

A strong OSCE for a strong Europe

A joint op-ed by the Foreign Ministers of Germany, Austria and Italy

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We live in turbulent times. Crises and conflicts are hitting us in quick succession and with full force. Take Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq or Afghanistan. But times are also turbulent here in Europe. The very question of war and peace has returned to our continent with Russia's annexation of Crimea in violation of international law and the unresolved conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The cornerstones of the European peace architecture which for decades we almost took for granted are today called into question.

It's clear that, particularly in times as tempestuous as these, we need shared structures to re-establish security and stability. We need fora to re-build lost trust.

In Europe we have such a unique platform: the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It stands like no other institution in Europe for a peaceful order rooted in shared values, fundamental freedoms and human rights. Despite all the different societies involved, the different cultures, languages and even different views, the OSCE, as a consensus-building organisation, provides a forum for dialogue between East and West, North and South.

Today we need the OSCE more than ever, an OSCE that has woken up after years of slumber and has set itself a strong agenda for the future.

However, it's also clear that we need to equip the OSCE for its new tasks and challenges. As members of the next OSCE Troika, we have defined five fields of action here:

1. New forms of dialogue

The OSCE has proven that it is a reliable platform for dialogue also spanning bitter divisions. High-level Ministerial Councils, informal Foreign Ministers Meetings (for example in Potsdam in September this year) and ad-hoc discussions (for example on the fringes of this year's UN General Assembly) provide a solid basis for in-depth exchange at the political level. In future, parliamentarians, young people and representatives from civil society, science and business should be included more in these debates to bolster the OSCE's potential as a mediator and connector. We are convinced that if we want to keep political communication channels open in Europe also in turbulent times, the organisation needs to play a central role once more at the heart of multilateral diplomacy in Europe.

2. Sustainable conflict resolution

Many crises and conflicts are sending shock waves through our European security architecture today. As the world's largest regional security organisation, the OSCE has the core task of preventing violent conflict and finding sustainable solutions for existing conflicts in the OSCE area.

However, the Ukraine conflict also showed us that the OSCE needs to prepare for new challenges that emerge from complex multidimensional conflict situations. We thus should further develop our conflict resolution instruments in such a way that we are able to act at all times: in both conflict prevention and mediation, in monitoring and post-crisis rehabilitation.

3. Relaunching conventional arms control

Confidence-building measures and arms control play a central role when it comes to creating transparency, minimising risks and re-establishing security in Europe. That is why we advocate modernising the Vienna Document and relaunching conventional arms control. The OSCE is a reliable forum for structured dialogue with all partners who share responsibility for the security of our continent. OSCE participating States have expressed considerable interest here and we will thus continue this initiative during the next Chairmanship.

4. Meeting global challenges together

Today, our states and societies are confronted with an unprecedented number of global tasks which cannot be performed by any country on its own. The OSCE can play an important role in seeking shared responses to challenges such as terrorism, extremism, cyber attacks and the impact of displacement and migration – amongst others, also through its Mediterranean Partnership.

Closer cooperation in the field of business and the environment also helps build confidence. The Connectivity Conference in Berlin in May provided important initial momentum here.

We want to continue these efforts in all dimensions of our security. After all, it is clear that we can only meet joint challenges together. Democracy and human rights remain the cornerstone of our cooperation here.

5. A capable OSCE

The OSCE can only be as strong as its members allow it to be. We call upon all OSCE states to shoulder their responsibility and give the OSCE the political and financial support it needs for its work – this includes the Secretariat in Vienna, but also the field missions and the OSCE's independent institutions.

We urge all OSCE states to play their part in implementing these fields of action. As the next Troika, we are confident that the more we invest in the OSCE, the more it can do for us. We need a strong OSCE, particularly in these turbulent times.