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## Where Is the OSCE's Cultural Engagement? Promised – to Be Forgotten or Awakened – to Be Renewed? An Interjection

The Helsinki Document of 1975, the Charter of Paris of 1990 and many subsequent statements of the Ministerial Councils until the recent past had repeatedly stressed the importance of cultural contact and co-operation for promoting understanding and peaceful coexistence among peoples. What has become of these abstract proclamations? To what extent has the OSCE itself made a specific commitment in this area? On what occasions and in what declarations or reports is the topic of culture mentioned? What importance is attached to it? Is the framework for action referenced bilateral, multilateral, or international? What activities have been carried out as examples? To begin with, it is assumed that there is an astonishing discrepancy between words and deeds, indeed a deplorable lack of action. Should such shortcomings be remedied, and if so, how? Using the declarations, decisions, and reports of the responsible CSCE/OSCE bodies and institutions, this contribution explores and examines these questions, and makes a proposal for future action.

From the beginning, the topic of “culture” was embedded in the so-called third basket, today known as the human dimension, alongside human rights, protection of minorities, freedom of the press, promotion of science, and so on. Its scope has gradually and conspicuously shrunk over the course of the series of Summit Meetings and Ministerial Councils.

In the Final Recommendations of the Helsinki Consultations of 1973, basic statements on culture are made in a separate, dedicated section and many activities are proposed for the detailed treatment of cultural issues.<sup>1</sup> The Helsinki Document of 1975, the “constitution” of the CSCE/OSCE, then incorporates them in a correspondingly concrete, detailed, and comprehensive manner.<sup>2</sup>

Normatively, “culture” is credited with contributing to the “development of mutual confidence and the further improvement of relations between the participating States”.

In general, “cultural exchanges and co-operation” are repeatedly mentioned as a means to this end. This idea is associated with the expectation that they will “contribute to a better comprehension among people and among peo-

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1 Cf. Final Recommendations of the Helsinki Consultations, Helsinki 1973, p. 12, available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/40213>.

2 For the following, see: Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Helsinki Final Act, 1 August 1975, pp. 45-51, available at: <https://www.osce.org/helsinki-final-act>.

ples, and thus promote a lasting understanding among States.” As a justification for this assumption, it is stated that at the multilateral level, “interest was [already] manifested in the active participation of the broadest possible social groups in an increasingly diversified cultural life”.

What intentions are mentioned? “Cultural exchange” should be substantially expanded, both in terms of persons and works and in all fields of culture, on a bilateral and multilateral basis. Active co-operation should be developed among them and, with it, “the mutual exchange of information with a view to a better knowledge of respective cultural achievements”. “Within their cultural policies”, the interest in the cultural heritage of the other participating States should be promoted, “conscious of the merits and the value of each culture”.

The means are also considered, with the demand “to improve the facilities for the exchange and for the dissemination of cultural property” and “to promote access by all to respective cultural achievements”. Who is meant here by “all” can be interpreted as all “states” or all “people”.

As a framework for action on expanded co-operation and links in the field of culture at various levels, reference is made to the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral agreements between state institutions and non-governmental organizations, and between “people engaged in cultural activities”, among whom direct contact and communication should be encouraged. It is worth noting the reference to developing “contacts and co-operation among persons active in the field of culture”. In addition, they are encouraged to “seek new fields and forms of cultural co-operation”. There is specific emphasis on the intention “to contribute [...] to the development of contacts and co-operation [...] especially among creative artists and people engaged in cultural activities”, among other things by making efforts to “promote [...] travel and meetings”, especially with a view to “their working together, making known their works in other participating States or exchanging views on topics relevant to their common activity”. In addition, attention is called to the “exchanges of trainees and specialists and the granting of scholarships for basic and advanced training in various fields of culture. There is also a call for “the exchange of experience in the training of organizers of cultural activities [...]” and “the organization of international meetings among creative artists, especially young creative artists, on current questions of artistic and literary creation [...]”.

Interestingly, the Helsinki Document does not only use the general term “culture”, which can mean many things. It makes very concrete operational and institutional proposals. It mentions, for example, promoting “such forms of cultural co-operation and [...] joint projects as: international events in the fields of the plastic and graphic arts, cinema, theatre, ballet, music, folklore, etc.; book fairs, and exhibitions [...] as well as performances given by soloists, instrumental ensembles, orchestras, choirs and other artistic groups, including those composed of amateurs.” Writer and composer exchanges and meetings are explicitly named and justified as worthy of promotion. The document even mentions the promotion and organization of “more frequent book exhibitions”

and refers to the possibility of “organizing periodically in Europe a large-scale exhibition of books from the participating States”. Even seemingly marginal proposals are made, such as “the exchange of information among interested parties concerning events of a cultural character foreseen in the participating States”. Music, theatre and visual arts are emphasized as worthy of promotion, with the aim of “contributing to the compilation and publication of a calendar of such events, with the assistance, where necessary, of the appropriate international organizations”. The “search for new fields and forms of cultural co-operation” and the conclusion of appropriate agreements and arrangements between interested parties are cited as worthy of support.

It is interesting to look at what kind of international events are in focus. The plastic and graphic arts, cinema, theatre, ballet, music, folk art, book fairs and exhibitions, joint performances of operas and dramatic works, as well as performances by soloists, instrumental ensembles, orchestras and choirs are specifically listed. Particular mention is made of amateur groups, the organization of international cultural youth events and exchanges between young artists. It is also stressed that “works by writers and composers from the other participating States [should be included] in the repertoires of soloists and artistic ensembles”.

In summary, the Helsinki Document of 1975 identified norms, objectives, expectations, intentions, operational proposals, and institutional areas for various cultural fields. How has the relationship of the CSCE/OSCE to “culture” evolved since?

At a CSCE seminar in Venice in 1984, “the value and usefulness of instruments of cultural co-operation” were recognized, and the following were listed: “cultural agreements; [...] national and international cultural institutions, whether governmental or other, operating in the area; more contacts and co-operation among persons engaged in the field of culture from different countries”.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1990 Charter of Paris,<sup>4</sup> there is a section on culture in its own right, which states, among other things, that “our common European culture” makes an “essential contribution [...] in overcoming the division of the continent”. It highlights the importance of the Krakow symposium and the high expectations in the consideration of guidelines for intensified co-operation in the field of culture. “In order to promote greater familiarity amongst our peoples, we favour the establishment of cultural centres in cities of other participating States as well as increased co-operation in the audio-visual field and wider exchange in music, theatre, literature and the arts.”

At the aforementioned Krakow Symposium of 1991, all sorts of cultural aspects were discussed in detail. However, it is striking to see how culture is

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3 Report of the OSCE Venice Seminar on Economic, Scientific and Cultural Co-operation in the Mediterranean within the Framework of the Results of the Valetta Meeting of Experts, Venice, 26 October 1984, p. 6, available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/16225>.

4 For this para., see: OSCE, Charter of Paris for a New Europe, 21 November 1990, p. 11, available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/39516>.

also instrumentalized and treated functionally. In the concluding document, the participating States take note of “the interrelationship between cultural life and the well-being of their peoples, and the special importance that this has for democratic countries in transition towards a market economy”. It is also striking how culture is invoked with reference to the past: “They encourage support, as already undertaken, and the on-going assistance to those countries in preserving and protecting their cultural heritage. The participating States respect the irreplaceable uniqueness of all their cultures and will endeavour to promote continued cultural dialogue among themselves and with the rest of the world. They reaffirm their belief that respect for cultural diversity promotes understanding and tolerance among individuals and groups. [...] The participating States are resolved to promote mutual knowledge of their respective cultures. Accordingly, they will encourage co-operation and exchanges in all fields of culture and creative work.”<sup>5</sup> After the previous declarations and promises, which may have raised many expectations, it is all the more surprising that there is no mention of culture in the Declaration at the end of the Helsinki Summit in 1992.<sup>6</sup>

Two years later, at the 1994 Budapest Summit, the participating States reiterated that they “will further encourage and facilitate human contacts, cultural and educational exchanges and co-operate in accordance with CSCE provisions. They will continue to implement their commitments in the cultural field, as laid down in the Document of the Cracow Symposium on the Cultural Heritage of the CSCE participating States and other relevant CSCE documents. They will encourage public and private efforts aimed at the preservation of the cultural heritage in their States. [...] The Permanent Council will explore the possibility of holding informal meetings on the issues mentioned in the two preceding paragraphs.”<sup>7</sup> If a qualitative limitation and a shift with regard to cultural engagement can already be seen here, these continued at the Lisbon Summit in 1996. The Summit Declaration states: “Among the acute problems within the human dimension, the continuing violations of human rights, such as involuntary migration, and the lack of full democratization, threats to independent media, electoral fraud, manifestations of aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, continue to endanger stability in the OSCE region. We are committed to continuing to address these problems.”<sup>8</sup>

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5 Document of the Cracow Symposium on the Cultural Heritage of the CSCE Participating States, 6 June 1991, pp. 2, 3 (pt. 8), available at: <https://www.osce.org/library/24396>.

6 Cf. Helsinki Summit Declaration, 10 July 1992, in: Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1992 Summit, Helsinki, 9-10 July 1992, CSCE Helsinki Document: The Challenges of Change, Helsinki, available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/39530>.

7 CSCE, Budapest Document 1994, Towards a Genuine Partnership in a New Area, Corrected version 21 December 1994, pp. 36-37, available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/39554>.

8 Lisbon Summit Declaration, in: OSCE, Lisbon Summit 1996, Lisbon Document 1996, DOC.S/1/96, Lisbon, 3 December 1996, pp. 5-9, here: p. 6, at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/39539>.

In the declarations of the following Summit Meeting in Istanbul in 1999, there is also no mention of the theme of culture, and cultural issues were again absent from the declarations and decisions of the Tenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council in Porto in 2002. This is especially surprising, as the Portuguese Chairmanship deliberately did a great deal to promote the human dimension. However, their attention focused on the freedom and protection of the media and the rights of minorities, especially Sinti and Roma. This was particularly evident at the following Eleventh Meeting of the Ministerial Council in Maastricht in 2003. There, the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) commented in detail on this topic and produced an in-depth report. “The HCNM will continue to elaborate and disseminate guidelines for policy-makers on the use of State broadcast media in multicultural communities aimed, *inter alia*, at encouraging support for minority broadcasters, including Roma and Sinti broadcasters, and improving their access to the media.”<sup>9</sup> In this context, there were also reports on the activities of various OSCE institutions and structures in collaboration with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).<sup>10</sup> ODIHR, for example, organized three meetings on the human dimension, dedicated to Roma and Sinti, freedom of religion and belief, and the prevention of torture.

If we look at other bodies, the Permanent Council once made a comment on the protection of cultural goods as cultural heritage in the context of the conflict in Georgia. The question regarding the cultural activities of the OSCE missions still remains. The OSCE Mission to Moldova financed and organized various cultural events, such as plays, jazz festivals, classical concerts, and rock festivals. However, culture was always a means to an end, i.e. the events served to build confidence or to convey other messages about tolerance or anti-trafficking. Other Missions are likely to present a similar picture. Concerts and performances at OSCE celebrations are also very common, but there were no events with culture as the actual centre of focus.

In summary, it is clear that the field of “culture” has contracted more and more, and has ultimately been neglected and abandoned. Most recently, there was no commitment regarding culture by the Milan Ministerial Council in 2018.

What reasons could lie behind the OSCE’s general, recognizable abstention in the field of culture? Perhaps this can be put down to the social and political changes that have occurred since the 1970s, or international organizations that have occupied this sphere, such as UNESCO, the Council of Europe, or the European Union. However, on closer examination, such arguments cannot suffice when it comes to the performance of OSCE-specific cultural engagement. Certainly, there has been an increase in the number of international,

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9 Decision No. 3/03, Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, MC.DOC/1/03, in: OSCE, Eleventh Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 1-2 December 2003, Maastricht, 2 December 2003, pp. 61-77, Annex, p. 66 at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/40533>.

10 Cf. *ibid.*

Europe-wide cultural events taking place on a continuous basis since the time of the 1992 Helsinki Summit. Nowadays, there are staggering numbers of pageants and festivals. However, they are almost all of country-specific significance. One exception is the European Union's nomination of one or more locations as "European Capital of Culture".

It is testament to the poverty of the OSCE if it does not provide any cultural impetus. What action would be possible, and in particular desirable, on the part of the OSCE? The tasks of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM) could be expanded and complemented by including the promotion of culture. One could imagine them initiating, sponsoring, carrying out, and supporting cultural meetings, events such as exhibitions, film screenings, concerts, opera and theatre performances, and festivals, especially in "hot spots", such as the South Caucasus, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus. In the field, the OSCE is often present through its field operations, the HCNM, ODIHR, and RFOM, whose mandates, competences, and facilities could be strengthened to support this endeavour. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act proposed the creation of a "Scientific Forum" in the form of a meeting of leading personalities in science from the participating States to discuss interrelated problems of common interest concerning current and future developments in science and to promote the expansion of contacts, communications and the exchange of information between scientific institutions and among scientists".<sup>11</sup> Taking this proposal from the past and replacing the word "science" with "culture" would have the effect of creating a cultural forum.

An "OSCE cultural prize" could be created, which would be awarded for cultural achievements in line with the OSCE's goals. A much more far-reaching, perhaps still utopian, idea: Why not create an OSCE radio and television station for the whole of Europe? All kinds of countries have international broadcasters, i.e. programmes for other countries. Based on the premises of the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris and their development, such a station would acquire relevant significance – for information, education, and cultural enrichment with substance and quality.

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11 Helsinki Final Act, cited above (Note 2), p. 54.