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THE OSCE EXPERIENCE FROM THE WESTERN BALKANS AND LESSONS LEARNT

Background paper for distribution

THE OSCE EXPERIENCE

Though the OSCE, through its active political bodies, institutions, and field activities is recognised by its participating States as a primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention and crisis management, the Balkans conflicts in the early 1990s marked a turning point for the institutional development of the Organization. During this period, there was an acute need for the CSCE/OSCE to shift its emphasis to date from regulatory mechanisms of inter-state conflict, based on military security issues, responding to conflicts, especially within states, more flexibly and effectively. To this end, instruments such as missions of long duration were created. These missions were new forms of international intervention into potential conflict situations.

In the last decade OSCE field activities have become the Organization's principal instrument for dealing with all phases of the conflict cycle in the Balkans. In 1992 the then CSCE deployed its first field activity in the region, the Missions of Long Duration in Kosovo, Sandjak and Vojvodina. Later that year, in an effort to prevent conflict from spilling over into the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYROM), the Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje was deployed - and it has since been adapted to meet new security challenges there.

While the situation in the Balkans has stabilized significantly in the last decade, the OSCE still maintains its strongest field activities in this region. Through its missions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia and Montenegro, it carries out a vast array of multi-faceted activities and projects, including in human rights and rule of law development, democratisation, institution building, organizing and monitoring of elections, police monitoring and training, media development, small arms and light weapons (SALW) activities, and other forms of arms control.

Structurally, in addition to the network of OSCE missions and other field activities - there are an additional 12 field activities outside the Balkans - the OSCE's conflict prevention tools include regular political dialogue and exchanges of views among OSCE participating States in the Permanent Council, and permanent Institutions like the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on

Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. These tools are complemented by various ad hoc mechanisms applied on an as needed basis: Personal representatives of the Chairman-in-Office, fact-finding and rapporteur missions, steering groups and so on. Within the Secretariat, the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) provides daily substantive support to and follow-up on the operational implementation of the OSCE's decisions.

LESSONS LEARNT

Despite significant progress, many parts of the Balkans continue to require the presence of substantial numbers of international military personnel and police forces to guarantee stability and future development. Many of these international responsibilities are progressively being turned over to the European Union, in the short term through the establishment of new European crisis-management tools and actual missions and in the long term through the Stabilisation and Association Process. Finding a balance between international involvement and the ongoing process towards regional and local ownership is a key question in this context. Further enhancing the normalisation of the overall security situation in the region, as well as strengthening responses to violent conflict, must also be addressed. Below are some OSCE lessons learned which we think would enhance co-operation between international actors, and as a result, which could point in the right direction to finding this important balance between international involvement and regional ownership - while enhancing overall security in the region.

Strategic lessons

Recent experiences have shown all too clearly that organisations with different mandates, resources and approaches to security have **to work together in the field** if common goals are to be achieved, for each has its own specific role to play. There remains much to be done to develop a greater understanding between the various major international organisations, and there is a need to build mutually supporting systems that will bring closer together the various players. This can be enhanced in a number of key areas through several means.

- Various international organizations (IO) working in the field should develop reciprocal knowledge of each other's respective mandates, modus operandi, organisational structures and procedures. One way to tackle this issue would be by sharing respective training modules, or developing **joint training programmes** for field officers on relevant issues prior to their deployment in the field. Joint training should be a general aim, not least because common standards are already current practice in many areas. Joint exercises can also play a very important role in this process of getting to know each other's procedures better - but only if partner organisations are treated as real partners, and can participate rather than observe, and have access to relevant information.
- On a similar theme, it could also be useful to harmonise respective actors' working procedures, or to try to develop **compatible procedures or model agreements** to improve co-operation in conflict prevention. Where necessary, partner organisations should introduce new modalities and establish new mechanisms for co-operation. But we also need to build more efficiently on the initiatives already launched and take greater active advantage of each other's existing tools. We must see where, and how, we can complement each other, using experience gained, resources and mechanisms available. And we should respect the principle of inclusiveness - and involve all relevant players.
- Building upon existing training networks and resources, IOs should aim at strengthening the level of **harmonisation** achieved in preparing future members of field operations,

particularly civilians. Experience has shown that a number of organisations have been drawing on the same pool of experts. Furthermore, it is a fact that many mission members regularly move between different missions and organisations due to the existence of common skills that are readily transferable between different field operations. Therefore, there is a need for organisations to co-operate in order to identify and prepare future mission staff.

- Since the implementation of the OSCE REACT (Rapid Expert Assistance and Co-operation Teams) programme, a number of OSCE participating States have enhanced their capabilities to train and select suitable personnel for field operations. Today there are several centres in Europe organising pre-mission training around a common set of **training standards**. Participation in such courses is often open to different nationalities at reduced or even no cost. These establishments work as training/assessment centres, usually in connection with recruiting and seconding authorities who use these pools of experts to cover the needs of different organisations. The training standards applied in these programmes reflect a common ground acknowledged by other traditional major players in this field, such as the UN and the EU. This is important work in progress.
- Experience has also shown that the introduction of this approach to identifying and preparing versatile field staff has been very beneficial. However, there is still much scope for improvement, particularly in the effective use of such training establishments. For example, the ability of some of these centres to accept trainees from neighbouring countries is often under-utilised. Even if organisations agree on the level of training standards necessary, cases where these organisations have effectively co-operated to produce materials to support common curricula are in fact rare. Since the capability of the international community to respond quickly to emergencies depends on its capacity to mobilise adequate resources and deploy them where necessary, more attention should be devoted to the development of a sufficient and versatile reserve pool of suitably trained individuals - from as wide a variety of countries as possible.
- Better information sharing among partner organisations could be achieved through joint working level meetings, both directly in the field and between headquarters. The **improvement of information sharing, especially in early warning**, remains a major challenge. Early warning is one of the main functions of the OSCE Institutions and field offices. Regular reports and evaluations of situations pertaining in a variety of locations and on a variety of issues are regularly and continuously provided to the OSCE States, who themselves regularly share information in the Permanent Council. The OSCE remains ready to share its knowledge with other partner institutions, but there is a need to think about how to exchange restricted information. Being a sensitive issue a possible pragmatic solution could be to exchange staff who have access to such information.
- Another area of consideration is **better co-ordination of policies**. Partner organisations should consider better co-ordination of their policies at a country specific, and, if possible, at a regional level, including joint development and implementation of specific projects. One possible way to enhance co-operation in fact-finding and monitoring missions could be the setting up, when needed, of joint **“country co-ordination teams”** in order to conduct, for example, political and security needs assessments.
- More use of **‘lead agencies’** could also be introduced. By co-ordinating approaches and efforts better, the OSCE and its partners could contribute more effectively to, for instance,

democratisation and institution building in the Balkans (and, of course, also elsewhere). This has to date been the case in a number of OSCE mission areas.

- The enhancement of **co-operation on lessons learned, evaluation and best practice** should also be considered. At present there is little co-operation on the issue of lessons learned, though this is an essential component of successful conflict prevention. Within the OSCE, the Conflict Prevention Centre is responsible for developing an OSCE lessons learned process, and to this end, a paper on the OSCE Mission in fYROM was prepared and distributed to participating States which set out lessons learned and made recommendations as to best practice. This was a valuable experience for the OSCE. It would prove of great value to formulate truly inclusive common evaluations of joint operations, with a view to developing common lessons learned and best practice.
- **Operational activities must be supported by a flexible and responsive administration that is tailored to the rapid deployment requirements of the field.** With regard to the management of resources, the OSCE learned from its Kosovo experiences 1998-1999 that its resource management structures had to be much better developed and standardised. The current development of an OSCE **Integrated Resource Management programme** (IRMA) will establish this facility. IRMA will create a common administrative system (CAS), which will be delivered through modern technological solutions. In short, **future OSCE missions will be able to deploy with all its administration systems pre-designed and in place.** This is in sharp contrast to previous Balkan deployments where OSCE Missions were hampered by having to develop systems as they went along. Greater transparency on the use of resources and, through the programme budget planning process, will create explicit links between future operational outcomes and resource allocations.
- There is more to be achieved also in the field of optimising co-ordination between peace-keeping forces and civilian actors, as well as in improving co-operation with fact-finding and monitoring missions.

Tactical lessons

In addition to the above strategic lessons, recent experiences have taught the OSCE a number of tactical lessons which, put into practice, would not only improve field operations but enhance co-operation between partners on the ground. Many of these are old lessons re-learned, others are lessons that the OSCE has failed to act on, despite knowing what best practice would have been. Some key issues are set out below.

- Civilian missions have to be launched in a benign environment in order that unarmed IOs are able to carry out their activities. In BiH, Kosovo and fYROM the necessary security requirements was met by the use of armed forces operating under robust mandates.
- There is a need for a system in place to **ensure rapid deployment**, since time always will be of essence, especially for civilian crisis management, or post-conflict rehabilitation operations. OSCE Permanent Council decisions can be quite fast, and a dedicated Secretariat Planning Unit, backed up by human resources quickly supplied through the REACT system mean that at least initial deployment can be swift – as was required, for example, in fYROM to cover the re-entry of police into former crisis areas.
- Whilst fYROM called for a rapid intervention, during the mounting of the mission to (the then) Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), the OSCE was able to conduct a ‘needs’

assessment beforehand in order to first assess where the OSCE could best help, and to avoid substantive areas already covered by other IOs. Thus, **when rapid deployment is not essential, a proper, and thorough, needs assessment is key to avoid duplication.**

- Civilian missions should have a clear mandate that is realistic and achievable. This can best be achieved by having experts in their respective fields involved early in the decision making process when discussions are underway to determine what needs to be undertaken, and what can be achieved (cf. OSCE and police issues during the Ohrid Framework Agreement negotiations). In this way unrealistic goals will not be set.
- There is a **need for versatility**. The OSCE sees itself as having a number different core activities. It can turn its hand to all of them, but the work of a mission will be dictated by the mandate. Careful appraisal of what to undertake, combined with transparent information-sharing among actors, can lead to seamless complementarity when different IOs deploy in the same theatre. If not duplication and waste will occur.
- There is also a **need for the flexibility and responsiveness to undertake new tasks**. When the OSCE Mission to FRY was established multi-ethnic police training was not initially seen as an area to be addressed by the OSCE. When subsequent unrest in southern Serbia arose the OSCE quickly adapted to this additional role following a request from the government. In the case of Albania, a border monitoring operation was rapidly launched in 1998 in order to report on a daily basis from the north-western region of the country following clashes in the western regions of Kosovo between the Yugoslav army and the KLA. (Our experiences from the Caucasus and Central Asia reinforce this.)
- Where there is an elected or appointed government in place, **IOs should ideally have the full backing of that host government**. Without this full support, co-operation at all levels will suffer. The OSCE mission in FYROM adopted a very inclusive and co-operative system, working closely with a number of ministries. **A benchmark system** was put in place to chart the progress of re-entry into areas of former crisis and joint daily progress talks with the authorities were held to assess the situation and developments.
- The size, speed of deployment and level of expertise in any new mission is dictated by political will and subsequent financial contribution states are prepared to make. In the case of the OSCE, full commitment means that highly qualified secondees can be rapidly forthcoming, and sufficient funding will ensure maximum flexibility. Extra-budgetary project financing now complements most OSCE country operations in all regions.
- In theatre, a dedicated, **functioning operational liaison system** between all key international actors is an essential part of any response to a complex emergency situation. Regular meetings do much to ensure that complementarity takes place, and that numerous other issues of common interest, particularly those related to security, can be shared. Skopje co-ordination among IO is a good example of this.
- **Training** is an essential component in the core team of any mission. Even more so when establishing a new mission or in phases of rapid growth of existing operations. Investing some time in a thorough orientation programme to the area of operations has not only proved beneficial to shorten adaptation times and thus increase the effectiveness of new recruits; it serves also to alert field staff of potential security risks. (End)