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## Adapting to a Changed World: The CSCE/OSCE in 1990 and Today

The OSCE reform debates over the last twenty years have taken place mostly under the heading “*Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE*”. There were good reasons for this focus, since the organizational strength of the OSCE could never keep up with the challenges it faced. However, the debate has never got to the heart of the need for reform: changing political realities. As it was neither desirable nor possible to tackle the political conflicts, the debate was limited to organizational matters.

The political culture, focus and remit of international organizations (IOs) can only be understood in the context of their political environment and its fluctuations. The structure of an organization is shaped significantly in its formation phase. Such structures harden over time and may make any necessary adaptations more difficult. This is as true of the OSCE as any other IO.

This article is based on the observation that the OSCE was largely formed by the political situation at the start of the 1990s, but that today’s political climate is fundamentally different. This produces a tension between the orientation of the Organization as it has developed historically, and the current challenges the Organization faces. The following will examine certain aspects of this tension.

### *The CSCE/OSCE as a Product of the Early 1990s*

The CSCE/OSCE<sup>1</sup> was, to a large extent, shaped by the transformation phase in the Central and Eastern European states of the late 1980s and the early 1990s. At this time, the Euro-Atlantic space was still regarded as the centre of the world, the global supremacy of the USA had not yet been called into question, and commentators spoke of a “unipolar moment”. With the Charter of Paris, all participating States recognized democracy, the rule of law, and the market economy as binding principles for coexistence and wanted to cooperate with one another and with the rest of the world on this basis:

Therefore, we issue a call from Paris today to all the nations of the world. We stand ready to join with any and all States in common efforts to protect and advance the community of fundamental human values.”<sup>2</sup>

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1 For the sake of simplicity, the following refers to the OSCE throughout.

2 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, Paris 1990, pp. 6-7, available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/39516>.

The prevailing mood at the time cannot be summed up better: the West uniting with the rest of the world on the basis of shared values. This included the general expectation that the democratic transformation in the post-Soviet space would quickly lead to sustainable success.

Unlike interest-based organizations, the OSCE has always been very norms-based. Building on the Helsinki Process, its normative *acquis* was developed within a few years, largely between 1990 and 1992, and then later differentiated, but barely expanded substantially. The normative *acquis* of the OSCE in terms of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, but also a catalogue of minority rights – which has since never been surpassed – was already included in the Copenhagen Document of June 1990 and was thereby also adopted by the Soviet Union. The 1990 Charter of Paris and the Helsinki Summit Declaration of July 1992 raised these commitments to the highest political level, but not much new was added. After 1992, numerous new individual fields of responsibility were opened, including combating human trafficking, and tolerance and non-discrimination, but the core normative commitments were only slightly expanded as a result. One exception was the “Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security”, which formulated and summarized the basic features of co-operative security policy on an international and domestic level at the end of 1994.<sup>3</sup>

A comparable development can be seen in the formation of the organizational structures of the OSCE. Initial approaches to this were already contained in the Charter of Paris, with a total of nine new permanent posts plus technical staff for the Secretariat, the Conflict Prevention Centre, and the Office for Free Elections, the predecessor of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). A breakthrough in the development of the Organization’s structure was achieved at the 1992 Helsinki Summit. Almost all of the structures that make up the Organization today – its field operations, the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the ODIHR – were agreed there. However, the follow-up Summit in Budapest in 1994 brought hardly any innovations. While the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe was renamed the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, this was done with the revealing note:

The change in name from CSCE to OSCE alters neither the character of our CSCE commitments nor the status of the CSCE and its institutions. In its organizational development the CSCE will remain flexible and dynamic.”<sup>4</sup>

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3 OSCE, Forum for Security Co-operation, Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, DOC.FSC/1/95, 3 December 1994/21 December 1994, available at: <https://www.osce.org/fsc/41355>.

4 CSCE, Budapest Document 1994, Towards a Genuine Partnership in a New Era, corrected version of 21 December 1994, Budapest Decisions, p. 4, point 29.

After Budapest, the Organization continued to grow only in a qualitative sense, but not in a structural sense. The number of field operations rose to just under 20; the OSCE budget reached a high of some 200 million euros in 1998/1999 with the *Kosovo Verification Mission*, before it was reduced by means of a zero nominal growth policy to its current level of around 150 million euros, albeit with an additional 100 million euros annually from 2014 for the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. This went hand in hand with a genuine inflation of the OSCE's areas of responsibility, with the consequence that the Secretariat has only one or two experts on certain issues.

### *The Persistence of Informality*

For an international organization of its size – a small to medium-sized IO, albeit with an inclusive membership and comprehensive agenda – the OSCE continues, to a remarkable extent, to adhere to informal structures and working methods. In this respect, the “Organization” still retains many of the structural features and ways of working of the “Conference”. The reason for this is essentially that some member states, which are called participating States in the OSCE, but in particular the USA, have so far refused to grant the OSCE the status of an entity possessing international legal personality, and the diplomatic immunities and privileges for its staff that go with this. Superficially, this was justified by stating that the OSCE must remain “flexible and dynamic”. The real reason, however, was to prevent the OSCE from developing into a competitor for NATO in the early 1990s. Although this option became obsolete years ago, the USA has never deviated from its position, even though the lack of diplomatic immunities creates substantial additional work for the OSCE. For every field operation, a new *Memorandum of Understanding* must be negotiated with the host state for the protection of staff amongst other things, and this often takes months.

The dominance of informality is also evident in the shape of the executive structures of the OSCE, including the Secretary General and the Secretariat as well as the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office. First, the executive structures are weak overall – the legal and political position of the Secretary General is in no way comparable to that of other Secretary Generals such as those of NATO or the UN. In addition, the Secretariat only employs sufficient staff to cover the minimum requirements, and sometimes not even this. Furthermore, there are often weak Chairmanships with limited possibilities, either resulting from the constrained capacities of a small state, or the weak interests of a larger state. Truly strong Chairmanships such as Switzerland in 2014 or Germany in 2016 are a rarity.

In addition to this, the fields of competency of the Chairperson-in-Office and the Secretary General overlap. The Secretary General is still defined as “chief administrative officer”, but in practice has for a long time taken on political tasks. In general, the post-holder travels more extensively around the

participating States than the Chairperson-in-Office and speaks with foreign ministers and presidents. In addition, the Secretary General holds their own informal discourse forum in the form of the so-called “Security Days” – high-level discussion events, attended by a few hundred participants from capital cities and from the OSCE in Vienna.

Conversely, it is not only weak Chairmanship that rely on the Secretariat to perform a large part of the work involved. This includes the organization of events and travel, drawing up all kinds of documents, writing speeches, and much more besides. This corresponds with the size of the staff: While the Secretariat has just under 400 staff, the Chairmanship Team (capital plus Vienna) seldom has more than 45-50 people. It was therefore indeed remarkable that the Swiss Chairmanship itself composed around a hundred press statements around the Ukraine conflict in 2014. Overlapping competencies and the differing ambitions of various Chairmanship states mean that the question of “who does what” has to be newly negotiated from year to year, which is of no benefit to the continuing effectiveness of the executive structures.

Looked at rationally, the position of the Secretary General should be strengthened. Many participating States, however, guard their influence jealously. For some, a weaker OSCE is more convenient than a stronger one.

### *Political Changes in the OSCE Area and Beyond*

In the just under 30 years since 1990, the political environment globally and in Europe has developed to a degree and in directions which no one would have predicted back then. The states in the post-Soviet region, led by authoritarian leaders, have consolidated. In addition, a strong populist and to some extent also authoritarian trend can be observed in the “West”, which itself is becoming increasingly difficult to determine, as a political concept and field of action. Finally, all of these trends are embedded in a rapid process of global hegemonic change. All this leads to instabilities of all kinds and serious deficits in global governance.

### *Consolidation of Authoritarian States*

The expectation that the post-communist states would democratize quickly and sustainably proved completely erroneous, just like many other things that were predicted by a US-dominated political science – which was largely copied here too. On the contrary, the authoritarian regimes in the “East” of the continent remain firmly in the saddle, and it is impossible to predict whether they will undergo a democratic transformation. However, it must not be ignored that these regimes are very varied in the way they manifest, their methods of rule, and succession regulations. On this issue too, political scientists’ predictions

were incorrect in many cases, for example, regarding the expectation that regulating succession in Central Asia would present a large, if not unsolvable problem. The cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan reveal otherwise.

Common to these states as a group is that, contrary to the aims of the Moscow Document of 1991, they have successfully rejected interference in their internal affairs, and in addition, have brought the OSCE decision-making within the human dimension to a standstill and seriously impacted the OSCE's activities in these countries. In short, the authoritarian regimes in the OSCE area feel relatively secure.

This allows them to inquire about certain elements of the rule of law, and this is precisely what can be observed. Recently, government authorities from states such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Belarus have been approaching the OSCE and asking for expertise in the field of the rule of law to such an extent that they occasionally exceed the advisory capacity of the relevant OSCE bodies. It is worth considering the reasons for this: On the one hand, collaboration with the OSCE always offers the possibility for the transfer of a certain legitimacy. On the other, word may have got about in one state or another that, in the current global competition situation, at least some elements of the rule of law are necessary to be able to keep up. Finally, the OSCE itself has also become more co-operative and has abandoned much of the missionary image for which it was known in the 1990s. For the Central Asian states, the Chinese influence has also become so dominant that they are looking for a counterbalance. Ultimately, they are firmly in the saddle, controlling the situation, and can afford to adopt a certain level of expertise in the human dimension without fearing immediate "colour revolutions".

#### *Populist and Authoritarian Tendencies in the West*

From the Second World War until into the 2000s, the concept of the "West" was the centre of political, economic, and military thought and implicitly represented the framework for the normative-political orientation of the OSCE. What still remains of the guiding concept of the "West" is up for debate, but it should be beyond dispute that the "West", in political-operational and normative terms, has become much more contradictory than ever before.

On an economic level, Trump's waves of customs and sanctions have turned the EU and the USA into opponents, to some extent even with a note of hostility. They remain united in a military sense, even if NATO has become much more competitive. In a normative sense, the image of the USA has already suffered since the senseless wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The current nationalist-populist outbursts of the US President and his administration are the icing on the cake. This has relevance for the OSCE, as the US has thus far been one of the most important guarantors of the human dimension (amongst other aspects) – a function which it cannot credibly continue to fulfil.

The EU is experiencing an open-ended existential crisis. For decades, it has not been able to sufficiently mitigate the economic and social split between the northern and southern EU states, which in fact intensified due to the economic crisis in 2008. Added to this are centrifugal tendencies, not only Brexit, and secessionist efforts in several member states. One new element is that the nationalist-populist wave from the edges has washed into the centre. In the “East”, this includes the governments of Poland and Hungary, which openly threaten the rule of law, division of powers, and academic freedom and have thereby provoked the EU to start proceedings. In the “West”, an alliance of left and right-wing populists has, for the first time in a large EU state, taken over the government in Italy, and others could follow. But even in places where right-wing populists remain a minority, as in Germany, their influence is unmistakable. This was illustrated by the refugee policy campaign of the Christian Social Union in Bavaria, CSU) in autumn 2018, which brought the governing “grand coalition” to the limits of its capacity to act. In addition, the EU states appear unable to unite on concrete policies around important issues, such as finance or refugees. However, it must not be overlooked that the same states are indeed able to reach a consensus on other key issues, such as their position on Brexit or Italy’s debt budget.

These processes have a significant influence on the OSCE’s scope of action, both externally (e.g. initiatives involving third parties or participating States) and internally (e.g. decision-making capacities). On the one hand, the normative confusion inside the EU delegitimizes the normative *acquis* of the OSCE. On the other, there has been a significant drop in the attractiveness and cohesion of the European Union, which in many cases provided the political basis for implementing OSCE commitments in EU candidate countries in the 1990s.

#### *A Change in Global Hegemony*

In the two generations from the end of the Second World War to the end of the twentieth century, the USA took on a global hegemonic position which was only challenged by the Soviet Union, but was never seriously questioned, and, after the collapse of real socialism, appeared to offer the short-lived illusion of a “unipolar moment”. However, the illusion was shattered all the more abruptly a short time later. In its hegemonic phase, the USA had not only engaged in bloody wars: It had also made large investments in global public goods that significantly contributed to making the world governable, and keeping it that way. Examples of this are the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), or indeed the whole nuclear arms control regime. The OSCE, too, owes its current form in a large part to the work of the USA.

Apparently, the USA is no longer able or willing to fulfil this hegemonic regulatory function, at least not to the extent it has thus far. On the one hand, it has undermined its own economic and moral-political position with a series

of senseless and essentially failed wars. On the other hand, the Trump administration has begun to withdraw from taking an active role in a number of global and regional regimes, as had its predecessors, albeit in a less extreme form. In contrast to the Obama government, however, the Trump administration has gone about actively destroying multilateral structures and providers of global public goods. The US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on climate change, the partly active attempts to bring down the WTO, and the destruction of the nuclear arms control regime have, in a historically short time, led to a substantial loss in global governability. Other states have so far been only partially willing and in the position to compensate for this loss. China, which itself has a strongly nationalist orientation, played a globally relevant, positive role in the economic crisis of 2008 and also contributed to saving the Paris Agreement, but is, on the whole, reluctant to play an active role in global governance in the long term. Due to its internal turmoil, the EU does not currently seem to be in a position to make pertinent contributions. The result is a shortage of global public goods, a reduction in global governance, more conflict, instability, and “turbulence” (James N. Rosenau) of all kinds.

These processes are taking place against the backdrop of a rapid hegemonic change in the relative positions of the USA and China, which is characterized by a complex relationship between co-operation and conflict. On the one hand, the USA and China are so closely linked to one another due to their deep interdependences that both sides would be seriously affected by the breakdown of these interdependencies. However, what is new about the current situation is, according to the German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on a visit to China in December 2018, that “America wants conflict and China feels so strong that it will no longer avoid conflict”.<sup>5</sup> Nothing will have a greater impact on the world than the development of the China-US relationship somewhere between co-operation and conflict, and nothing is as uncertain as the direction this relationship will take.

However, it is clear that the global centre of power has shifted to Asia and will continue to shift further, and that the exceptional 200-year boom in Europe has come to an end. Europe is no longer at the centre, but rather on the periphery, even though this may contradict the political sentiment we have inherited. Currently, seven per cent of the world’s population live in the EU; by 2030 this will be around five per cent. If the EU is not in a position to act as one (and there is not currently much evidence that it is) its individual parts – even the larger ones such as Germany or France – will no longer play a role in world politics in the future. Contrary to the fantasies in Brussels, the EU will, even in the best case, no longer be a central global actor in most fields of action. Others, particularly China, will instead expand into the governance area of the

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5 Cited in: Friederike Böge, Ein Schlussstrich unter eine Fehleinschätzung. Die China-Reise von Bundespräsident Steinmeier ist auch eine Begegnung mit der Vergangenheit [A final stroke under a misjudgement. President Steinmeier’s trip to China is also an encounter with the past.], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 December 2018, p. 3.

EU with even fewer inhibitions. The 16+1 format of China with the (South-) Eastern European governments and the surge in the influence of China in Central Asia are just the start.

All of these large-scale political processes and changes have a significant direct and indirect influence on the OSCE, both as forces that act on the Organization, but also in the development of new options for action.

#### *Scope and Options for Action in the OSCE*

The following will discuss a few examples of the ways in which the changes to the regional and global political conditions affect the scope and courses of options for action, both within and for the OSCE. The conclusion that the political scope within and for the OSCE has become smaller is trivial. Even such an active and comparatively influential country as Germany left little in the way of legacy besides the so-called Structured Dialogue when it held the Chairmanship in 2016. Less trivial, however, is the question as to which possibilities and challenges apply to which fields of action and where the OSCE, as in the case of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, is even the only international organization which can offer possible courses of action. Part of this evaluation consists also in distinguishing where political scope exists, and if and how these can be used. Overall, it is important to recognize that regardless of the fact that the overall scope of action of the Organization is becoming smaller, in individual fields and certain regions there will be new, to some extent unexpected courses of action to be taken.

#### *The OSCE as a Norms-Based Organization*

The OSCE is a deeply norms-based organization, whose orientation cannot be changed to suit a primarily interests-based political approach. In other organizations, including the EU and NATO, this may work to some extent; in relation to some states, for example China, it is indispensable. Such a “pragmatic” change of policy would, however, destroy the OSCE. First, this lack of flexibility represents a significant disadvantage. Ever fewer participating States must struggle to defend OSCE norms and commitments against open and covert attacks from states in the East and West. This can, however, be also understood as political investment in the future, supported by the conviction that sustained co-operation between states, which is essential to solve global and other problems, will always require a sufficiently normative basis. If this conviction is correct, it is also correct that high-quality normative platforms such as the OSCE should be preserved for a future when they will be needed. Therefore, every attempt to relativize norms should be countered, whichever point on the political compass it comes from. This does not rule out open dia-



logue about the meaning of specific norms, quite the contrary. However, abandoning the normative *acquis* of the OSCE is not up for debate. At the same time, under the given circumstances, a declaratory agreement to certain normative commitments should not be scoffed at, however relative it may be in its substance.

#### *Coalition of the Willing in the Human Dimension*

These considerations are notably relevant for the human dimension of the OSCE. This is the target of fierce attacks. For more than a decade it has not been possible to adopt decisions in the core areas of the human dimension. The tools of the human dimension, in particular the *Human Dimension Implementation Meeting* (HDIM), are under considerable pressure and their collapse can no longer be ruled out. In this situation, it is vital that the supporters of the human dimension come closer together in a coalition of the willing and drive forward the ongoing functioning of the HDIM, but also its necessary reform at a higher level and with more courage.

Parallel to the attacks on the human dimension and the HDIM, a counter movement can be observed whereby states ruled by authoritarian regimes request considerable expertise on certain aspects of the human dimension, in particular the rule of law. One of the tasks of a coalition of the willing would be to ensure that these requests for advice could be met.

#### *Preparation for a Revival of the Politico-Military Dimension*

The situation in the politico-military dimension is characterized by the contradiction that, on the one hand, the sides have largely given up the approaches to co-operative security policy of recent decades and are re-establishing structures of conventional deterrence with all its inherent risks. On the other hand, a discussion around arms control policy on containing these risks, in particular in the contact zones between Russia and NATO, has hardly begun.<sup>6</sup>

In the debates in the politico-military dimension, there has been a kind of thrust reversal. While years ago, Russia called for more activities in this dimension (and fewer in the human dimension), now the Russian Federation is rejecting the initiatives of the Western and neutral states to reform the Vienna Document 2011 (VD 11). While the Western states prefer moderate confidence-building measures, Russia may welcome a comprehensive approach – if any, which remains unclear. This is, however, rejected by the NATO states, indicating that under the current circumstances, “business as usual” with Russia is not possible, as if a reform of the VD 11 were something other than this. Thus, however, each approach rules out the other, and NATO is passing up the opportunity to seriously put Russia to the test, while it remains

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6 Cf. Wolfgang Zellner (Co-ordinator) et al., *Reducing the Risks of Conventional Deterrence in Europe. Arms Control in the NATO-Russia Contact Zones*, Vienna 2018.

divided on the question as to whether they should take a proactive stance on arms control. While the 22 members of the Germany-led group of like-minded countries on conventional arms control would tend to agree, other influential states such as the USA, Canada, Poland, the Baltic states and Norway are strictly opposed to it.

The Structured Dialogue – carried out since spring 2017 on the basis of a resolution of the Hamburg Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in 2016<sup>7</sup> in the format of OSCE Vienna plus capitals – represents a certain contradiction to this. In the context of the Structured Dialogue, discussions have covered topics such as threat perception, military doctrine, challenges to a norms-based European security order, and the so-called “mapping exercise”, which should use available data to come to an understanding of the existing military power relations. Firstly, the Structured Dialogue is important because it is currently the only systematic politico-military bridge of dialogue between the NATO states, the neutral states, and Russia and its allies. Secondly, this dialogue currently offers the only platform to discuss the dangers of reviving the structures of conventional deterrence – more manoeuvres closer to borders; modernization and development of armed forces; the military postures of the sides moving ever closer together; and overall the entry into a new arms race.

In this situation, it is important to maintain a differentiated dialogue that is not reduced to reciprocal recrimination to develop new concepts for arms control that address the current dangers, and to agree on initial practical steps.

### *The New Meaning of the Economic and Environmental Dimension*

The claim that the economic and environmental dimension is the “step-child” of the OSCE has been widespread for decades. Less prominently discussed is the fact that this dimension is currently perhaps the largest and, at the same time, least used resource of the Organization, and the reasons for this. Three factors in particular have substantially increased the relevance of the economic and environmental dimension for security policy in the last one or two decades.

*First*, it can no longer be assumed that economic co-operation and integration will automatically foster political integration and stability, as has been the standard narrative (not only) in OSCE documents right up until the recent past. Since the start of the Ukraine conflict at the latest, we have known that weak and asymmetrical interdependence – which is how the economic relations between the West and Russia must largely be understood – can lead to conflict. Competition for integration and reciprocal sanctions – in short, economic methods – are being used as political weapons.

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7 Cf. OSCE, Ministerial Council, Hamburg 2016, From Lisbon to Hamburg: Declaration on the Twentieth Anniversary of the OSCE Framework for Arms Control, MC.DOC/4/16, 9 December 2016, available at: <https://www.osce.org/chairsteamship/289496>.

*Second*, it is slowly becoming clear that the global economic crisis of 2008 was perhaps the most significant cause of the dramatic rise in nationalist, populist, and xenophobic trends in almost all European countries. The crisis led to a huge increase in anxiety about the future in large swathes of the population, while at the same time undermining both the legitimacy of the political leaderships and the functioning of the political institutions along with it. The consequences of this populist groundswell in Europe for security policy are still difficult to predict.

*Third*, in recent years China has become very active in various regions of the OSCE area, not only in Central Asia, but also in (South-)Eastern Europe and the core countries of Western Europe. This is of particular significance because China is an emerging hegemonic power, whose normative basis and governance structures are vastly different from those in the OSCE area. This does not only apply to Western Europe, but also to Russia and even Central Asia. Therefore, considering how these fundamentally different governance approaches will be compatible inside the OSCE area is an important issue for security policy.

All this could be discussed under the umbrella of the concept of “economic connectivity” that was introduced into the OSCE during the Swiss Chairmanship in 2014. Unfortunately, however, the debate around this concept has almost come to a standstill, and, in particular, the details of what economic connectivity means in concrete terms for the work of the OSCE have not been worked out sufficiently.

Therefore, it is about time that a group of interested states came together to break down the concept of economic connectivity to the political-operational level. There is no shortage of good individual suggestions – for years, Kazakhstan has been suggesting setting up an OSCE regional centre for economic and environmental issues in Astana. With China’s participation, such a centre could become a laboratory for examining the conflict potential and the interplay of different governance structures and styles in the Eurasian space. The OSCE could pioneer this work.

#### *Co-operation with China*

The rise of China and its activities within the OSCE area are not adequately recognized by the OSCE and its participating States. China appears not only as an economic and political actor in the OSCE area, but has also occupied positions that have implications for security policy. For example, China is not only discussing questions of religious policy with the government of Tajikistan, but is also engaged in border management there. In Afghanistan too, China has been operating in various diplomatic formats for some time. And for (South-)Eastern Europe, China has started its own discussion and decision forum within the EU governance area, in the 16+1 format (meetings between China and 16 (South-)Eastern European states up to the level of a summit). In

individual states such as Greece, the influence of China is strong enough to block resolutions that are critical of China in the European Council. In short, China is becoming increasingly visible in the OSCE area, but is hardly acknowledged by the Organization.

In the years following 2003, China showed a certain interest in the OSCE for some time as well as an increased interest in the EU. In the one and a half decades since then, the power relations have not only shifted significantly in favour of China, but in parallel, the performance of both European IOs has deteriorated. Therefore, China prefers bilateral contacts to EU contacts, even if, unlike Russia, it is not explicitly attempting to weaken the EU. China has not actively engaged with the OSCE for at least ten years.

The OSCE should, however, involve China wherever and to the greatest extent possible. If China is invited, it accepts these invitations, as in the case of the economic conference of the German OSCE Chairmanship in May 2016, in which a Chinese delegation took part under the leadership of a deputy foreign minister. It would not be feasible for China to take on the status of an OSCE Partner for Co-operation, however, firstly, because this would require the adoption of the OSCE *acquis* and secondly, because China would probably not be interested. An alternative would be flexibly involving China in OSCE activities, by, for example, issuing invitations to conferences, participation in a regional economic and environmental office in Kazakhstan, and maintaining more intensive contacts between the OSCE and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. It would be necessary for a group of participating States to take the initiative.

#### *Conflicts and Problems in “Western” Participating States*

OSCE commitments apply to all participating States. In spite of this, many states see the OSCE as, first and foremost, an instrument of the West to influence the political East. While this business model might have been partly justified in the early 1990s given the conflicts and problems in the then transition phase, for the last 20 years this has been under criticism and is now, to a large extent, politically obsolete. The reason for this is, firstly, the fact that the transition period is now history, and secondly, the fact that today the OSCE commitments are grossly and continuously ignored in Western states too, whether it be issues of voter registration in the USA, academic freedom in Hungary, or the rule of law in Poland, the list could be extended. Therefore, the legitimacy of the OSCE stands and falls on the fact that its commitments are applied to all states in the same way. This still cannot be said to be the case today. Problems in the “West” are visibly on the agendas of only a few of the OSCE institutions. The most prominent is that of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, who brings to light the relevant problems in the East, as well as in the West. The problem is also often raised in the speeches of the

High Commissioner on National Minorities. Otherwise, however, the Organization still continues to act on the East from the West. The OSCE will need to change this if it wants to continue to be relevant in the future.

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On the surface, the current situation may not be the best in which to talk about a (partial) reorientation of an international organization like the OSCE. However, it is precisely the present political crisis that makes it necessary, and provides the opportunity to start.