

'V to V DIALOGUE'

First Informal Meeting at Ambassadors' Level - The Conflict Cycle

15 March 2011

CHAIR'S PERCEPTION

The first informal meeting at Ambassadors' level, held on 15 March as part of the 'V to V dialogue' on advancing Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security, focused on issues related to the conflict cycle and was based on the Chairmanship's invitation letter and attached discussion paper distributed under CIO.GAL/31/11 on 7 March 2011.

The constructive debate, greatly enriched by 25 interventions, demonstrated that the conflict cycle remains at the core of OSCE work and that there is universal agreement that yet more needs to be done to strengthen the OSCE's capacity in, *inter alia*, early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. It was widely acknowledged that this key point had been agreed upon at the highest political level at the 2010 Astana Summit and, thus, it is now time to capitalize on that momentum by moving towards concrete actions. In that context, the informal meeting provided a useful platform to identify particular areas where progress is still needed and concrete achievements are possible. The many proposals already put forward during the Corfu Process were acknowledged as a pertinent basis for further debate. Moreover, the 2010 Astana Commemorative Declaration, the Draft Astana Framework for Action (although not a consensus document), and the 2011 Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship's Work Programme were recognized as providing further orientation.

The meeting was an opportune moment to continue the journey towards a common understanding of concrete issues that could be taken forward, including to the 2011 Ministerial Council (MC) in Vilnius. In that respect, the following paragraphs provide an overview of the main areas that were raised during the informal meeting.¹

Deliverables in general. Most participants opined that deliverables were the key to progressing the 'V to V dialogue', particularly as these would also enhance the relevance of the Organization internally as well as to the wider international community. While the main

¹ The content is not meant, nor should be taken to indicate that any issue not covered in the following paragraphs is perceived as any less relevant or important than the issues that are covered.

focus should be on generating operational deliverables, further consideration could also be given to producing an action plan on the conflict cycle covering concrete efforts and activities to be carried forward over the next years. Many participants felt that there was no need to wait until the 2011 MC to agree on all the deliverables, and encouraged a pragmatic, flexible and incremental approach. Where deliverables fall within the existing mandates and competences of the OSCE executive structures, as some undoubtedly will, they should be put into action this year when ready. Similarly, any deliverables requiring political agreement should be forwarded to the relevant decision-making body on a case-by-case basis as each reaches sufficient maturity. Some deliverables may, however, need to wait for political approval at the 2011 MC while others may not be ripe for a political decision this year. In that respect, ideas should not be pursued which are unlikely to enjoy consensus. In a similar vein, decisions should be de-coupled and a package approach avoided, otherwise the advancement of those that enjoy consensus may be hindered.

Framework for Advancing the Conflict Cycle. The three expert meetings and the workshop mentioned in the Chairmanship's discussion paper were widely supported as useful forums for focused discussions. Care should be taken to ensure that they are cross-dimensional in content and outlook, and that they seek to identify concrete deliverables, including those that can be taken forward to the political level. Expert advice should be incorporated as concrete discussions are more likely to lead to concrete decisions, and because expert advice can often help to de-politicize the discussions. Participation by other organizations, NGOs and think-tanks would be beneficial, especially as outsiders may bring in fresh ideas. Notwithstanding the usefulness of the above events, they alone were not likely sufficient to result in actionable deliverables. Hence, they may need to be supplemented with informal follow-up meetings, particularly in cases where a political decision or other deliverables need developing. Progress in advancing the conflict cycle should be regularly reviewed, including beyond the 2011 MC.

Early Warning. The need for a more comprehensive and organization-wide systematic collection, analysis and sharing of early warning information, balanced across the whole OSCE area, was highlighted. Many believed that much can and should be done to strengthen the OSCE's early warning capacity within existing mandates and competences. For instance, there should be greater co-ordination within and between the OSCE executive structures and with other international actors based on the 1999 Platform for Co-operative Security, including through a greater sharing of information, advice and lessons learned/best practices. Greater effort should be expended on providing early warning in advance of an emerging crisis, drawing it to participating States' attention and suggesting response options. Ideas on how that could be achieved included strengthening the early warning role of the Chairmanship and Secretary General and strengthening the analytical capacity of the executive structures - the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) and the Institutions in particular. Many suggested that this be done within existing resources, including through a review of the current tasks, within the CPC for example, to identify those which could be rationalized or diverted to allow a greater focus on early warning analysis.

Crisis Response. Most participants highlighted the imperative of earlier decisions based on timely early warning information being given to the Permanent Council (PC) and maximizing the existing capabilities to respond. This was seen as critical to closing the early

warning/early action gap which remains a major shortcoming. In that context, the political process and decision making of the PC needs to be more effective, efficient and operational. Suggestions included the holding of PCs in a special format, such as informal or closed sessions (as happens in the UN Security Council) to allow a frank exchange. While greater flexibility is desirable, some advocated moving forward cautiously, pointing to the need to avoid hasty action. In terms of responses on the ground, some opined there should be better co-ordination among the executive structures and that more should be done to harness lessons learned. Others highlighted that the REACT capability should be re-visited, the scope for greater OSCE PA involvement should be explored, what to do when a crisis emerges where there is no field operation should be further considered, and greater use of Track II diplomacy, civil society and CSBMs should be pursued.

Protracted Conflicts. A central goal of the 'V to V dialogue' and beyond should be to progress the resolution of existing conflicts. Some pointed to the need to remain within existing formats, albeit, according to some, the dialogue could nevertheless be streamlined and strengthened and the OSCE executive structures could be more proactively engaged. Greater use of CSBMs on the ground should be considered. Moreover, patience is needed as quick fixes are unrealistic and root causes need addressing. Some emphasized the OSCE should pursue a status-neutral approach, while advocating adherence to OSCE commitments.

Post-conflict Rehabilitation. According to various delegations, efforts in this conflict phase continue to provide a challenge to the OSCE - hence the merit in further developing the Organization's capacities in this field. *Inter alia*, the development of best practices, which draws on lessons learned from previous experiences of the OSCE and others, would be especially useful, including as an outreach to other organizations. Throughout this endeavour, the need to avoid duplication and to work on the basis of the Organization's comparative strengths is paramount.

Mediation Capacity. Numerous delegations supported the need to enhance the OSCE's mediation and mediation support capacities which, they perceived, fell within the existing competences of the executive structures and should be achieved within available resources. They also highlighted the imperative of drawing on the lessons learned and the experiences of all actors involved in previous and current mediation efforts, previous OSCE Special Representatives in particular. The potential of the Court of Arbitration and Reconciliation should also be re-assessed.

Review of the Existing Mechanisms. There was general agreement that there is no need for additional mechanisms. The key issue remains the lack of political will to use them to their full potential rather than the inadequacies of the mechanisms per se. However, some also believed that there is merit in reviewing the existing mechanisms, both to increase awareness and knowledge and to update them, where appropriate, to current needs, present conflict dynamics, but without prejudice to consensus. In that respect, updating the 1999 Vienna Document may create a positive climate in which other issues can also be advanced.

Co-operation with other International Actors. There was general agreement that co-

operation with other international actors must be further strengthened, based on the 1999 Platform for Co-operative Security and including through greater co-ordination and information sharing - such as on lessons learned and early warning. Burden sharing with other organizations should be examined, and consideration should be given to the setting up of ad hoc co-ordinating mechanisms. Some advocated that the OSCE should take a proactive role in this regard.

Resources. Most recognized that there are resource implications associated with the various changes suggested; hence it will be important to discuss resources in tandem with the political debate. Financial constraints should not, however, preclude concrete action. Some deliverables will be cost-neutral and can be implemented straight away. Moreover, seeking to do better with existing resources, streamlining and re-allocating as necessary, should always be the initial approach. Should more resources still be needed, there may be merit in 'making a business case' for an increase. In case where resources are still constrained, ambitions should be limited and/or reprioritized. One participant suggested that there would be merit in exploring the creation of a special fund for use in an emerging crisis, as it exists in the UN, as that may enable the Organization to react more swiftly.

In closing, the Chairmanship perceives that the meeting served as a useful stepping stone to take stock of discussions over the past two years and to identify possible options for advancing concrete deliverables up to the 2011 MC and beyond. While the meeting kicked off this stage of the journey, further actionable progress is largely dependent on the willingness of all to pull together along the road – always with an eye to providing constructive input to enhancing the OSCE's efforts to address current and emerging conflicts.

The Chairmanship looks forward to further proactive engagement at the first informal expert meeting, in April on 'Enhancing the Early Warning and Analytical Capacity of the OSCE.'