system is not sustainable and needs urgent reform. The secondment policies of participating States differ dramatically, which results in significant inequalities among OSCE staff when it comes to their remuneration packages, professional level, and geographical and gender balance. This also translates into far fewer applications for seconded posts than for contracted posts, and in a number of instances no candidates at all for some seconded posts, despite repeated advertisement. While it is unrealistic to expect all 57 participating States to unify their policies on seconding professionals to the Organization, some fundamental principles and conditions respected by all seconding authorities should be adopted.

If participating States want the OSCE to keep attracting professional and competent international staff in the future, they need to fundamentally rethink the Organization's human resources policies, especially when it comes to term limits and the secondment system.

Policy Analysis and Outreach

The increasingly complex and dynamic security environment in which the OSCE operates requires enhanced capacities that would enable the Organization to strengthen its long-term policy and operational planning focused on global, overarching goals, including horizontal and cross-dimensional issues. This would also call for strengthening long-term strategic planning capacities in key organizational units. Although my proposal for the budget-neutral creation of a Department of Policy Analysis and Outreach was blocked by participating States, I still believe the Organization needs to enhance its policy analysis and planning capacities. Furthermore, because of the inherent complexity of the OSCE and the long-term nature of its work, it is a challenge for the Organization to project an active and strong image that would attract sustained attention in the capitals of participating States and raise awareness among the general public. Outside of brief periods of crisis when the OSCE is in the spotlight, the Organization needs to develop a better communication strategy to ensure constant outreach, visibility, and the promotion of its achievements. Small information offices across the OSCE region that would promote OSCE values, principles, and commitments and inform the general public about OSCE activities could be beneficial in this regard. They could

be established and run by participating States themselves with support from the relevant OSCE executive structures.

A Cross-Dimensional Approach

Since most security challenges today are cross-dimensional, it is time to acknowledge that the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security needs updating to move beyond the strict divisions of self-contained security dimensions. This calls for a change of mindset: The OSCE should take a more flexible approach, opening up to more cross-cutting policies and increasing co-ordination among the executive structures and within the Secretariat. Participating States should consider possible ways to pursue increased cross-dimensionality in the Organization's work, both conceptually and organizationally. For instance, more cross-dimensional initiatives and activities, such as regular meetings on cross-dimensional issues, could be introduced into the work of the PC's three Committees. The functioning of key annual OSCE meetings across all three dimensions – the Annual Security Review Conference, the Economic and Environmental Forum, and the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting – should be also reconsidered. The Organization would benefit from a proper annual review process on all three dimensions, and the structure and content of these events should be amended accordingly to ensure that they complement each other. Each should have a similar generic standing agenda with regard to all other details such as dates and modalities, and should have a more concrete focus that is decided by the Chairmanship and that does not require a special decision by the PC.

Conclusion

Serving as OSCE Secretary General was the most challenging, humbling, and in many ways frustrating position I have ever held – but it was also the most inspiring and rewarding. The OSCE has a long history of preventing conflicts and promoting stability that the entire OSCE family can be proud of. The Organization has proven to be a precious tool, especially during times of tension, and in recent years it has reconfirmed its relevance as a platform for inclusive security dialogue and joint action in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian space, aligning its work ever more closely with the global peace and security agenda. Over the years, it has repeatedly proved its operational flexibility and adaptability. In 2015, the OSCE's contribution to peace and security in Europe was recognized by prestigious awards from the Munich Security Conference and the German city of Magdeburg.

But the OSCE has great potential to do more. Current security challenges require a space for engagement in an increasingly polarized and con-

frontational environment. This is not new: We went down that road a few decades ago when the world was split into two camps threatening to annihilate each other, and with them the rest of the world. While the current situation is in many ways different from the past, the way out of it remains the same: mutual dialogue and co-operation. Cold War tensions led to the creation of the CSCE, which later transformed into the OSCE. It is now our common responsibility to build on this heritage and make full use of the OSCE's potential to help create a safer and more stable future for us all. It is high time to revive result-oriented dialogue, and we can start by discussing how to make the OSCE more resilient, effective, and efficient for years to come.