

Annual Security Review Conference, 1-2 July 2008, Vienna
Working Session III:
Early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation, including the use of the relevant OSCE tools

SPEAKING NOTES DR. ARIE BLOED FOR ASRC 2 JULY 2008

Introduction

1. After having been almost 'forgotten' over a long period of time, OSCE's mechanisms in the security domain have recently been rediscovered and applied. Although this certainly has surprised many here in Vienna and in the capitals of the OSCE pS and although the triggering of these largely 'unknown' mechanisms signals the existence of serious problems in the OSCE area, this recent development should be welcomed. The aim of this intervention is to see in how far OSCE's existing mechanisms are (still or again) useful tools to achieve OSCE's main aim of early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and peaceful settlement of disputes (PSD) and whether changes are needed. I will focus mainly on OSCE's mechanisms in the security dimension (e.g. Berlin mechanism, the mechanisms contained in the various Vienna Documents on CSBM, Bucharest mechanism).

Rediscovering OSCE's largely forgotten mechanisms

2. OSCE's toolkit, developed over the course of many years (mainly in the 1990s), contains many tools which had almost been forgotten, even in Vienna. For a long time there was the conviction that these so-called mechanisms had become obsolete, as most had been developed when permanently functioning bodies hardly existed in the C/OSCE. The establishment of the PC and other permanent bodies was usually the explanation for the thesis that these mechanisms were no longer needed. It seemed that knowledge about the mechanisms largely became a privilege of the OSCE historians and 'gurus' only.
3. As is known, recently some of these mechanisms have been triggered again, so apparently we still or again need them.

What has changed? Likely reasons:

- Different political circumstances in comparison with the 1990s
- Existing channels (in particular PC and FSC) apparently don't constitute a viable and effective road for substantive and focused political dialogue any more, as it used to be the case in the past, in particular in the 1990s
- Maybe also: mechanisms are being used as additional 'weapons' to exert political pressure

4. Is this a positive development?
In principle I would welcome this development. OSCE's mechanisms have been created to be used and if in the present circumstances pS consider them to be useful and potentially effective tools to trigger an in-depth dialogue about specific issues that highly concern them, then they exactly serve the purpose for which they have been created. However, this development also indicates that OSCE's permanent bodies and structures apparently don't sufficiently provide effective tools for dialogue any longer. I would hope that this recent development would lead to a revitalization of the much-needed dialogue on security concerns in, in particular, the PC and the FSC.
5. However: the mechanisms should be used in the spirit of the context in which they have been created. In this regard I specifically refer to OSCE's basic philosophy of cooperative security. This implies that the mechanisms can only be used effectively, if pS pursue a cooperative approach. In other words: if the aim of triggering mechanisms is only putting pressure on other pS, then they most likely won't serve the purpose for which they have been created. Although the present-day political circumstances are widely different from the period in which most of these mechanisms have been created, this essential element in my view should not be forgotten.
6. Although recent developments indicate that OSCE's mechanisms are being rediscovered, only a few are actually being used. OSCE's toolkit contains many other mechanisms which in practice have never been used. In this context I want to mention in particular the various mechanisms on PSD: the Valetta Mechanism (1991) and its complement on Directed Conciliation adopted at the Stockholm Ministerial in 1992. The latter mechanism is well-known because of the Consensus-Minus-Two principle, although never applied so far. Also the OSCE Court on Conciliation and Arbitration has never been used.
7. Although personally I don't think that using *all* these (until recently) fairly unknown mechanisms more regularly is necessary, I would recommend that at least the knowledge about their existence and their potential usefulness here in Vienna and in the OSCE pS capitals should be enhanced.

In this context I appreciate CPC's efforts to bring these mechanisms again in the spotlight by compiling useful summaries of the various mechanisms and procedures and I would recommend continuing the efforts to raise awareness about the availability of these mechanisms. I would also suggest paying more attention to the existing possibilities to come to certain outcomes on the basis of C-1 or C-2 which are parts of OSCE's toolkit over many years already.

8. The question may be raised whether the existing toolkit on mechanisms should be significantly changed or even complemented. In my opinion this is not necessary, as the available tools allow for a great flexibility and can, therefore, more or less be 'tailor-made' for each particular case. What in my view is more necessary is revitalizing OSCE's consultation bodies and make their work more flexible, because I see this as one of the main reasons for the rediscovering of the existing mechanism, as apparently OSCE pS don't see other alternatives available at the moment.