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Developing a new approach to conventional arms control?

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Let me start with two general observations about the state of the OSCE. First, the future of this organisation may be less grim than many predict. Much has been said about the OSCE's crisis. Much of it is true. But current developments in Europe suggest that the role and relevance of the OSCE may grow in the years ahead.

Following the ambivalent outcome of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is a conspicuous intervention fatigue among European publics. The crisis of military crisis management is bound to exacerbate as the European debt crisis translates into shrinking defence budgets. There will likely be a shift towards more subtle, civilian, long-term approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding – the type of measures the OSCE has focused on.

Looking at the EU and NATO, there is also growing enlargement fatigue. This points to obvious limits to how far stability in Europe can be accomplished by expanding the Euro-Atlantic security community. By implication, the pan-European OSCE, with twice as many member states as the EU and NATO, is bound to gain traction again.

This brings me to my second general observation. The OSCE will have to adjust its level of ambition to what an organisation of 56 members can realistically accomplish if it is to be a credible actor in European security. Establishing a pan-European security community is a noble but unrealistic goal. There is too much diversity in the OSCE for this to happen anytime soon. Instead, the OSCE should focus on managing this diversity in ways that enhances security in Europe. In other words, it should concentrate on promoting cooperative security again – the core business of the former CSCE.

Cooperative security stands for a lower level of ambition than security models exemplified by the EU, NATO, or the UN, which are based on features such as the transfer of sovereignty, collective defence, or sanctions. It aims at building inclusive regional security arrangements by taking into account divergent security needs of countries that may have little in common. It strives to achieve common objectives despite fundamental differences. Based on the premise of the indivisibility of security, the concept assumes that cooperation can bring benefits to all participating states, whereas one state's insecurity can negatively affect the well-being of all. Cooperative security is about reassurance rather than deterrence,

engagement rather than containment, consultation rather than confrontation, and socialization rather than conditionality. The bottom line is that security is to be built through a culture of dialogue, cooperation, and transparency.

The trouble for the OSCE is that even this kind of security cooperation no longer works properly across Europe today. Just look at the state of the conventional arms control regime in Europe, i.e., the subject matter of this panel. While long a cornerstone of cooperative security, conventional arms control has all but crumbled over the past decade. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) of 1990 – a legally binding European arms control regime that provides for a system of limitations, transparency, and verification – has been suspended by Russia in 2007. Numerous other states have since suspended implementation of the treaty vis-à-vis Russia. The Adapted Treaty of 1999, which transformed the bloc-to-bloc system of limitations to a post-Cold War system of national and territorial ceilings, has never entered into force for lack of ratification.

Several factors account for the crisis of conventional arms control. For one thing, the *political climate* has deteriorated significantly over the past decade. Some emphasise the role that NATO enlargement played in this, arguing that the expansion of the Euro-Atlantic security community undermined pan-European cooperative security. Others point out that Russia has become more assertive again. There have also been major changes in the *threat picture*. Many states have shifted attention to extra-European threats. New systems like missile defence are being installed to provide protection against such threats, even if this may weaken pan-European security. At the same time, sub-regional threats have come to the fore in Europe, raising additional challenges for European arms control. The *linkage approach* of tying the arms control regime to developments relating to some of the sub-regional protracted conflicts has turned out to be counterproductive, resulting in the weakening of strategic arms control at large. Arms control is unsuited as a vehicle to accomplish other political objectives.

Can cooperative security be restored in the field of conventional arms control? There are those who make the case for adapting the Adapted Treaty of 1999, urging both NATO members and Russia to move away from their maximalist positions. However, judging by the experience of recent years, it is hard to see how any modified CFE treaty would get ratified by all parties concerned. Therefore, the only way forward could well be to work for a new regime that may be politically rather than legally binding, or perhaps a mixture of both.

New multilateral negotiations would no doubt be extremely difficult. Numerous questions need to be resolved. Should the whole OSCE area be part of such a regime? What exactly should be limited, given the far-reaching changes in military affairs in past decades? Could limitations be defined on levels low enough to be meaningful in the current European security context? Can a regime be established that is status-free as far as protracted conflicts are concerned?

Given that no new regime will emerge overnight, the OSCE should work hard to at least strengthen its Confidence and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs) in the near future. The Vienna Document, which is about information-sharing, inspections, and evaluations in the military realm, has been an important complement to the CFE. But many of its provisions are still shaped by Cold War strategic thinking. The document is in need of an update well beyond the changes made in 2011. Adaptations are required concerning both lowering thresholds for notifying military activities and increasing inspection quotas. Discussions in the past years have indicated that progress in this field will not be easy to accomplish either. But it is certainly worth trying.

The main problem is that some states quite obviously have lost interest in conventional arms control in Europe. They no longer see a need for such measures. I think they are wrong. Stability in Europe should not be taken for granted. It has to be jointly established. It is not just that sub-regional conflicts pose a continuous challenge. Even strategic stability on the pan-European level may be less consolidated than we long thought. Against the background of the debt and euro crisis, scenarios leading to large-scale economic havoc, political fragmentation, massive social unrest, and the rise of populism in Europe look far less far-fetched than a few years ago. In such an environment, the perseverance of the Euro-Atlantic security community could well be put to a serious test.

Accordingly, features such as military restraint, predictability, and mutual trust remain of great importance for the security of Europe. The OSCE has an important role to play here. Fostering trust is of course also in its own interest, as much of its organisational effectiveness depends on member states' support. The return of trust into the OSCE is tied to the same precondition as a successful relaunch of arms control: the organisation will have to find means of handling the protracted conflicts in ways that do not paralyse its work.

This brings me to some final comments about the second topic linked to this panel, i.e., transnational threats (TNT). The OSCE has recently set up a new TNT department, which covers issues such as cyber security, anti-terrorism, border management, and police-related aspects. In view of its credo of comprehensive security, addressing these issues seems a logical thing to do. Indeed, the OSCE has become an interesting laboratory of ideas in this regard.

Still, the OSCE will have to demonstrate its comparative advantages and its ability to provide extra value to become acknowledged as a major actor in these fields. In some cases, its geographic reach may or may not speak in favour of an OSCE role when compared to, say, the EU or the UN. But in many cases, when sensitive issues are at stake, there is also the question of trust. All too often, OSCE progress concerning some TNT issues is still hampered because these issues are being politicised and sucked into controversies about protracted conflicts. Just as with arms control, making TNTs an effective part of a cooperative security system would be desirable. But achieving such an objective requires much political will, the ability to compromise, stamina, and, indeed, a genuine appreciation for what the OSCE really is – a unique forum for dialogue and building trust.