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Background Note on ‘Enhancing the Early Warning and Analytical Capacity of the OSCE’

Prepared for the 1st Expert Meeting within the Framework of the Conflict Cycle - V to V Dialogue

Introduction

Although various parts of the OSCE executive structures have explicit mandates for early warning related activities (e.g., the field operations (FOs), the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the Representative of the Freedom of the Media (RFOM), the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), or the Office of the Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA)), OSCE capacities for systematic and comprehensive early warning are still not fully developed. Hence, it is important that numerous participating States have supported efforts toward enhancing the existing OSCE’s early warning and analytical capacity. These efforts should entail that the OSCE create a more systematic and comprehensive early warning capacity that reflects the Organization’s multi-dimensional approach to security, as a variety of factors – be they political, military, economic/environmental or human/societal in nature – may contribute to instability and conflict. Only a systemic, comprehensive and cross-dimensional early warning capacity can assure timely and objective assessments of impending crisis and conflict situations and ensure that appropriate options for effective policy responses are provided.

Preliminary Stock-Taking: Strengths and Weaknesses

A preliminary stock-taking exercise involving various parts of the OSCE executive structures has revealed some strengths but also significant weaknesses in the existing early warning and analytical capacity of the OSCE. As to *strengths*: The OSCE already has an early warning mandate since the beginning of the 1990s, and it possesses well-developed executive structures that continue to be involved in various aspects of early warning, including data collection and analysis (e.g., the FOs and the CPC on events in OSCE Mission areas; or the OCEEA and its ENVSEC initiative; or the HCNM on national minority related issues). Also, the HCNM has within his mandate the authority to formally issue an early warning to the participating States.

*) Redistribution due to change of distribution status text remains unchanged

Considerable subject-matter expertise, be it on the regional, thematic or analytical and policy-planning level, is also a strength inherent to the OSCE executive structures.

Among the *weaknesses* identified are: (1) inadequate human and financial resources to allow for dedicated early warning expert capacities and a consolidated data collection, analysis and formulation of policy responses (or scenario-making) at headquarter, institutions and field operations levels; (2) the absence of systematic data collection across all dimensions and of a comprehensive analysis framework (i.e., methodology); (3) not yet well-developed institutional linkages with other international actors (e.g., international organizations, think tanks and NGOs) for purposes of data and analysis sharing; (4) the preoccupation with other essential tasks to be performed by relevant executive structures (e.g., in FOs, the ever-increasing focus on projects leaves little time for a systematic collection of information, analysis and reporting).

Issues for Further Consideration

- Early warning entails an operational and a political dimension, and therefore these two areas have to converge – a well-functioning early warning and analytical capacity must be accompanied by the political will to allow for timely and proper channeling of analysis and corresponding policy options to political decision-makers.
- To create a truly comprehensive and cross-dimensional capacity, increased attention needs to also be devoted to conducting relevant early warning activities in the economic and environmental dimension, and to co-ordinating such activities with other parts of the Organization. Political will is crucial for the enhancement of an early warning capacity across the dimensions.
- Discussions need to include questions related to the institutional set-up and modalities for reporting (e.g., only to the Chairmanship; from the Chairmanship to the pS, etc.) and for issuing an early warning (e.g., within the PC's 'Current Issues').
- Consideration might be given to authorize the Secretary General and the Director of ODIHR to issue formal early warnings, similar to that authority entailed in the mandate of the HCNM.
- The creation of a focal point system could be encouraged as a way to establish and maintain closer co-ordination and co-operation within the OSCE executive structures and between these structures and other international actors.

- Participating States might also play a more active role in early warning. Informal arrangements could be considered for working together with participating States on early warning related activities. Participating States could also consider providing information voluntarily on a case-by-case basis.
- ‘Mind the gap’ – Concrete discussions and sustained political engagement are crucial to closing the gap between early warning and responding with timely and preventive action. A comprehensive early warning system loses its legitimacy over time if crisis and conflict situations are allowed to escalate, especially if accompanied by massive loss of life or other atrocities.

The Way Forward for 2011

- An informal ‘group of experts’ consisting of representatives of participating States and OSCE executive structures could be created to discuss policy-related and operational issues pertaining to enhancing the early warning and analytical capacity of the OSCE. This ‘group of experts’ could be convened by the co-ordinator of the 1st expert meeting. The ‘group of experts’ could also explore possible deliverables for the 2011 Ministerial Council or make recommendations for implementation for the 2012 OSCE Chairmanship. Furthermore, the institutional set-up and modalities for reporting on early warning signals should be the focus of the ‘group of experts.’
- The Secretariat could also convene an internal expert group or task force to co-ordinate efforts related to developing a more systematic and cross-dimensional early warning capacity and exchange insights on a regular basis with the ‘group of experts.’
- MC Deliverables: Possible deliverables for the Ministerial Council would depend on whether certain organizational and/or political issues would require a PC or MC decision, and on progress achieved throughout the next several months. MC deliverables can entail a range of possible products; on the most basic level, for example, a decision to task the Secretary General and the executive structures to produce a draft ‘concept on strengthening the early warning and analytical capacity of the OSCE’; or on a more advanced level, a decision to adopt such a concept or even to approve any necessary institutional arrangements either within existing resources or by dedicating corresponding human and financial resources.