



International Civic  
Initiative for OSCE

## **HUMAN DIMENSION AND THE CORFU PROCESS**

**May 2010**

## **Why and what is the Corfu Process?**

The Corfu Process began at the informal Ministerial meeting convened by the 2009 Greek Chairmanship of the OSCE on the island of Corfu.<sup>1</sup> The idea behind the meeting was to launch a frank discussion of the European security issues following the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008.<sup>2</sup> The August war, the first armed conflict of the twenty-first century between the OSCE participating States, was the crescendo of nearly a decade of rising tensions in the region. Factors contributing to these palpable tensions in the OSCE region include NATO enlargement over Russia's vehement objections; NATO bombings of Serbia not authorized by the UN or the OSCE; Western recognition of Kosovo's independence; recognition by Russia of independence of the breakaway Georgian regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the August war; the unresolved conflicts in Moldova and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is not to mention the impact of the war in Afghanistan on its OSCE neighbors in Central Asia, the internal threats from groups espousing violence in some of the OSCE participating States and the global threat of terrorism that defined the security approaches of many of the OSCE states following the deadly attacks on Manhattan's Twin Towers on September 11, 2001.

The Corfu process is putatively a dialogue about European security in the wake of the Russian-Georgian war and autumn 2009 proposal of Russian President Medvedev on a legally binding treaty on European security (apparently unacceptable to many Western countries), and the OSCE as a forum for discussions of security issues in the region. These recent developments have underscored the fact that while the OSCE may have weakened in the recent years (partially due to the strengthening of other institutions), it is an absolutely necessary regional organization.

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<sup>1</sup> Some observers of the OSCE are inclined to give at least partial credit for the beginning of the Corfu Process to the 2008 Finnish Chairmanship of the OSCE which made an effort to ensure high attendance of the 2008 OSCE Helsinki Ministerial meeting and convened an informal lunch of the ministers during the meeting. The lunch featured, according to eyewitnesses, a very frank discussion of contemporary European security issues following the Russian-Georgian August 2008 war.

<sup>2</sup> NB. This article uses a "greater Europe" notion of European security defining the entire OSCE region, comprising North America and all of the former Soviet Union, Central Asia including, as "Europe".

The above list of threats and challenges does not suggest that the OSCE participating States have developed some semblance of a common vision on how to meet them. Indeed, cleavages with regard to visions of European security have not been deeper since any point following the end of the Cold War. And, diplomatic talk masks a simple fact that there is a deep divide in the OSCE on the very notion of security. For many States which take most of their OSCE commitments in earnest, security means ability of their societies and individuals living in them to continue developing while enjoying basic freedoms such as freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, conscience, due legal process, and periodic free and fair elections of their leaders. All these freedoms are enshrined in various CSCE/OSCE documents and constitute what in the OSCE is known as the “third basket” or the “human dimension”. However, a group of the OSCE States has been challenging the centrality of human dimension, especially the commitments to create equal opportunities for all political forces during elections, ensure the independence of the judiciary, safeguard freedom of peaceful assembly, place no undue obstacles to freedom of association and to fully respect freedom of individuals to express themselves. These States appear to seek to revise the nature of the OSCE commitments as a part of the Corfu process, especially the idea central to the OSCE of international commitments not belonging only to internal affairs of the States concerned but being of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States.

The risks and dangers associated with non-implementation of human dimension commitments are rarely mentioned. Nevertheless, they need to be spelled out. For example in States that have not established a framework for conducting fair elections and where freedom of expression is not respected, prospects of demise of the top executive coupled with absence of democratic procedures for the selection of leaders implies high risks to internal stability which may also have regional security ramifications. The nearly absolute power enjoyed by the top executives, not checked by legislative or judiciary branches, makes the top state office an extremely attractive prize for any potential successors. Thus the risks of a succession struggle with unpredictable consequences are high. Similarly, lack of freedoms to expression and peaceful assembly and a dysfunctional justice system lead to frustration among disaffected parts

of the society, and these pent-up frustrations could result in eruptions of severe unrest and even violence. These risks suggest that links between respect for human dimension commitments and security are not abstract.

The Corfu process thus can be looked at as a means to manage a growing divide in views on security among OSCE participating States. The view of human dimension commitments as being essential for security is crucial for the OSCE and has to be upheld despite efforts of those who have diverging views on security and its human dimension. Civil society plays an important role in this regard as watchdogs of the way the States observe the commitments they have taken upon themselves and as supporters of the idea that security has to have a human being at its core. Raising of the role of civil society organizations and increasing the effectiveness of their impact on OSCE processes will result in strengthening the human dimension of this organization and thus lead to an increase in its role and influence.

### **Contribution of Human Dimension to closing divergent views on security: outlining priorities**

In light of divergent views of security, ultimately there is limited prospect for agreement among the OSCE participating States on advancing principles governing European security. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that there is no retreat from the existing OSCE commitments and to take advantage of opportunities where they exist for updating the commitments.

There is also a clear need, in light of disagreement between governments and leaders for greater human contacts between civic groups from States that disagree on their visions of security. Non-governmental organizations have traditionally played a special role in the Helsinki process and this role should be intensified. In addition to the regular menu of human dimension meetings, the NGOs should be gaining access to the OSCE delegations and seeking ways to regularly brief the diplomats in Vienna on various issues with regard to the implementation of existing of human dimension commitments.

Representation of interested NGOs in Vienna is highly desirable. The increased role of NGOs is absolutely necessary in closing the gap between the diplomatic negotiations on the inter-governmental level and societies of the participating States.

In addition, as implementation of human dimension commitments is closely interlinked with personal security of citizens of the participating States, the implementation of human dimension commitments is most closely linked to security. Therefore, strengthening of human dimension commitments is necessary for enhancing security in the OSCE region.

The International Civil Initiative (ICI) for OSCE is created as a civic platform for the OSCE space, called upon developing and promoting a unified process of strengthening security, co-operation and standards in the human dimension in the second decade of the XXI century. ICI intends to

- work on developing a common position of civic organizations of OSCE participating States in the sphere of the human dimension and other aspects of the Helsinki process as a whole;
- advance new international norms and standards, strengthening the existing principles and approaches of the OSCE in the sphere of the human dimension;
- strengthen mutual support in working on these goals in the framework of the OSCE process as well as in other institutions and communities;
- develop recommendations to the OSCE participating States on improving the work of the OSCE and its institutions.

There are ten areas that ICI identifies as priorities in the Corfu process where the commitments need to be updated and strengthened. These are:

1. Stronger commitments on fundamental freedoms;
2. Freedom of movement;
3. Freedom of expression in the Internet
4. Standards on separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers;

5. Increasing the role of civic organizations in resolution of internal and international conflicts;
6. Development of concrete mechanisms within OSCE of addressing the most serious non-implementation of commitments;
7. Special requirements with regard to implementation of OSCE commitments for the participating States seeking to become OSCE Chairman-in-Office;
8. E-government and the use of new technologies in the administration and provision of government services;
9. Civilian oversight of law enforcement agencies;
10. Transparency of extractive industries.

It is recommended that OSCE delegations engage in discussions with Civil Society Organizations on what OSCE should be doing on each of the above issues. These can be done, for example, in the format of human dimension meetings or in the format of specially organized meeting between NGOs and OSCE delegations.

The implementation of OSCE's human dimension will be challenged if the role of the civil society in the organization is not enhanced, on both national and international level. National civic organizations and international networks that attempt to articulate values and advance interests, therefore serving as a channel between societies and state authorities. They provide important feedback to the governments on the impact of their policies, including on the implementation of OSCE commitments. Therefore, given the importance of implementation of human dimension commitments to the OSCE region's security, the civil society should be viewed as a necessary partner for enhancing security.

International Civic Initiative for OSCE calls on the OSCE participating States to develop a mechanism to ensure the contribution of the civil society in the Corfu Process.