



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Secretariat

PC.NGO/4/18
21 June 2018

ENGLISH only

Conference Services

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Working session II: Early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation: lessons learned and the way ahead

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this distinguished audience. It is a remarkable sign that the OSCE invited representatives from civil society to present their reflections on the topic of this session.

One reason, why the topic of early warning and conflict prevention recurred so prominently to the global agenda, are increasing doubts as regards the political feasibility of what has been considered for long proven mechanisms, agreed rules and appropriate approaches to terminate violence and resolve conflicts sustainably. The 1990 OSCE Charter of Paris built on the conviction that a Euro-Atlantic community of states, if agreeing on common values, was able to create a durable peace order from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Since the early 1990s, the dominant analytical view assumed that the failure of conflict resolution in the past has been less a malfunction of particular tools and approaches, but rather the lack of political will to apply them effectively.

Today, we are witnesses of an increasingly entangled set of crises, which prompt other, much more crucial, queries. A recent NGO-report on the state of peace (Friedensgutachten 2018) identified three such crises.

1. The crisis of the *global order*. The post WW II order was built on the idea of implementing the universal rule of law. The responsibility, for maintaining and restoring world peace in particular, was left to the member states of the UN Security Council, amongst them the five permanent members with a right to veto. This system was only partly effective, to say the least, because in many conflicts the P 5 did not prove capable to establish a sufficient consensus, and some of them participated or even initiated armed operations without being mandated by the UN. Why should other countries adhere to an order that may not even enjoy the respect of its guarantor states?
2. A second crisis refers to the *role model of liberal democracy*. The Paris Charter sparked hopes that spreading the ideas of freedom, democracy and market economy leads to a collective peace community that could provide a model for all participating states and beyond. These hopes have also been fulfilled only in parts. On the one hand, many people and states considered the manner of how the West spread and translated these ideas into politics patronizing. On the other hand, over time, the aspired collective peace order seemed to fall victim to processes of increasing fragmentation and

polarization, resulting in a deadlock in responding collectively to crucial challenges of conflict resolution and conflict prevention. Can the idea of a liberal peace survive if the underlying liberal democratic order suffers from deepening fissures?

3. Finally, the crisis of *multilateralism* is also undeniable. It would be too simple and misleading to explain this crisis with a strengthened role of individual leaders of states. On the contrary, the apparent renaissance of Strongmen is more of a symptom than a cause for the prevalent weakness of international and state-based institutions as well as of regimes for cooperation. The recurrence of geopolitics is posing a threat to the entire construct of multilateral governance, the aim of which had been the idea of taming the power of individual states and strengthening the impact of collective norms. It takes a generation, maybe some 15 years, to develop an international organisation from scratch until ripeness. This is what empirics usually tells us. Its erosion, however, takes only months or weeks, nowadays even a tweet can apparently do it. How can cooperative conflict prevention be sustainable, if some actors look at it as if the international order was just a game of winners and losers?
4. Let me point to a fourth crisis, which is rather creeping and hence less visible, therefore often underrated, but maybe it is the most striking among them all. It relates to the emergence of the “cyber space”. Cyber offers constructive as well as destructive potential. The lacking regulation of this space allows a variety of actors to shift conflict to a less visible arena, less risky to the perpetrators, but with effects, possibly similar to the destructive potential of war. How can the idea of cooperative conflict prevention prevail, if the trust into the regulatory role of politics and cooperation is fading away?

I have spent such a plenty of time to reflect on these crises, because I am convinced that tackling conflict today is less a matter of improving existing tools for crisis management but of finding tangible solutions in addressing these entangled crises and I am sure that the OSCE and its participating States could make a difference in this regard. We can talk at length about making existing tools for conflict prevention more effective and smart. If we fail to address the aforementioned global trends properly, better tools alone will not suffice. However, effective conflict prevention tools can help also to address these crises more effectively.

Starting from this premise, prevention is a challenge to collaborate. Collaboration, builds on trust. Therefore, conflict prevention is only effective when built on mutual trust. However, preventive collaboration is not only necessary at the inter-state level. Vertical complementarity of preventive tools is equally required. The aforementioned crises originate primarily in an insufficient responsiveness of state and society actors

to the transformative effects of globalization. A high level of trust at vertical levels in the ability of institutions to adjust and manage these effects proactively can heal broken relationships that trigger an erosion of the core values of peace, freedom and democracy that once have helped forming the space for the OSCE. Establishing sustainable incentives for consensus-building can foster cooperation across societal and political divides both within and between the participating States.

Intentional mobilization of cleavages between ethnic, religious and/or identity groups has become a widespread catalyst for conflict escalation. It has brought about potentially disruptive effects not least for the European institutions. We should remind us of one of the formative lessons of transforming the CSCE into the OSCE. Effective conflict prevention must be based on shared values, be inclusive and integrated, adaptive and flexible, collaborative and sustained.

The recent World Bank report “Pathways for Peace” posted a number of crucial messages and recommendations, which I think might very well serve the purpose of a teaser as well for discussing effective conflict and crisis prevention within the OSCE framework.

First, local, national and global approaches are not alternatives, but the best tools and instruments are those that are most effective at each level and at the same time complementary and mutually reinforcing. Neither the imposition of tools that are culturally alien to local actors, nor approaches, which build on patrimonial or exclusionary local power structures, are sustainable.

Second, poverty that exists and increasingly spreads in the Northern hemisphere as well is not a root cause of the apparent crisis of institutions and the trigger for violence in conflict, but relative poverty and social imbalances are. Prevention agendas and social development agendas should go hand in hand. However, unlike the report, I would not argue in favor of integrating conflict prevention into development politics, but to make different approaches synergistic for a common goal – sustainable development and just peace.

Thirdly, embedding a culture of peace into the minds of people can transcend stereotyped ways of thinking in friend and foe narratives. Incorporating peace education, i.e. training in technics of nonviolent conflict resolution, into the school curricula could be a promising long-term effective option in this regard. Resilience to violence evolves from a viable and reliable social contract. The potential of local peace change makers is higher than commonly recognized. Local networks of skills, capacities, resources, tools and institutions can make a difference with regard to inclusivity and active participation. Trust starts with the personal experience of fruitful collaboration. No party or stakeholder group should suffer from exclusion, if it is willing to participate in a constructive manner.

Fourth, the role of states remains indispensable, but the interaction of states is not the only game in town. The participating States could be connectors between other relevant international institutions and their manifold local actors. If cooperation and trust are key to prevention, non-state actors who represent grievances of relevant constituencies are to be attracted to engage in constructive collaboration with state actors. In some areas, such as cyberspace, the urgent need for such collaboration lies at hand. Exclusion, at least, provides incentives for self-isolation, for polarization and eventually for radicalization and confrontation.

Fifth, conflict prevention does not result from smart deals or signed agreements. Transformative approaches, such as dialogue and mediation, can help to transcend attitudes and behavior, and cultivate constructive relations. In doing so, capacities for conflict prevention should address conflicts at the lowest possible level to make people directly experience the benefits of nonviolent conflict transformation. A viable civil society is a strong driver of making peace sustained.

Sixth, future-oriented conflict prevention policies require more participation of women and youth, but also of representatives from business, faith-based actors and traditional communities in strategizing and decision-making, especially on issues, which may have long-term effects on global and local economic, social, and environmental development.

Finally, conflict prevention must stay flexible and adaptive. Lessons Learned, based on a critical and self-critical evaluation of effects and achievements, must feed into innovation and strategizing over plausible scenarios and appropriate tools. Such tools can be formal, but informal tools are often even more effective. Intentional search for synergies requires a systemic approach and getting rid of inherited practices of thinking in resort-based silos.

I am sure, the OSCE, because of its unique composition and value-based constitution, its wide scope of activities and – last, but not least - its comprehensive approach, is in a perfect position to adopt a proactive role in developing, testing and promoting new tools for conflict prevention. More importantly, the OSCE can help to revive or renew, where necessary, an international order based on mutual respect for human rights, just peace and sustainable development.