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Working Session I: Transnational Challenges to Security in the OSCE Area

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In recent years, the OSCE has become increasingly aware of a new security dimension: transnational threats and challenges arising from demographic imbalances, illegal migration, trafficking and other forms of organized crime, and from transnational terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Although protracted ethno-political conflicts smoulder on in some states, and the prevention of new conflicts remains an ongoing task, transnational threats have become the most prominent security challenge for the Organization.

Transnational threats endanger people's lives and property, they undermine the viability of states, particularly weak states, and they threaten stability and security both in specific regions and in the OSCE area as a whole. Today, transnational threats are no less relevant than the nuclear and conventional stand-off was in the Cold War period and ethno-political conflicts were in the 1990s. Consequently, the OSCE has to reinvent itself and adapt its working instruments to the nature of this new challenge.

Limited progress has so far been made in doing so and, all in all, it has been less convincing than fifteen years ago, when the CSCE created instruments to address ethno-political conflicts. While the Organization has produced excellent policy documents, concrete tools for actually tackling transnational challenges have remained significantly underdeveloped. Many of the Organization's activities are merely declaratory or symbolic.

Yes, we have the 2003 "OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century". It clearly states that "threats to security and stability in the OSCE region are today more likely to arise as negative, destabilizing consequences of developments that cut across the politico-military, economic and environmental and human dimensions, than from any major armed conflict" and that they are "transnational in character". And we also have a number of good documents dealing with specific transnational challenges, including action plans on anti-terrorism and anti-trafficking and the Border Security and Management Concept.

Where the Organization is still deficient, however, is in terms of its concrete working instruments. The thematic units within the Secretariat – each with a mere handful of staff members – are tiny given the nature of the challenges ahead. And the idea of establishing thematic missions was given a second-rate burial at the 2006 Brussels Ministerial Council meeting after years of discussions.

To decide how we should develop the OSCE's working instruments, we have to consider some typical dilemmas connected with transnational threats and challenges.

*First*, the dilemma of complexity. Transnational challenges are complex, multi-dimensional, mutually interlinked and long-term in nature. Consequently, they can only be effectively addressed by means of a comprehensive, cross-dimensional and long-term approach. What sounds easy and fits so well with the general philosophy of the OSCE is extremely difficult to put into practice. The working structures of states and international organizations including the OSCE are heavily compartmentalized and oriented towards short-term success.

*Second*, the dilemma of invisibility. Many transnational challenges occur out of the public eye. Heroin from Afghanistan probably kills more people than a limited ethno-political conflict, but unlike the latter, will rarely make it onto the main TV news. Because most types of transnational challenge do not attract much public and political attention – the one clear exception being terrorism – it is more difficult to mobilize resources and to involve the political leaderships of the participating States.

*Third*, the dilemma of unknown actors. Actors associated with transnational threats are usually non-state entities, whose identity is frequently not known, and who are far more difficult to address than states and even rebel groups. It is impossible or at least very difficult to negotiate with criminals and terrorists, even if one knows who they are.

*Fourth*, the dilemma of co-operation. Transnational challenges represent a global phenomenon by their very nature. Threats originating from outside affect the OSCE area and vice versa. That does not mean that the OSCE should seek to act outside its area, but it does mean that it must co-operate even more intensively with many national and international actors. Lack of co-ordination leads to the fragmentation of international efforts, as can frequently be observed.

*Fifth*, the dilemma of weak states. Violent conflicts and weak states breed transnational challenges and threats. Unrecognized pseudo-states, such as those created in the protracted conflicts, or states that are simply unable to fulfil basic functions of governance, may provide safe heavens for criminal groups and terrorists.

*Sixth*, we can still observe a certain conservatism in terms of the general approach to foreign policy making. When crises need to be managed, treaties signed and peacekeeping forces deployed, the foreign policy apparatuses know what to do, and ministers are quick to become involved. The same is true when it comes to assessing the relevance of threats and crises. In 1999, the participating States were able to quickly agree on the deployment of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, a field operation with more than 2,000 staff members at times. A comparable effort related to transnational challenges, although equally necessary, is inconceivable under present conditions.

I must mention one final phenomenon, namely the return of classical international disputes over power and influence within the OSCE area. States afford themselves the luxury of treating issues such as the Adapted CFE Treaty, missile defence, military bases, and the enlargement of military alliances as zero-sum games. For the first time since the Charter of Paris was signed, politico-military disagreements between OSCE participating States have again become a relevant factor in European security policy. Although I do not want to overdramatize these tendencies, they have a profound negative impact on the overall situation: They undermine the principle of co-operative security to which states have committed themselves. And they consume political capital urgently needed to address transnational threats and other global challenges.

In considering what modest steps the OSCE can take to address transnational threats and challenges more effectively, four things come to my mind:

*First*, States should consider reviving the topic of thematic missions as an instrument for addressing transnational challenges and threats. One of the main concerns regarding thematic missions, shared by a number of States, was that they might be used as an instrument to undermine the traditional country missions. This was not entirely groundless. However, it is

becoming ever less relevant as the significance of the country missions in terms both of their number and the number of staff involved declines.

*Second*, I would like to suggest that the existing thematic units should be upgraded and integrated to form a single department. As one well-known German diplomat, Ambassador Wilhelm Höynck, used to say: “Co-ordination starts at home”. This is also true for the OSCE’s working instruments for tackling transnational challenges.

*Third*, the OSCE agenda is overloaded and fragmented. States have too often given the Organization new tasks without providing it with adequate capacities. The OSCE should therefore streamline its agenda and focus more on long-term efforts. The Quintet is an important first step into this direction.

*Finally*, Central Asia is particularly exposed to a number of transnational threats and challenges. Thus, the OSCE should make Central Asia a strategic priority. The current favourable conditions for doing so represent a true window of opportunity. The EU Central Asia Strategy reflects the European Union’s long-term interest and commitment. And the Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship in 2010 provides a unique opportunity for the development of local and regional ownership.

Border security and management in Central Asia – particularly, but not only related to the borders with Afghanistan – will be a key element of a strategic reorientation. But while more efforts on border security are essential, addressing transnational threats cannot be reduced to one issue. Transnational challenges can only be met by means of a comprehensive approach, and weak states need a broad variety of assistance. To give just two examples: strengthening the rule of law remains a key issue for establishing sustainable structures of governance, while educational initiatives are required to address the growth of radicalism and extremism.

I am far from underestimating the role of symbolic action in international politics. Political declarations and symbols matter, but they are not sufficient for addressing hard-core transnational threats in Central Asia and elsewhere. I believe that the OSCE can and should move clearly from symbolic to real action.