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*Discussion Paper*

**Reinforcing the OSCE capacity as regards early response to crisis and emerging conflicts**

**Introduction :** The purpose of this paper, in view of the 20 September workshop on “early response” and following preceding expert seminars on subjects related to the conflict cycle, is to help feed the discussion and contribute to the identification of possible improvements to the OSCE practices and capabilities. Some of those could be reflected in a draft Ministerial Council Decision on enhancing OSCE capacities to address the so-called “conflict-cycle”. Others could inspire practical improvements of OSCE practices which do not require formal decisions.

There is widespread acknowledgement that the OSCE’s role throughout the conflict cycle remains one of its core task and that its effectiveness and capabilities in that matter should be enhanced. The deliberations within the Corfu Process, the preparatory work for the Astana Summit and, lately, the V-to-V Dialogues offer a rich base to draw from, as recalled in the 2010 Astana Summit declaration. What is needed now is to flesh out ideas which could potentially gather consensus, with more concrete proposals.

The need for the OSCE to respond in a more timely and effective manner to urgent and potential crisis situations before they evolve into conflicts has been underlined for a long time. The “early response” topic remains, however, particularly complex to address. This is not because of a lack of instruments, mechanisms and procedures at the disposal of the OSCE but rather due to the way those are used (or not used).

“Early response” cannot be dissociated from the other phases of the conflict cycle as it frequently overlaps. It is sufficient to recall the close link between early warning and early action or the fact that some mediation activities of the OSCE could also be perceived as part of its “early response”. The discussion could thus, also, usefully take stock of some proposals of previous seminars. There is clearly a need to make an integrated, coherent, approach appear between the different aspects of the conflict cycle.

1.- Preliminary Stock-Taking

This requires to take stock of the track record (achievements and failures) of the OSCE in the matter of early response. It appears that, all too often, early warning signals do not result in early preventive action. Efforts are thus needed to close the gap between early warning and early action. It is to be noted that the gap is not only between warning and

response but also between the high ambitions and far-reaching goals of early response projects and their actual implementation.

There is a widely shared opinion that the OSCE has relevant instruments to do better and be a major actor in early response to escalating tensions and conflicts. But even the best capabilities and procedures are ineffective without the political will to use them.

The “warning-response gap” can also be attributed to shortcomings in early warning or in the OSCE own internal organisation, not to mention the lack of capacity and resources to react.

## 2. - Issues for further consideration

As in the other phases of the conflict cycle, the aim here is mostly to do better with existing tools starting with the simple statement of fact that those are neither all nor fully used.

Participating States of the OSCE should look for practical improvements of OSCE practices and possible enhancement of capabilities and think about how we could feed a draft ministerial Council decision which would include a recommitment to timely and preventive responses to crises and emerging conflicts and a mandate to continue the work beyond the Vilnius Ministerial Council. It should not only be an expression of political will but should also make an integrated, coherent, approach appear between the different aspects of the conflict cycle, in view in particular to fill the gap between early warning and early action.

As regards practical improvements on the issue of “early response”, those could refer to :

- The political process and decision making of the Permanent Council. The Participating States could consider how they could render the working methods of the PC more effective, efficient and operational. How could it be convened at the earliest opportunity, including in a special format if necessary, to consider early warning signals and potential response options? In that context and in fulfilment of its key role as the central forum for political dialogue and decision making, the PC could take advantage of its ability to seek independent advice and counsel, as set out in Decision III of the 1992 Helsinki Summit. It could seek ways to enhance involvement of relevant OSCE institutions and field operations during PC debates on emerging and ongoing crisis and conflicts in which Institutions and field operations are directly engaged. It could seek closer collaboration with the Forum for Security Cooperation, which politico-military toolbox includes valuable early response CSBMs (see Vienna Document Chapter III “Risk reduction” and the ongoing discussion at the FSC on its possible updating). It could pursue a more systematic follow-up of emerging crisis and conflict situations raised in the Permanent Council.

- The role of the Chairmanship in Office, the participating States and of the OSCE executive structures. How could they be encouraged to make full use of existing tools in order to act quickly and decisively? Participating States could give consideration to make better use of existing OSCE instruments, mechanisms and procedures, as applicable to a particular crisis or conflict situation. As mentioned in the context of earlier deliberations on “early warning”, the Secretary General, in consultation with the CiO, could, on the basis of thorough analysis,

suggest to participating States appropriate options for timely and effective responses to escalating tensions or conflicts.

- Better coordination of efforts between the OSCE executive structures (within their current mandates and existing resources) could consolidate further the OSCE's cross-dimensional response to emerging crisis and conflict situations.

Equally, better coordination with other organisations could be pursued through greater use of the operational modalities included in the 1999 Platform for Cooperative Security to ensure swift response and to avoid duplication. It could include, for example, the exchange of liaison officers or focal points, the use of videoconferencing, joint planning and needs assessment missions and the development of common responses where appropriate.

- As regards good practices, the OSCE would gain in better harnessing lessons learned both internally as well as from the practice of other regional organisations.

- Finally, the Participating States could ensure that resources both human and material allocated for crisis response capabilities match relevant political decisions. Reallocation of existing resources will no doubt prove necessary. Should the Participating States preclude once and for all a debate on additional resources? What about ideas like the creation of a special conflict prevention and crisis management fund which could be made available when immediate action is required?