

***Keynote Presentation for the 2010 Annual Security Review Conference, Working Session II:  
'The Role of the OSCE in Early Warning, Conflict Prevention and Resolution, Crisis  
Management, and Post-conflict Rehabilitation'***\*

**The OSCE and Conflict Management:  
From Old Themes to New Directions**

**Dr. William H. Hill  
Professor of National Security Strategy  
National War College, Washington, DC**

It is a privilege to return to Vienna to the OSCE to provide a keynote presentation for discussion at the Annual Security Review Conference of the role of the OSCE in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. These are some of the most important concerns and areas of operation of the OSCE since 1990. While the political and security landscape in the OSCE area has changed over the past two decades, these fields retain their importance for all participating states, but present new challenges not anticipated when the structures of the fledgling organization were put into place as the cold war came to an end.

My understanding of the purpose of a keynote presentation is that ideally it should pose significant questions and provide fodder for constructive and fruitful discussion of those issues. In that spirit, the presentation that follows does not attempt to provide a comprehensive review of OSCE normative commitments or all of the established OSCE mechanisms and procedures ranging from early warning to post-conflict rehabilitation. Instead I begin with an analysis of the historical context in which most of the existing OSCE commitments, mechanisms, and procedures with respect to conflict prevention and resolution were established, reflecting my assumption that one is better able to decide where to go in the future if one has a proper understanding of how one arrived at one's present position. I then use selected examples from recent OSCE history to review the operation – successes and failures – of OSCE mechanisms, institutions, and procedures over the past two decades. Finally, using various food for thought contributions and proposals from participating states, I offer some thoughts on some steps that might be taken by the OSCE and its participating states to improve the organization's capabilities and performance in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation.

**The Historical Background of OSCE Institutions and Mechanisms**

Most of the OSCE's institutional capabilities for addressing various stages of intrastate or interstate conflicts date from 1986 to 1994, a period in which the cold war came to a surprisingly rapid end and OSCE participating states developed the basic structures of the post-cold war world. As the Vienna Follow-up Meeting opened in autumn, 1986, the CSCE was still frozen in the pattern of east-west standoff that had emerged after the signing of the Final Act. CSCE meetings were dominated by charges, countercharges, and competition between the NATO and Warsaw Pact caucuses, punctuated by interventions from the NNA bloc. However, signs of thawing

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\* The opinions and judgments contained in this paper are the personal views of the author and do not represent the positions or policies of the National War College, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

between the cold war rivals were already evident in the agreement at the Stockholm CDE meeting accepting the principle of on-site inspections on the territory of participating states. This initial breakthrough in my view facilitated progress at the Vienna Follow-up Meeting on a mandate for successor talks to the seemingly endless MBFR negotiations and successful adoption of a series increasingly ambitious transparency and confidence-building measures in the first basket-security sector.

Beginning with the Vienna Follow-up Meeting, the OSCE participating states also began to accept more intrusive measures and mechanisms in the human dimension. From the very beginning the Helsinki process has been characterized by tension and contradictions between the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of participating states (Principle Six) and the human rights commitments embodied most notably in Principle Seven. By 1989 discussions among participating states on human rights situations in other participating states had taken on a substantially different, more cooperative tone. In addition, participating states agreed in the Vienna Concluding Document to respond to requests for information and to hold meetings with other participating states on specific cases and situations in the human dimension within their own borders. While non-interference in the internal affairs of participating states remained an important OSCE commitment, the so-called Vienna Mechanism constituted the first step in a process of developing operational mechanisms in which participating states agreed to considerable practical infringements on their absolute sovereignty as embodied in Principle Six of the Final Act.

It is important here to recall the epochal events that provided the geopolitical context for the development of the OSCE from 1989 on. Fundamental changes in the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States resulted in cooperation between these two global powers unheard of in the decades of bitter rivalry following their alliance in World War II. The chain reaction collapse during the autumn of 1989 of the communist regimes in the eastern European Warsaw Pact states led to unprecedented collaboration between OSCE participating states from 1990 on.

The post-1989 political reconciliation of former cold war rivals allowed the adoption of a broad normative base that to this day remains the basic OSCE guidance for behavior both within and among participating states. In addition, the broad political consensus that reigned among almost all of the OSCE participating states from 1990 to 1992 facilitated the establishment and development of the institutions and mechanisms which since that time have been the basic pieces in the OSCE tool kit for addressing conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. It is ironic that while these years witnessed the start of the most serious conflicts in the OSCE area since the Final Act was signed, political agreement among the participating states on basic norms and operations was never greater, before or since.

Some of the same or related political trends that produced such euphoric optimism in Europe in late 1989 at the same time put ultimately intolerable pressure on two important OSCE participating states, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. In particular, demands from constituent federal republics in both states for increased self-determination produced disagreements and conflicts that eventually tore these states apart. The break-up of Yugoslavia was particularly violent, producing major wars that dominated European politics for much of the 1990s. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, no matter how peaceful in the aggregate, still produced a plethora of localized conflicts, a number of which still threaten European peace and security, as we all witnessed in 2008.

The OSCE's claim to advance a comprehensive view of security is demonstrated with convincing clarity in the events that followed the close of the Vienna Follow-up Meeting, as dramatic progress was achieved in both the military security and humanitarian fields. In 1990 twenty three of the participating states reached agreement on the landmark Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe, a pact that basically ended the cold war conventional military standoff in Europe. In November 1990 participating states signed the Vienna CSBM Document, which included the mechanism on unusual military activities. The CFE treaty, the UMA Mechanism, and the Vienna Document all contained hitherto unheard of intrusive rights into activities and affairs on the territory of other participating states.

Meanwhile, progress was equally rapid in the humanitarian and operational dimensions of the OSCE. The 1990 Copenhagen Document and Charter of Paris contain breathtakingly broad normative commitments to democracy, free elections, and individual human rights. The Charter of Paris also contains the first rudiments of today's institutional structure of the OSCE, in particular the Committee of Senior Officials (now the Permanent Council), the Conflict Prevention Center and Secretariat, and the Office for Free Elections (now ODIHR). Finally, the Document of the 1991 Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension adopted a human dimension mechanism which in essence allows a small group of participating states to insist upon raising human dimension concerns about specific cases of situations in another participating state. While the Moscow Mechanism requires only a report on the case or situation from a designated OSCE rapporteur, such a report can be required irrespective of the objections of the requested state, an apparent limitation on the rights accorded by Principle Six of the Final Act.

The violent break-up of the SFRY contributed mightily to development of the present day role of the Permanent Council and spurred the establishment of the first field missions. When military hostilities began in Slovenia and Croatia in late June 1991, the CSCE conducted emergency discussions of the crisis in the fledgling Committee of Senior Officials. Although the decision was to let the emerging European Union take the lead in addressing the Yugoslav conflict, this marked the beginning of the comprehensive political dialog that has characterized the Permanent Council since that time. In April 1992, as the war began to spread to Bosnia-Herzegovina, participating states attempted to prevent the spread of the conflict to Serbia's tense province of Kosovo. Building on discussions at the Moscow Human Dimension Meeting of the possible use of participating states' "good offices" to help prevent or resolve conflicts, the result was the Mission of Long Duration to Kosovo, Sandjak, and Vojvodina, the first of the OSCE's field operations. As conflicts and hot spots multiplied in the former Yugoslavia and former Soviet Union, participating states established multiple field missions with incredible speed, especially considering that less than four years before the OSCE had no formal organizational structure at all.

The conflicts provoked by the break-up of the Soviet Union prompted the OSCE to develop mediation and conflict resolution activities, as well as possible peace support or peacekeeping capabilities. In particular the developing conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh became the focus of OSCE mediation in early 1992, as open warfare loomed between two new participating states. The ministers who took the original decision in March 1992 probably believed that there would actually be a peace conference in Minsk, not just an ongoing mediation and negotiation process bearing that name. The OSCE deployed an advance observation party to both Armenia and Azerbaijan in April-May 1992, and with the IOPG/HLPG began to develop at least a planning capacity for peacekeeping and post-conflict resolution. I would argue that the expectation of further involvement in settling this conflict was largely responsible for insertion of a peacekeeping role in principle for the OSCE in the 1992 Helsinki

Document. This role and capability have never been developed in practice, but that result stems more from subsequent events than from expectations at the time.

Finally, the experience from the dissolution of both Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union played a very large role in the decision in 1992 to establish the post of High Commissioner for National Minorities. The rights and status of ethnic and national minorities within the participating states had been a concern of the Helsinki process from its very start. However, the escalation in the late 1980s of demands for ethnic and/or national self-determination and separatism raised widespread concern for stability and peace among most of the participating states. The Dutch proposal for an HCNM to provide another mechanism for early warning and conflict prevention found widespread support; in my view time and experience have amply vindicated the proposal.

I provide this brief, selective review of the historical context of the late 1980s and early 1990s not to impart facts that are not already known, but to make the argument that the current set of OSCE institutions, mechanisms, and procedures that address conflict prevention and resolution are not the result of some grand, well-organized conceptual scheme, but grew out of *ad hoc* responses to fast moving, often unexpected and cataclysmic historical events. I would also argue that for many reasons – some of which I have discussed and others beyond the scope of this paper – there was a broad political consensus among the participating states that has not been seen before or since. Therefore the requirement for consensus has been a constant in the OSCE, but not the ability of the participating states to obtain it. The implication is that it may be exceedingly difficult to adopt political and institutional responses in today's OSCE to respond to our present challenges similar in scope and ambition to those fashioned by the participating states in the early 1990s.

The other major historical factor that affects the possibilities of the contemporary OSCE is the change in OSCE's relative position in the overarching Euro-Atlantic security architecture. One must keep in mind that in 1991-1992, the decision had not yet (or just) been made at NATO's November 1991 Rome Summit on the post-cold war future of the Alliance. Similarly, the Maastricht Treaty was signed only in early 1992, and the present-day European Union was just beginning to emerge out of the European Community. My purpose is not to debate whether the development of the institutional capabilities of NATO and the EU from 1992 to the present was a good thing, but simply to note the historical fact. Nor are NATO and the EU the only alternatives to the OSCE to develop in Europe since 1992; they are simply among the most prominent. As a result, the participating states of today's OSCE face a far more complex Euro-Atlantic security architecture as they contemplate how further to develop and enhance OSCE capabilities and activities in conflict prevention and resolution.

### **A Selective Review of OSCE Conflict Prevention and Resolution Efforts**

The history of OSCE activities in early warning, conflict prevention and conflict resolution, crisis management, and post-conflict resolution since 1992 is too long and detailed to discuss exhaustively in a paper of this size. I will therefore review an admittedly incomplete, anecdotal selection of OSCE activities and institutions since 1992 with the aim of identifying some conceptual and institutional approaches that have been successful, and others that have not. The ultimate aim of this portion of my discussion is not only to single out those things that have "worked," but also to explain why, in the hope this may provide some guidance in proposing possible future steps by the participating states in these areas.

In my estimation, the Minsk process has been fairly successful over the past 15 years, in particular in presenting a relatively united front among the OSCE mediators seeking to assist Armenia and

Azerbaijan in reaching a resolution of the conflict between them. Admittedly, to date no settlement has been reached, but the parties to the conflict have been very close to one at least twice. In addition, the presence of the Personal Representative of the Chairman and his staff in the area have arguably led to greater transparency and confidence on the ground, and have prevented the conflict from getting worse, or full-scale fighting from reigniting, since 1998.

While it may seem strange to single out a conflict prevention or conflict resolution process that has not produced a settlement over almost two decades, and was not able to forestall massive hostilities in 1993-1994, the Minsk Conference nonetheless is probably worth examining if only for the sustained relationship between the major mediators. The three co-chairs have worked since 1996 with relative harmony and cooperation. In just about all of the other conflict resolution efforts mounted by the OSCE we have frequently witnessed difficult, if not conflicting working relationships between various participating states involved as mediators or facilitators. It is worth posing the question as to whether there are any particular characteristics of the Minsk process that have made it easier to sustain a relatively united mediation effort.

Until 2008 the Minsk Conference dealt with the only active conflict between OSCE participating states, when – sadly – Georgia's internal conflicts became also a conflict with the Russian Federation. The OSCE Mission to Georgia was one of the earliest field operations established, but during its years of operations always had limited authority to address the basic issues of the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In South Ossetia the OSCE was able to participate directly in talks in the Joint Consultative Commission, and thus could have some input in attempts to broker an agreement on status. In Abkhazia, the involvement and leading role of the United Nations necessarily complicated and circumscribed the role of the OSCE. Such limitations notwithstanding, the OSCE still could mount significant and helpful initiatives, such as the 2006 Belgian Chair's efforts to provide infrastructure repair assistance as a confidence-building and reconciliation mechanism.

I would point to one particular aspect of OSCE involvement in Georgia as particular evidence of the potential effectiveness of field operations. This is the Border Monitoring Operation. When the BMO was put in place hostilities in the North Caucasus and uncertainty over how anti-government fighters were getting into the Russian Federation were already creating acrimony and threatening to expand the conflict. The credible, impartial observation of the Russian-Georgian border in my view contributed significantly to prevention of possible escalation of tension and active conflict in the region. I find it regrettable that the BMO came to a less than amicable end. I might note that another border mission, with a very different mandate, is now working very effectively along the frontier between Moldova and Ukraine – the EU Border Assistance Mission (BAM), there since late 2005. Such missions are clearly valuable confidence building, conflict prevention tools. No international organization holds a monopoly on the ability to deploy such missions, and it is worth keeping such possible operations in the OSCE tool kit.

The OSCE was involved in the political settlement negotiations in Moldova from almost the very beginning of that process, and the CiO signed the most significant document to come out of that process so far, the 1997 Moscow Memorandum. The OSCE Mission also raised and transferred major amounts of financial assistance to the Russian Federation to support the destruction or withdrawal of Russian troops, arms, and ammunition from the Transdniestrian region of the Republic of Moldova. Together with mediators from the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the OSCE Mission developed an extensive set of proposed confidence building measures and agreements – largely involving military and hard security – between Chisinau and local authorities in Tiraspol. The OSCE Mission is currently facilitating confidence building contacts in other areas

between experts from both parties to the conflicts, in the hope of eventually getting the stalled political settlement process going again.

In both Georgia and Moldova the activities of the OSCE Missions in the field of conflict resolution have been complicated by the involvement also of individual participating states as mediators and peacekeepers – in Georgia, the Russian Federation and the Friends of Georgia in the UN, and in Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine (with the U.S. and EU added as observers in 2005). The long-term involvement of participating states – especially those in geographical proximity – increases the danger that such states may end up either in competition with other mediators or even be perceived by one of the involved actors as an additional party to the conflict. Arguably, this is what happened in Georgia, where Tbilisi increasingly perceived Moscow's involvement and actions as support for the breakaway entities. In Moldova, the unilateral mediation effort of the Russian Federation almost produced a settlement in late 2003, but also provoked resistance and a counter-reaction from Chisinau that arguably still complicates efforts to reach a political settlement. On the other hand, as I have noted, the interactions of the three co-chairs of the Minsk Conference have generally been perceived as relatively impartial, disinterested, and even-handed.

In the Balkans, the OSCE had early warning and/or conflict prevention field operations at one time or another in Kosovo (1992 and 1998) and Macedonia (FYROM). The first Kosovo Mission was expelled by Yugoslav President Milosevic after a year, and cannot really be judged either as a success or failure. The KVM, of course, departed as the province descended into war, and thus is technically a failure. However, the determination of both Belgrade and the UCK to pursue their aims through the application of force raises real questions as to whether any diplomatic intervention at that time would have been sufficient to avert hostilities. Finally, in my own view OSCE involvement in conflict prevention in FYROM has been overall relatively successful. The OSCE presence was important after a Chinese veto ended UNPREDEP. Despite some turf fighting with the EU, the OSCE also contributed significantly to the prevention of violence in 2001 and a peaceful process of political development since then.

The OSCE Missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Kosovo after 1999 have all been devoted largely to post-conflict reconciliation and rehabilitation. These field missions have operated with varying degrees of overall success, and with considerable ups and downs over time. One might argue that the differences in their records, or degrees of success, are attributable to the different circumstances and recent history in the states themselves. One also needs to note that each of these field missions operated and operates in an environment with many other international organizations, NGOs, and domestic agencies that is not always cooperative. All of these states appear much better off now in most respects than when the OSCE missions were first deployed, although it is difficult to prove that the OSCE is directly responsible for this. On the other hand, if one uses absolute norms, one might just as easily question why massive international involvement in all of these countries has not led to greater material progress, justice, and harmony.

I would argue that these are all cases in which the glass can be legitimately judged either half-full or half-empty. As recent U.S. and NATO experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate, the tasks involved in post-conflict reconstruction are myriad, complex, and enormous. They are not completed quickly or easily, and the earliest and best indicators of success are often simply that the situation is not getting worse. Thus, while these tasks are arguably well worth doing, at times indispensable, it is extremely difficult to produce dramatic results that offer quick evidence of success.

The OSCE Missions in Estonia and Latvia are, I believe, good examples of successful conflict prevention. With the assistance, cooperation, and support of other OSCE institutions (in particular the HCNM), important participating states (in particular the Russian Federation), and the authorities of the receiving states, considerable progress was made in addressing the grievances and concerns of the ethnic Russian population in both states, as well as issues connected with the withdrawal of Russian military forces and social consequences of the breakup of the USSR. Some argue that the situation was never as difficult in the Baltic states as in the former Soviet republics that experienced military conflicts. I would counter that OSCE involvement in part helped to ensure that remained the case.

The OSCE Mission to Ukraine also may take some of the credit for the peaceful resolution of an internal conflict within a former Soviet republic. Agreement on a special political status within Ukraine for the Crimean region was not a foregone conclusion in the early 1990s right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the Ukrainian and local Crimean leaders and negotiators deserve credit and praise for their moderation and reason in achieving agreement, one should also recognize that having the OSCE Mission there made the process easier.

From time to time the Chair has designated personal or special representatives to respond to emergencies, deal with difficult or high-level questions, or augment and support existing OSCE mechanisms or institutions. These appointments have been on both a short and longer-term basis. In addition to the Personal Representative for the Nagorno Karabakh Conflict, the dispatch of personal representatives to the FRY in 1996-97 and to FYROM in 2001 come to mind. I had the opportunity to work with several representatives of successive CiOs while Head of Mission in Moldova, and generally found that the appointment of a special envoy facilitated my contacts with the Chair and added scope and resources to my Mission's capabilities.

Finally, I give very high marks to the activities of the HCNM in preventing, mitigating, or resolving many potential or developed conflicts within or between participating states involving national minorities. The work of the HCNM is generally designed to be private, and thus many or all of the successes of this institution go without public credit. However, for those of us who have worked for any length of time in OSCE field operations, it is clear that the activities of the office of the HCNM provide a model for identifying early on potential sources of conflict and intervening quietly to head off such conflict.

This brief, admittedly selective review of OSCE institutions and activities in the overall area of conflict management from 1990 to the present suggests to me several basic conclusions:

First, OSCE field operations – chiefly the OSCE missions – provide flexible and powerful tools for addressing a wide range of issues and all stages of the conflict process, from early warning to rehabilitation. Field missions may not always produce the desired results, but this is often due to an imperfect mandate, insufficient personnel or resources, or local conditions and the nature of the problem, rather than inherent flaws in the concept itself.

Second, in addressing any stage of a particular conflict, there is no substitute for the political will to reach consensus among the major actors involved. If the parties to a conflict, significant powers in the region of the conflict, or major external powers do not wish to change a situation or wish only to move a situation to their own advantage, then external efforts will have a significantly smaller chance of producing success. It is always possible that OSCE intervention in a conflict may convince the involved actors to move toward accommodation, but even with the best of intent and personnel, this will not always be the case.

Third, involvement and intervention are often desirable, notwithstanding a low probability of immediate success. OSCE intervention and presence can often prevent situations from becoming worse. One may argue with some justification that the “frozen” state of the conflicts in Georgia from 1994 through 2007 was better than what occurred in 2008. Expectations of what any organization can do need to be managed. The United Nations has addressed various conflicts for decades without success, yet states continue to bring their problems to the UN because the organization provides a comprehensive forum for addressing them. On the more circumscribed Euro-Atlantic stage, the same basic truth applies to the OSCE.

Fourth, and related to number three, the problems of turf battles between international organizations and forum shopping will only become bigger for the OSCE as we move further into the twenty first century. Participating states gave the OSCE the lead in Bosnia in 1995 because of widespread disenchantment with the UN role from 1991-95, in particular UNPROFOR. By 1999, upon completion of the war in Kosovo and Serbia, most of the same major powers decided to have the UN take the lead in Kosovo. NATO, the EU, and the Council of Europe are only a few of the other prominent international organizations that provide alternative fora and operational institutions in the OSCE space. Strengthening the role and improving the capabilities of the OSCE inevitably involve defining its basic relationship with all these organizations.

### **How to Make OSCE Conflict Prevention and Resolution Better**

The biggest difficulty in determining how the OSCE today might improve its capabilities and operations in conflict prevention and resolution is that the biggest challenges to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area come from without, not from within. This is not to say there are no problems or threats within the territory of the OSCE participating states. However, the changes in the OSCE area since the major institutions and mechanisms were formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s are immense. Twenty five years ago Europe was an armed camp, dominated by two opposing political-military blocs that had significant normative, ideological differences and disagreements. That Europe has vanished (forever, one hopes) and has been replaced by a space characterized by a far greater degree of shared values, freedom of movement, human contacts, peace, and relative prosperity. One hopes participating states might keep these facts firmly in mind as they ponder how to resolve their remaining differences.

In addressing new threats, OSCE institutions and operations will need to communicate and cooperate with an expanding list of international organizations and NGOs, including specialized UN agencies, NATO, the EU, the CoE, a plethora of regional organizations, various IFIs, and OSCE partners in cooperation. In order to keep track of and support such operational cooperation and coordination, the capabilities of OSCE institutions, in particular the Secretariat and the CPC, will need to be expanded somewhat. The participating states may also wish to consider how to make use of the OSCE’s deliberative bodies, in particular the PC and the FSC, to consider normative responses to new threats, for example cyber attacks and cyber terrorism.

It is my firm conviction, whether dealing with old or new threats, that to be effective the OSCE must maintain and keep current its capabilities to deploy field operations with sufficient flexibility to meet the particular circumstances and with enough speed to meet the challenge as early as possible in the conflict process. In reinvigorating the capabilities of the OSCE, therefore, I believe it is crucial to look for ways the organization can maintain and improve its ability to deploy and support analysts, monitors, mediators, and other experts, who are able to provide warning, build confidence, broker compromises, or find ways to rebuild, depending on when and where they are



deployed. The participating states will undoubtedly wish the OSCE to engage also in other areas and tasks, but such activities are the heart and soul of conflict prevention and conflict resolution. To be effective in the twenty first century, the OSCE must bring up to date both its ability to reach consensus on deciding when and how to intervene, as well as the operational capacity to support such activities.

In the context of such an approach, I would like to offer some comments on a number of recent thought-provoking and promising proposals on how to improve the conflict management capabilities of the OSCE. One of the broadest and most ambitious is the Russian Federation Proposal for a Draft Decision on Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management in the OSCE Area. My personal perception is this proposal stems from the same motives that prompted Russian President Medvedev's initiative for a new European security treaty, that is, a desire to attain an agreed set of obligatory norms and procedures for responding to security problems in the OSCE area. I find all of the operative points of the proposed decision to be laudable as aspirations, but relatively less guidance in the proposal as to how to realize them.

The Russian proposal poses in stark clarity what is perhaps the most difficult dilemma of the OSCE approach to all stages of the conflict process – the requirement for consensus. This requirement obviously allows one participating state at any point in the process to block progress. All of us who have spent any time in the OSCE recognize this fact, yet none of us have ever found any way to get around it, since almost all participating states find the consensus rule essential at one time or another for protecting their own national interests. One answer to the consensus requirement is patience – if one persists long enough, one may eventually persuade the recalcitrant parties to accept a compromise solution. The history of the OSCE itself from the Helsinki Final Act to the Charter of Paris might be offered as evidence in support of this proposition.

The problem is that long-term blocking of a conflict situation by one actor in the process can sometimes lead to increasing frustration on the part of other parties. This frustration may eventually boil over and prompt a resort to more decisive or extreme actions. In my own personal perception this is what occurred with the conflicts in Georgia from the early 2000s to 2008. I recognize the essential wisdom of the Russian proverb: "*plokhoi mir luchshe dobroi ssory* (A bad peace is better than a good fight)." Nonetheless, one must keep in mind that preservation of a peaceful *status quo* will not always be the best course in addressing a conflict, particularly if the dynamics of that *status quo* result in one party becoming increasingly aggrieved.

In the Russian proposal I find the sixth (or next to last) operative bullet to be the most interesting and most promising part. In my own mediation efforts, I found the expansion and maintenance of political dialogue at all levels and the use of confidence and security building measure to be extremely useful and effective tools. I would recommend that OSCE personnel involved in other conflict resolution or mediation efforts consider how to employ appropriate variants of these basic tools. In addition to committing in principle to employment of these tools and techniques, participating states might consider how the OSCE institutionally might improve its ability to provide mediators educated and skilled in these techniques. Practical steps to pursue such goals might include increased training opportunities offered either at the OSCE Headquarters in Vienna or at appropriate sites provided by individual or several participating states; compilation of reserve personnel rosters to be drawn upon in the case of emergency situations requiring rapid build-up and deployment of OSCE assets; or long-term study groups composed of experts from OSCE participating states to compile studies of past OSCE efforts and recommendations for use in future OSCE operations.

A number of documents arising from the Corfu process all express the desire to reinvigorate OSCE capabilities, with particular reference to conflict prevention and resolution. The Athens Ministerial Declaration on the OSCE Corfu Process expressed the aim “to recapture the sense of common purpose that brought together our predecessors in Helsinki almost 35 years ago.” Many recent documents and proposals, including the Athens Ministerial Declaration, specifically mention the political dialogue among the participating states as a basic measure of the OSCE’s strength and effectiveness.

The Permanent Council is the institutional home of the OSCE’s political dialogue. Academic studies of the OSCE point to the OSCE’s all-inclusive membership and its availability as a forum for political discussions of all subjects related to security as the two major strengths of the organization. Thus it is ultimately in the Permanent Council that the institutional capabilities of the OSCE will be realized or frustrated. Over the past decade the OSCE, and in particular the participating states acting in the Permanent Council, have been increasingly unable to reach agreement on important questions involving security in Europe. High-level discussion and decision-making has migrated on a number of issues to the more limited fora of NATO, the EU, or the Council of Europe, where at times reaching agreement is easier because of the more limited membership. This is fine as long as non-members in those organizations are not affected by or do not object to the decisions they take. However, the OSCE remains the only forum that can provide agreement on norms or operations from all Euro-Atlantic states.

In one sense, the lack of consensus on many major issues among the OSCE participating states simply reflects current political realities in Europe. For example, after listening to Russian President Putin’s speech at the February 2007 Munich Security Conference, it was hard to imagine that OSCE discussions of the issues Mr. Putin raised would produce quick agreement. Yet it is precisely in the OSCE where such difficult issues should be raised and debated if one aspires to reach a broad consensus among all Euro-Atlantic states and to avoid the development of new dividing lines in Europe.

I have seen a number of recent proposals and food for thought papers that address possible improvements to the political dialogue or debates within the Permanent Council, in particular a paper from Finland and ten other participating states. In my personal opinion it would definitely be worthwhile for participating states to look at ways to make better use of the Permanent Council as the basic instrument of political debate within the OSCE. When I returned to the OSCE in 1999 as Head of Mission to Moldova, PC debates seemed to me at times perhaps too undisciplined and disorganized. By the time I finished my second term in Moldova, I found PC discussions generally too scripted and predictable.

It is my personal conviction that the potential of the Permanent Council as a forum for political debate and decision making has so far been considerably unrealized by the participating states. If real business is to be done in the PC, debates there must be both manageable but flexible. A number of changes could be instituted to seek this aim, such as special closed sessions and informal meetings, as suggested in the Finnish proposal. However, technical fixes alone will not restore or realize the potential of the PC. Participating states must consider how to structure the work of the PC so that it encourages sustained deliberation of important security issues, not just the exchange of polemical point and counterpoint on issues of the day. The point is to seek an eventual end state in which the PC is the logical forum in which to deliberate and – one hopes – from time to time decide comprehensive issues in European security, just as the UNSC is the logical forum to which one takes global security issues.

There have been a number of papers with proposals to augment the powers of the OSCE Chairperson in Office to enable a quicker, more flexible response to unexpected situations and rapidly evolving crises. For example, a U.S. food for thought paper from last October suggests empowering the CiO to make statements, offer her or his good offices, and even deploy small missions to conflict areas for a limited time as an immediate response to a crisis or outbreak of conflict. An energetic Chairmanship, prepared to engage in broad consultations, already has considerable flexibility in responding to unforeseen events. I believe that current suggestions I have seen on broadening the possible scope of CiO action could be useful in enhancing existing rapid response capabilities, while not weakening the need for consensus in reaching fundamental political decisions or basic institutional changes.

The important point to keep in mind is that one of the greatest historical strengths of the OSCE over the past two decades has been its ability rapidly to deploy operations to the field tailored flexibly to the needs and situation of the receiving state. OSCE conflict prevention and resolution capabilities will be enhanced to the extent that actions taken and changes made by the participating states add to or enhance the ability of the organization to respond quickly, flexibly, and on the spot to emergencies that arise or conflicts that begin to develop, before they result in full scale military action. Realistically, the OSCE will not be able to respond early and effectively in every case, although that should be the ideal to which participating states aspire. There will always be a tension between the demand for consensus on the one hand, and the need for speed and flexibility on the other. The thing to remember is that effective early warning, conflict prevention, and crisis management all address problems on site, in the field, and not just in capitals and headquarters.

Finally, a number of participating states have suggested various steps to strengthen and improve the OSCE's institutional capacity in dealing with the various stages of conflict management. For example, a food for thought paper from Belgium and six other participating states discusses the possible establishment of a civilian mission that would provide personnel resources and expertise for post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction. A number of other proposals suggest expanding and strengthening elements of the Secretariat and CPC or establishing new offices or mechanisms to provide added continuity and expertise for the OSCE to address the various stages of conflict prevention and resolution.

I side with those who do not believe that wholly new OSCE institutions or mechanisms are necessary, but I do believe the Secretariat and CPC need to be beefed up to provide the OSCE with a much better institutional memory in order to provide more effective guidance and support to field operations and activities. In my personal observation OSCE Headquarters needs a better historical record not only of the conflicts and specific issues in which field operations have been involved but also of the stages of and reasoning behind the growth and development of OSCE institutions themselves. I perceive a need for the ability in the Secretariat and CPC to provide participating states with better and more complete information as they contemplate proposed decisions, as well as better to support OSCE operations in implementing decisions once they have been taken. I do not believe providing such enhanced capabilities to the Secretariat and CPC would require exorbitantly large amounts of money or people; it will require some additional personnel, devoted in particular to research and analysis in support of operations, and moderately enhanced IT and library/archival capabilities. Whatever the decisions of the participating states on the other proposals I have mentioned, discussion and action on this particular score seems to me to offer potentially large returns in capability for a relatively modest investment in resources, and is thus eminently worth investigation.

The heady days of November, 1990 are gone, when the signatories of the Charter of Paris envisioned a new Europe emerging with the OSCE at its head. These days will not come again. However, if there were today no international security organization that included all European and North Atlantic states and was mandated to discuss a comprehensive range of security issues, the states of the Euro-Atlantic space would almost certainly invent such an organization. As we all know, there already is such an international body, the OSCE. It still can and will work well, when and if the participating states once again exhibit the desire for it to do so.