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Capacity-Building in the OSCE Context

Introduction

The OSCE is often described as a platform for "political dialogue and joint action". While these are distinct categories, they represent two sides of one coin, as dialogue without co-operation is meaningless and co-operation without dialogue impossible. This realization was one of the driving forces behind the transformation of the CSCE into the OSCE in the early 1990s, providing what was originally a standing conference between two opposing blocs of the Cold War era with permanent structures and operational capacities. Since then, the OSCE has been facilitating security co-operation among its participating States on a wide range of issues, from security sector reform and military risk reduction on the one hand, to human rights and democratization on the other.

The transformation of the international environment in recent years, marked by accelerating globalization and rapid technological advances, has increased demands on international co-operation. With our world becoming more complex, interconnected, and interdependent than ever before, there are hardly any issues that can be effectively addressed by one state alone. In the security sphere, this is particularly evident in the case of transnational threats and challenges such as cyber security, terrorism, organized crime, illicit trafficking, migration, and climate change. Since the turn of the century, international co-operation on these issues has been expanding, and the OSCE is no exception. In early 2000s, the OSCE Secretariat established the relevant operational capacities, namely the Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU), the Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU), the Border Security and Management Unit (BSMU), and the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (OSR/CTHB).[1] At the same time, the OSCE participating States adopted key policy documents to guide the Organization's work in this area, such as the Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism,[2] the Strategy to Address Threats to Security and

Note: Opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not represent the official position of any institution or organization.

1 In 2012, the Action against Terrorism Unit, the Strategic Police Matters Unit, and the Borders Security and Management Unit were consolidated in the newly created Transnational Threats Department (TNTD).

2 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Porto 2002, OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism, MC(10).JOUR/2, 7 December 2002, available at: https://www.osce.org/mc/42536.

Stability in the Twenty-First Century,[3] and the Border Security and Management Concept.[4] A few years later, additional strategic documents were adopted: the Strategic Framework for Police-Related Activities,[5] the Concept for Combating the Threat of Illicit Drugs and the Diversion of Chemical Precursors,[6] and the Consolidated Framework for the Fight Against Terrorism.[7]

Based on these documents, the OSCE's activities with regard to countering transnational threats and challenges can be grouped into several general categories: providing a platform for political discussions on these issues; facilitating exchange of information and best practices; raising awareness; advising on policies and reforms; conducting training activities for practitioners and decision-makers; and building the capacities of state or non-state actors. This contribution focuses on the last of these. In particular, it outlines key elements of effective capacity-building and provides an example of a concrete capacity-building project of the OSCE that is currently being implemented in South-Eastern Europe. We then discuss the OSCE's key strengths and weaknesses in the area of capacity-building.

Elements of Effective Capacity-Building

Capacity-building, sometimes called capacity development, is one of the main types of assistance provided by international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, to a wide variety of state and non-state actors. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), capacity-building can be defined as "the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time".[8] Capacity-building can be thus conducted at three different levels: individual, organizational, and societal. The UNDP identifies five steps in this process: (1) engage stakeholders

3 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century, Strategy adopted at the 11th Meeting of the Ministerial Council, Maastricht, 1 and 2 December 2003, 2 December 2003, available at: https://www.osce.org/mc/17504.

4 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Ljubljana 2005, Border Security and Management Concept, MC.DOC/2/05, 6 December 2005, available at: https://www.osce.org/mc/17452.

5 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, Decision No. 1049, OSCE Strategic Framework for Police-Related Activities, PC.DEC/1049, 26 July 2012, available at: https://www.osce.org/pc/92559.

6 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, Decision No. 1048, OSCE Concept for Combating the Threat of Illicit Drugs and the Diversion of Chemical Precursors, PC.DEC/1048, 26 July 2012, available at: https://www.osce.org/pc/92557.

7 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, Decision No. 1063, OSCE Consolidated Framework for the Fight against Terrorism, PC.DEC/1063, 7 December 2012, available at: https://www.osce.org/pc/98008.

8 United Nations Development Programme, Supporting Capacity Development: The UNDP Approach, 4 June 2008, p. 4, available at: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/capacity-building/support-capacity-development-the-undp-approach.html.

on capacity development, (2) assess capacity assets and needs, (3) formulate a capacity development response, (4) implement a capacity development response, and (5) evaluate capacity development.[9]

While in practice this process may not always be so straightforward, the steps outlined above provide a good guideline when considering the key elements in ensuring effective capacity-building.[10] The most essential of these is the ownership and engagement of beneficiaries. Capacity-building goes beyond simple training or technical assistance; it requires a qualitative change in processes, attitudes, behaviours, and often even mindsets. This is unthinkable without the beneficiary's direct engagement and stake in achieving such a long-term change. In other words, for any capacity-building project or programme to be successful, there needs to be active support, buy-in and engagement from the intended beneficiaries. This point deserves to be underlined, as sometimes it is assumed that beneficiaries will automatically support any capacity-building initiative, especially if it addresses a salient issue or an objectively existing gap, because from a rational point of view, it must be in their interest. In reality, a number of other factors influence decision-making, whether political, financial, societal, cultural, or even personal in nature. Especially in the realm of politics, these factors often play a more important role than rational considerations. Therefore, beneficiaries' engagement and sense of ownership should never be assumed, regardless of the quality of a proposed initiative.

A second important element of effective capacity-building is sustainability. Sustainability can be seen from two angles. On the one hand, it means that an intervention needs to produce results that are sustainable for a beneficiary once the intervention is over. In other words, a change in processes, attitudes, or behaviours achieved by a capacity-building project or programme will remain in place after external support is removed. On the other hand, sustainability should be an important consideration, not only in relation to a beneficiary, but also with regard to the broader overall strategy of an implementing institution. This means that any capacity-building initiative should be designed in a way that will enable future activities that can further build upon its results and achievements. Due to the complexity of most contemporary security challenges, projects and programmes can rarely address the phenomena they target in their entirety. At best, they can only deal successfully with one particular aspect. Furthermore, most contemporary challenges evolve rapidly over a relatively short period of time. All these factors underline the importance of having a long-term strategic approach that underpins the development of any capacity-building initiative in a particular thematic area.

9 Cf. United Nations Development Programme, Capacity Development: A UNDP Primer, 13 October 2009, p. 21, available at: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/capacity-building/capacity-development-a-undp-primer.html

10 The purpose is not to provide an exhaustive list but to highlight key issues from the author's perspective.

Another essential aspect is tailoring activities to beneficiaries' needs, conditions, and contexts. While this may seem trivial, in practice it is not always easy to do. It requires devoting significant time and resources to a thorough assessment and mapping of the existing situation, not only before implementing any activities, but ideally even before developing a capacity-building project or programme itself. Despite its crucial importance, this first step is often not attractive to donors. Moreover, context (e.g. historical, socio-cultural, political etc.) and local conditions (e.g. a relevant legislative framework), especially in the case of multi-year projects and programmes, may change over time. A good capacity-building initiative thus needs to be designed in a way that allows for a certain degree of flexibility so that it can adapt to an evolving situation. All these potential problems are amplified in the case of regional projects where differences in needs, conditions, and contexts are multiplied by a number of different beneficiaries. Regional projects have obvious advantages – not only do they save time and resources, they also facilitate regional co-operation and the creation of professional and personal networks. However, they do have a downside in terms of the degree to which various activities can be individually tailored to each beneficiary. Therefore, any regional capacity-building initiative should always consider how it might effectively tailor its content and activities to the different needs, conditions, and contexts of each of its beneficiaries.

An important part of tailoring activities to beneficiaries is evaluation. Evaluation is normally conducted at the end of an initiative but from a long-term perspective, a systematic evaluation of projects and programmes that were implemented in the past (for instance, two or three years ago) plays even more important role in developing future activities. Any lessons learned or good practices identified by such an evaluation help to better tailor capacity-building activities in a given thematic or geographical area.

Last but not least, effective capacity-building requires co-ordination as well as co-operation among key international players. Many international organizations focus on similar thematic issues and operate in overlapping geographical regions. Co-ordinating capacity-building activities in a particular thematic or geographical area is therefore necessary to avoid duplication. It can also help organizations to learn from each other's experiences and practices. While co-ordination is an important first step, in many cases it is desirable to translate this into co-operation. As already mentioned above, due to the complexity of most contemporary security challenges, capacity-building initiatives cannot address the phenomena they target in their entirety. Furthermore, no state can successfully deal with today's challenges alone, and nor can any international organization. It is increasingly necessary to join forces and resources, both human and financial, to complement and support each other's activities in order to achieve a significant and long-lasting impact. Therefore, co-ordination and co-operation with other key international actors go hand in hand

and should be an integral part of every capacity-building initiative, beginning with a needs assessment and the development phase of the initiative.

It goes without saying that all the elements mentioned above complement one another. For instance, without beneficiaries' engagement and sense of ownership, sustainability is unthinkable. If the project or programme activities are not tailored to beneficiaries' needs and conditions, they are unlikely to generate sufficient interest to ensure engagement and ownership. Likewise, without co-ordination and co-operation with other key international actors, an initiative risks duplication or overlapping with other similar projects, making it less relevant for beneficiaries, thus undermining their engagement, and weakening the overall impact.

OSCE Capacity-Building in Practice

To demonstrate the OSCE's work in this area, it is worth taking a more detailed look at one of the Organization's current capacity-building projects. In particular, this contribution will describe the extra-budgetary project "Capacity Building for Criminal Justice Practitioners Combating Cybercrime and Cyber-enabled Crime in South-Eastern Europe".[11] Implementation of this project by the OSCE Transnational Threats Department's Strategic Police Matters Unit (TNTD/SPMU) began in May 2017.

The objective of this two-year regional project is to enhance the capabilities of the criminal justice institutions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia in investigating and prosecuting cybercrime and cyber-enabled crime through building up their national training capacities in this area. The project employs a train-the-trainer approach as its core element, with each beneficiary country nominating two experts to serve as "national trainers" throughout the project's duration. In order to ensure that local beneficiaries are engaged and take ownership of the project, to facilitate information sharing and to co-ordinate all activities, the project has established a co-ordination board, which consists of representatives from relevant national authorities and OSCE field operations in the region. The board plays a crucial role not only in co-ordinating and monitoring the project's implementation, but also in deciding on the modalities of various activities and resolving a number of practical issues. The project thus represents a joint endeavour of the OSCE Secretariat, the OSCE field operations in South-eastern Europe, and relevant national authorities of the beneficiary countries.

Project activities primarily consist of a series of training courses focusing on three key thematic areas, namely identification and handling of digital evidence by first responders; investigation of crimes facilitated by the use of the

11 The project is funded by the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States of America.

Darknet and cryptocurrencies; and enhancing skills and knowledge of the specialized cybercrime/digital forensics investigation units in conducting live data forensics and malware investigations. The training activities are implemented in several phases. In the first phase, the courses are delivered at the regional level to "national trainers" and a group of other relevant practitioners from all beneficiary countries. The rationale behind having such a mixed training audience that partially varies from course to course is to ensure that in each country, there are practitioners who not only have practical experience in the given thematic area, but are also familiar with the corresponding training course. This ensures they are later well positioned to assist "national trainers" and relevant training institutions in their countries with running their own courses. Between December 2017 and April 2018, the TNTD/SPMU organized six one-week courses for over 120 criminal justice practitioners from the region. A number of external partners were involved in these training activities: other international organizations (EUROPOL's European Cybercrime Centre and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC), academia (University College Dublin's Centre for Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Investigation), non-profit international associations (European Cybercrime Training and Education Group, ECTEG), the private sector (Austrian Institute of Technology, AIT) and a number of leading experts from several OSCE participating States such as Germany, Norway, and Belgium.

In the project's second phase, "national trainers" take the content from the first phase and adapt it to their national needs, conditions, and context, such as their legislative framework. The purpose is not to replicate the regional courses but to take the modules that are most relevant and develop courses that are tailored to each beneficiary country. For instance, highly specialized courses may not be urgently or regularly needed in each country, while a basic course for police officers (cadets or those already in service) on identifying and seizing digital evidence may be in high demand. Then, "national trainers", together with the relevant training institutions, organize a first round of pilot courses at the national level. This is supported, monitored and evaluated by the project's co-ordination board members in each country, i.e. a representative from an OSCE field operation and a representative from a relevant national authority. The second phase concludes with a regional workshop to review the first round of local training activities, identify lessons learned and existing gaps, and propose recommendations for the next round of training activities.

Finally, in the project's third phase, another round of training courses, amended as per recommendations from the workshop, takes place at the national level. This is again monitored and evaluated by the project's co-ordination board members. At the same time, TNTD/SPMU, with the active support of field operations in the region, consults the relevant national training institutions on how to incorporate the courses developed and piloted by "national trainers" into official teaching curricula so they become a standard part of their educational programme and can be run regularly in the future after the

project's completion. The project is then finalized with an external evaluation and a concluding conference that takes stock of its implementation and identifies areas requiring special attention in the future.

Turning back to the elements of effective capacity-building mentioned in the previous chapter, several key points can be underlined. First, the project's co-ordination board and training activities conducted at the national level ensure beneficiaries are actively engaged and take ownership throughout the project's entire duration. Second, adaptation of the courses by "national trainers" should guarantee that the content is tailored to the actual needs, conditions, and context of each beneficiary country. Constant monitoring and evaluation of training activities and adoption of the courses by the respective training institutions should then ensure long-term sustainability. Furthermore, the project provides a good basis for future capacity-building initiatives in this area that can further build on their outcomes. These can include, for instance, initiatives aimed at further enhancing the training capacities of the respective countries, either vertically, by introducing more advanced specialized courses, or horizontally, by introducing a similar type of training to other criminal justice practitioners such as judges or defence lawyers. Finally, directly engaging a number of external partners in the regional training courses facilitates the co-ordination and co-operation of the project's activities with other leading actors in the field.

The OSCE's Strengths and Weaknesses in Capacity-Building

After providing an example of a capacity-building initiative run by the OSCE, we now turn our attention to discussing strengths and weaknesses of the Organization in this type of activity. It should be stressed that the issues highlighted below are not limited only to capacity-building, but apply to the OSCE's work in general. Nevertheless, due to the specific nature of capacity-building initiatives, the implications of these factors may be particularly relevant in this area.

Starting at the political level, the OSCE is well positioned to conduct capacity-building for several reasons. First, the Organization embodies a co-operative approach to security, which is an indispensable component of its political mandate as well as its very rationale for existence. While co-operation can be considered essential in any multilateral framework or organization, in the case of OSCE it is deeply written in its "genetic code", as clearly indicated not only by its name, but also by its history and a wide set of commitments adopted by the participating States over the years. The OSCE's mandate and its modus operandi thus very much reflect the principles of co-operation and collaboration that also underpin capacity-building.

Second, the OSCE's comprehensive model of security with its three dimensions (politico-military, economic and environmental, and human) provides

a good basis for many capacity-building activities. Thanks to this multi-dimensional approach to security, the Organization has accumulated expertise in a number of thematic areas over the years and managed to apply its diverse toolbox to a variety of issues, from arms proliferation and the promotion of military transparency, to the resolution of protracted conflicts, support for transition processes and democratic reforms, and combating transnational threats. With the growing complexity of many contemporary security challenges, this approach is highly relevant and is playing an increasingly important role.

Finally, as the world's largest regional security organization, the OSCE has a wide geographical scope that enables it to connect such diverse regions as North America and Europe on the one hand, and Central Asia or South Caucasus on the other. This is particularly beneficial for capacity-building initiatives in various thematic areas, as the Organization can take advantage of existing expertise in one participating State and bring it to activities in another State, often hundreds of miles away from each other. The OSCE's geographical reach also helps with building truly diverse international partnerships and professional networks as well as exchanging best practices and experiences among a wide variety of experts and organizations, both of which are important elements for effective capacity-building.

At the operational level, the biggest strength of the OSCE lies in its extensive network of field operations. These are currently located in South-eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia, where 2,820 of the Organization's 3,416 staff members (i.e. over 80 per cent) were based in 2017.[12] Thanks to their long-term physical presence in host countries, the OSCE field operations have a deep understanding of local conditions and realities and an extensive network of contacts with state and non-state actors. This makes them particularly well positioned to conduct capacity-building activities, and assist other OSCE executive structures based outside the host country with the implementation of such initiatives, be it the OSCE Secretariat or any of the three specialized OSCE Institutions.

The field operations are instrumental in several aspects that are essential for effective capacity-building. For instance, thanks to their direct and constant access to key stakeholders, they can effectively facilitate relations with the main beneficiaries and ensure their sustained engagement and responsiveness. Numerous working contacts and partnerships established by the field operations over the years at different levels of government and across various sectors of society play a crucial role during the implementation of a capacity-building initiative. They are also particularly helpful when conducting a thorough needs assessment in a certain thematic area or an evaluation of a project's impact after its completion. Furthermore, the physical presence in a host coun-

12 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Annual Report 2017, Vienna 2018, p. 102, available at: https://www.osce.org/annual-report/2017.

try enables the field operations to constantly monitor the progress of beneficiaries, provide practical support where it is needed, and immediately address any complications that may arise. In short, a physical presence in a beneficiary country provides numerous advantages that are very important for the successful and effective implementation of any international initiative at all stages, from assessment and development to implementation and evaluation. In the case of capacity-building initiatives, which require a lasting change in processes, attitudes, behaviours, or mindsets, such a presence is of critical importance.

Another strength of the OSCE at the operational level is its wide network of partnerships, especially with other international organizations. Extensive contacts at both leadership and working levels enable the OSCE to better coordinate its activities with other key players and establish practical cooperation on various programmatic activities, bringing in expertise from other institutions, as clearly illustrated by the capacity-building project on combating cybercrime in South-Eastern Europe mentioned above. Indeed, most programmatic units and departments of the OSCE executive structures have established a number of partnerships over the years. For instance, the TNTD/SPMU alone can draw on several co-operation agreements and action plans signed by the OSCE and other key international actors such as the UNODC, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) or the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL).

While the OSCE possesses several advantages in conducting capacity-building activities, there are also some weak points that can undermine the Organization's efforts in this area.

The most obvious weakness of the OSCE stems from the complicated budget situation it has faced for several years. With a few exceptions, the OSCE's annual budget has been constantly decreasing since 2000.[13] Recently, the decrease seems to have turned into stagnation. However, with some participating States pursuing the policy of zero nominal growth, in practical terms this means that the actual resources of the Organization are still shrinking every year as inflation cuts deeper and deeper, although the pace is slower and more gradual than in the case of outright cuts. The lack of resources, combined with the extensive delays in budget approval that have become a common practice in recent years, results in a limited amount of operational funds available for programmatic work. Therefore, most OSCE executive structures have to rely on extra-budgetary contributions to fund their activities, especially those that are more demanding in terms of both time and finances, such as capacity-building. The strong reliance on voluntary contributions poses a challenge for this type of activity, since it does not allow for any long-term strategic planning and cannot guarantee continuity. It is very rare that a larger multi-year project,

13 Cf. Christian Nünlist, The OSCE and the Future of European Security, CSS Analyses in Security Policy No. 202, February 2017, p. 3, at: http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse202-EN.pdf.

regardless of its type or scope, would receive full funding from the very beginning. Many donors are simply not able to provide multi-year funding as their budgets are approved only on an annual basis. Furthermore, some countries require that their contributions are used to fund only activities that take place in the given financial year. In short, financing capacity-building initiatives that are often implemented over several years and require significant resources through extra-budgetary contributions is challenging, due to various existing limitations in relation to this type of funding.

Another weakness that may have negative implications for capacity-building activities is a high turnover among the OSCE's staff. This is caused by the Organization's strict policy on a period of service for professional staff. For most positions, it is limited to seven years of service in one post and a maximum of ten years in total. For senior management positions, the limit is five years and for directors it is only four years. This leads to an accelerated rotation of staff, especially at the senior level, as many staff members do not want to wait until the very end of their contracts to start looking for a new job. As a result, many projects that span over a few years, as is usually the case with capacity-building, have more than one project manager in the course of their implementation. This poses similar challenges for capacity-building activities as the lack of sustained and predictable financing: It can undermine long-term planning and continuity. In addition, working and personal relationships with counterparts from beneficiary institutions cannot always be easily transferred to a new manager.

Finally, the OSCE lacks a systematic evaluation of its programmatic activities. As mentioned above, evaluation is an important step in any capacity-building process. Thorough evaluation requires time and resources, both human and financial, something that many publically funded organizations lack. The OSCE Secretariat's Office of Internal Oversight, among others, is responsible for evaluating the Organization's work, but given its limited budget and staff, it can only evaluate a small portion of the OSCE's activities. Furthermore, virtually all capacity-building projects are funded via extra-budgetary contributions, which are not evaluated automatically. Therefore, the only option to ensure that an external evaluation will be conducted is to include financial resources for such an activity in a project's budget. However, with many projects not receiving full funding, there is no guarantee that sufficient resources will be available for a final evaluation at the end. Furthermore, just as with needs assessment, an evaluation does not necessarily represent a very attractive activity for most donors.

Conclusion

Capacity-building represents an important part of the work of international organizations like the OSCE. Its main defining feature lies in the fact that it aims

to change the attitudes, behaviours, processes, or even mindsets that form a framework within which beneficiary actors address certain thematic issues. Its ultimate goal is thus to achieve a long-lasting impact. There are several important elements that can ensure such efforts are effective. In particular, these include ensuring beneficiaries are engaged and take ownership of projects; long-term sustainability; tailoring activities to beneficiary's needs, conditions, and contexts; and co-ordination and co-operation of the implementing organization with other key actors in a given thematic or geographical area.

As demonstrated with the example of a regional capacity-building project on combating cybercrime in South-Eastern Europe described above, the OSCE is well positioned to effectively support its participating States in building their capacities to address contemporary security threats and challenges. The Organization's key added value in this regard lies in its co-operative and multidimensional approach to security, geographical scope, strong physical presence in many strategic regions such as South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, and a wide network of international partnerships. All of these represent important elements that can facilitate effective and successful capacity-building.

At the same time, it should be recognized that the OSCE faces several challenges in this area. These are mainly related to the lack of predictable and consistent funding that leads to a heavy reliance on voluntary contributions, a high turnover of the Organization's staff, and the lack of systematic evaluation. However, it can be argued that these shortcomings could be resolved if there was sufficient political will among the OSCE participating States. Some of these issues are also being addressed by the new OSCE Secretary General, Thomas Greminger, in his "fit for purpose" reform agenda.

With the growing complexity, interconnectedness, and interdependence of the international security environment, a demand for capacity-building assistance can be expected to grow in the coming years. The OSCE is well equipped to provide this kind of support to its participating States and thus contribute to building resilient societies that are prepared for the current as well as future challenges.