

# Building Sustainable Peace and Democracy:

## OSCE Experiences in South-Eastern Europe

A Reference Guide



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South-Eastern Europe

A Reference Guide


OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre

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Gratitude is expressed to the Federal Republic of Germany and the OSCE's field operations in South-Eastern Europe for their support to this project.

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# Foreword

As the world's largest regional security organization, the OSCE has an impressive record in promoting peace and security, and in strengthening democracy, good governance and respect for human rights. Building on the OSCE's unique experience, this reference guide provides valuable insight into the work of its field operations in South-Eastern Europe, with a particular focus on sustainable peace and democracy. It provides a comprehensive overview of best practices from activities on the ground, with an emphasis on peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and the promotion of democratic reforms at all levels—local, national and regional.

Already during its OSCE Chairmanship in 2016, Germany emphasized strengthening the OSCE's toolbox along all phases of the conflict cycle, from early warning and conflict prevention to crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. Enhancing the OSCE's capacities to support peacebuilding, reconciliation, good governance, and the rule of law was a key priority. For this reason, Germany wholeheartedly supported the identification of lessons and best practices from South-Eastern Europe in this important area.

Further strengthening the OSCE and the instruments within its toolbox is best done by building on the decades of expertise already acquired by the organization in its pursuit of peace and security. This reference guide does exactly that: it draws on the OSCE's achievements and provides—for the first time—a comprehensive

and systematic collection of OSCE experiences in South-Eastern Europe. It illustrates the excellent work accomplished by the OSCE in this region through best practice stories covering aspects from all three dimensions of security—the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension. It therefore provides a wealth of experience that can be replicated in other parts of the OSCE area.

The OSCE's expertise in South-Eastern Europe is vast and valuable. I am convinced that this reference guide will be an excellent source of inspiration, information, and guidance for policymakers and practitioners, both in the OSCE area and beyond.



**Ambassador Eberhard Pohl**

Head of the Permanent  
Mission of Germany to the OSCE



Permanent Mission  
of the Federal Republic of Germany to the OSCE  
Vienna



# Introduction

Since its inception, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has been promoting peace and security in regions where conflicts have occurred or where security has been under threat. It continues to develop strategies to achieve sustainable peace in its area, including in South-Eastern Europe—the focus of this reference guide. As a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, the OSCE is a key instrument for conflict prevention. Its work in this area includes the fostering of democratic governance and the rule of law, which aims to build resilience to emerging tensions and crises, and support sustainable political solutions to existing disputes and conflicts. Furthermore, the OSCE works toward building sustainable peace by contributing to post-conflict rehabilitation, including by supporting initiatives that foster reconciliation and dealing with the past. Activities in these areas are implemented by different members of the OSCE family but most importantly by the organization's field operations.

In addition to its field operations, the OSCE has a plethora of instruments at its disposal that support building peace and preventing conflict on a daily basis. These include, among others, thematic units within the OSCE Secretariat that address different phases of the conflict cycle—from early warning and early action, to crisis management and post-conflict resolution. Moreover, the OSCE's three institutions—the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR),

and the Representative on Freedom of the Media—as well as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, play a vital role in the organization’s cross- and multi-dimensional approach to security.

Over the past twenty-five years, the OSCE has delivered targeted assistance, including by developing successful programmes for the prevention of violent conflict and the building of sustainable peace at the local, national and regional levels, and across the OSCE’s three dimensions of security: the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension. As a whole, the OSCE has contributed to building transparent and accountable institutions and to increasing trust between divided communities, and between citizens and institutions.

This reference guide was developed by the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre to serve as a source of inspiration, including for its field operations working to build sustainable peace in other regions of the OSCE area. It is designed to provide insight into the organization’s peacebuilding experiences in South-Eastern Europe for OSCE officials, policy makers, practitioners, and civil society.

The reference guide provides an overview of past and present activities in South-Eastern Europe in various thematic fields and across all three dimensions of security. It looks at the particular contextual environment in which the activities took place, describes the challenges that had to be addressed, and highlights the initiatives that contributed to conflict prevention and sustainable peace in the region. This context-specific approach allows for the practices and lessons identified to be adapted to different settings, taking the specific characteristics and needs of host

societies into account. Accordingly, the reference guide provides insight into OSCE activities with regard to institution building, community security, education, electoral reform, reconciliation, diversity, and people-to-people contacts. The reference guide also contributes to strengthening the OSCE's institutional memory and enhancing the organization's capacity for building peace in a sustainable and holistic manner.

In seeking synergies and strengthening its co-operation with other actors, the OSCE has been working with all relevant stakeholders, including governments, political parties, civil society, other international organizations and agencies, non-majority communities, national minorities, and local citizenry. The OSCE has ensured the participation of women and youth<sup>1</sup> throughout its activities and encouraged the inclusion of vulnerable groups in all processes.

The guide sets out the concept of building sustainable peace, the OSCE's comprehensive approach and instruments, and some of the challenges that had to be overcome in building sustainable peace and supporting democratic transitions in South-Eastern Europe. The OSCE's comprehensive approach is then illustrated through thematically-clustered examples that highlight the OSCE's work. It is hoped that this guide will be a useful resource for all who want to benefit from the OSCE's experiences in this important area.

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<sup>1</sup> In the absence of an OSCE-wide definition of youth, this reference guide follows UN Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security, which defines youth as "persons of the age 18-29 years old". However, for the purpose of this guide, the term youth/young people should be understood as including people under the age of 18 years, especially in the context of education-related programmes.



# The OSCE's Conceptual Approach to Building Sustainable Peace

The prevention of violent conflict and the building of sustainable peace have been at the forefront of the organization since its inception. Since its early days, including at the time of the then Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), efforts to build peace have played a major role in fostering European stability. The OSCE came into being as a result of the willingness of its participating States to overcome and reconcile different narratives. In particular, their aim was to create mutually acceptable standards and guidelines for future relations among states and to respect those already put in practice by the United Nations (UN) and in other multilateral forums.

Building sustainable peace is a critical component of these efforts and forms an important part of the OSCE's toolbox to address all phases of the conflict cycle, which encompasses early warning, early action, crisis management, post-conflict rehabilitation, and reconciliation. The first two phases of the tiered approach to conflict prevention used by the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) encompass early warning and early action mechanisms, followed by crisis management if a conflict has escalated. Tertiary prevention takes place in the post-conflict phase, in which transition, rehabilitation and reconciliation form the core of the OSCE's

work. Accordingly, the purpose of tertiary prevention is to hinder the re-emergence of tensions and the recurrence of violence. To be successful, conflict resolution efforts should ideally be based on local strategies and initiatives that take place within existing political systems and societal practices.

In line with the UN's sustaining peace agenda<sup>2</sup>, the CPC's tiered approach to conflict prevention emphasizes the need to be holistic, cross-cutting, and implemented throughout the conflict cycle. Sustainable peace and transition, therefore, relate to a wide and diversified set of measures targeted at reducing the risk of relapse into violent conflict.

Building sustainable peace includes, most importantly, the strengthening of local capacities and institutions at all levels to address root causes of instability, as well as the promotion of open, diverse, and tolerant societies that are resilient to violent crises and conflicts. The OSCE works toward these goals by providing participating States with advice and practical support for societal, political, and legislative reforms, including by strengthening the functionality, transparency, and accountability of democratic institutions in line with good governance and the rule of law.

In 2011, the OSCE decided through Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/11 that “post-conflict rehabilitation and peacebuilding must involve efforts to address violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, intolerance and discrimination, and the absence of strong democratic institutions and the rule of law”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> UN (2017).

<sup>3</sup> OSCE (2011a).

Logically, the diversity of activities and projects supported and implemented over the years by the OSCE's six field operations in South-Eastern Europe<sup>4</sup> range across these different areas but belong largely to a longer-term strategy reflected in their annual programmatic priorities. Since all field operations develop, within their very different mandates, various ways to fulfil their given tasks, their efforts to build sustainable peace and democracy are context specific and take into account local conditions.

However, since the OSCE has not yet agreed on a consensus definition of what peacebuilding encompasses, the UN's definition was used to determine the scope of this reference guide. In that context, building sustainable peace is understood to “involve a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to specific needs of the country concerned, [be] based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives.”<sup>5</sup>

To achieve sustainable peace, OSCE activities have to be focused on meeting the needs of local populations. To engage conflict-affected societies, it is necessary to promote an awareness of the need for mutual respect, tolerance for different interests,

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4 As of 2017, six field operations are active in the region, including the Presence in Albania, the Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Mission in Kosovo, the Mission to Montenegro, the Mission to Serbia, and the Mission to Skopje. For more information see <http://www.osce.org/where-we-are>.

5 UN (no date): What Is Peacebuilding?

readiness to compromise, and commitment to non-violent conflict resolution. Support for local initiatives is an essential element of the OSCE's work in this regard. Local ownership means that activities are not only supported but actively welcomed and that the concerned community considers them part of their own agenda. This concept, however, could have different interpretations and can relate to different levels of governance. Therefore, it is important to have a clear understanding of the different levels to be addressed when conducting activities that aim to build sustainable peace and support transitions. However, activities should not be restricted to supporting national initiatives but rather enhance the impact of peace drivers. Moreover, the OSCE's efforts in building sustainable peace should always ensure that local initiatives are strengthened in such a way that they can continue even after external support has concluded.

OSCE support for locally-owned and locally-driven processes includes the facilitation and strengthening of local infrastructures for peace.<sup>6</sup> These could encompass peace commissions, institutions for mediation and dispute settlement, early warning networks, and conflict prevention initiatives. An essential benefit of local peace infrastructures, which must be employed and strengthened to the extent possible, is their ability to create space for the inclusion of civil society.

The promotion of active citizenry, which aims to increase the demand for accountability and the inclusion of civil society in political discussions and, where appropriate, in political decision making, is a vital part of the OSCE's understanding of good and

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<sup>6</sup> OSCE (2013a).



democratic governance. Particularly in societies where political decisions are taken in a centralized and hierarchical manner, the OSCE helps to promote local ownership of and participation in decision-making processes. This not only allows central governments to include local perspectives in their discussions, but also encourages local communities and municipalities to become more vocal. To this end, all efforts to build sustainable peace should pay specific attention to the inclusion of under-represented and vulnerable groups, such as ethnic and social minorities, youth, and women.

The establishment of ombudsperson institutions is one concrete example of how the engagement of citizens in transformation and reform processes has helped to ensure that the interests of society are properly reflected. Through ombudsperson institutions, citizens can report perceived or alleged violations of human rights. The creation of election commissions that are based on the specific needs and composition of societies has also helped to ensure that electorates feel their interests are better represented.

Building sustainable peace also includes support for mechanisms that allow for confidence- and relationship-building, specifically in societies that experience polarization and division. Accordingly, the OSCE's contribution to building sustainable peace and supporting transitions aims to facilitate reconciliation and dealing with the past. Like any other peacebuilding activity, such processes must be supported with due consideration for the specific context. This means they must be tailored to the specific situation

on the ground and implemented complementarily with ongoing or envisaged peace processes.

Many actors engage in building sustainable peace on the global, regional, and local levels, based on their respective conceptual approaches to addressing the different phases of a conflict. To avoid duplication and to take advantage of possible synergies, the OSCE ensures that its own activities are carried out with due consideration for the work of other actors, which requires close co-ordination and co-operation to the extent possible.

In carrying out its activities in South-Eastern Europe, the OSCE co-ordinates with key partners, including the UN and the European Union (EU), as well as with national and international development agencies, which partner with OSCE field operations in the region to implement different projects.

Like the OSCE, a further partner in the region—the Council of Europe (CoE)—considers education to be a fundamental element of reconciliation and building sustainable peace. To create synergy, the OSCE pays special attention to co-ordinating its work in the field of education with the CoE, and has created a valuable partnership in implementing education projects in the region. Through its field operations, the OSCE co-ordinates with the CoE to ensure that the mandated activities of the two organizations are complementary and avoid overlap.

One such activity is a CoE-established network of ‘Schools for Political Studies’ that is a main driver of the CoE’s post-conflict reconciliation efforts in South-Eastern Europe. These schools

provide an open and impartial space where dialogue is encouraged among young people from different ethnic communities who have the potential to be future leaders in the political, economic, social, media, cultural, and environmental spheres. As the OSCE is also very active in supporting education processes in post-conflict societies, its work with the CoE is closely interlinked.

Despite efforts to co-ordinate peacebuilding activities with other international actors, challenges arise when international organizations and development agencies change their geographic or thematic focus, and host governments change their priorities. Even so, the international actors present in South-Eastern Europe remain devoted to developing national capacities, enhancing regional co-operation, and working toward sustainable peace.



# OSCE Experiences in Building Sustainable Peace and Democracy in South-Eastern Europe

The different political and societal circumstances across South-Eastern Europe require a holistic approach to conflict prevention, democratic transitions, and the building of sustainable peace. This necessitates a broad range of measures and activities that are tailored to specific contexts. The activities and projects that the OSCE has supported and implemented over the years range across a variety of areas and reflect the annual programmatic priorities of its six field operations in the region. Since all OSCE field operations develop within their mandates ways to fulfil their given tasks, there is no standardized approach to building sustainable peace in the region.

Some field operations in South-Eastern Europe implement their mandates in a post-conflict environment, with some of their activities contributing to the implementation of internationally-sanctioned peace agreements. Other field operations do not operate in post-conflict environments, however—in line with the holistic approach to building sustainable peace outlined above—the implementation of their mandates contributes to increasing the resilience of their host societies to emerging tensions. Therefore, in societies

where an OSCE field operation was not established in response to a violent conflict or crisis, this reference guide examines cases that promoted the building of sustainable peace and democracy, and the strengthening of resilience against possible security threats.

It is with this understanding that examples are included from field operations that are not primarily mandated in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation, but are entrusted with providing advice and assistance in democratic transition processes. The same accounts for activities that inherently deal with a society's past, such as war crimes trial monitoring<sup>7</sup>, which only some field operations undertake. Through this broad range of support, the capacity of society to settle disputes and resolve conflict at an early stage through democratic governance and the rule of law is enhanced. Such activities contribute to the building of sustainable peace, not only in the region but in the OSCE area at large.

To represent the breadth of the OSCE's work in building sustainable peace in South-Eastern Europe, this chapter encompasses thematically-clustered examples in the areas of:

- institution building
- community security
- education
- electoral reform
- reconciliation
- diversity
- people-to-people contacts

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7 OSCE reports (2011, 2016).

Each thematic area offers a general introduction to the topic's relevance for building sustainable peace, which is followed by illustrative examples of OSCE's work in South-Eastern Europe. Each area concludes with a summary of the lessons identified from these thematic examples, and highlights some of the challenges that had to be overcome.

The case of war crime trial monitoring illustrates such challenges. Despite the understanding that war crimes trials contribute to reconciliation between and within communities, some societies perceived such processes as lacking in commitment or being too slow. Other challenges included inadequate progress on high-priority cases, divergent application of appropriate legal standards, and stalled investigations due to funding delays. Conflict-related sexual violence cases present a particularly acute challenge, with thousands of incidents believed to have been unreported, thus leaving survivors (and their families) suffering from emotional trauma and social stigma.

Another challenge that the OSCE encountered in the region, though to differing degrees, is political polarization, which creates difficulties in promoting long-term visions of peace and stability. This occurs particularly in societies where different narratives of the past are exploited by various stakeholders for short-term political gain, at times creating polarization with a very profound impact. Such exploitation may also affect the work of civil society actors, of which some might be politically affiliated and, thus, become part of the problem.

In post-conflict settings, one of the biggest challenges in building sustainable peace was a certain lack of interest and support among local political elites for reconciliation initiatives and dealing with the past. To overcome this obstacle, some activities were focused deliberately on the grassroots level by working directly with conflict-affected communities to increase their impact.

Another challenge encountered by the OSCE and other actors in the region relates to the return and inclusion of refugees and displaced persons stemming from violent conflict. Even when displaced persons could return to their former places of residence, they risked remaining vulnerable if their inclusion in existing social structures was not actively supported by the host society. Such situations can lead to discrimination and a lack of equal access to rights, such as the right to health care, employment, education, social care, and other rights connected with social inclusion in the local community.<sup>8</sup> This psychologically- and politically-sensitive topic requires specific care and empathy from all involved parties, not the least from the OSCE. The examples included in the area of diversity illustrate some of the ways that these difficulties have been approached and overcome.

Despite these and other challenges, many examples exist that demonstrate the OSCE's work, often in co-operation with other international actors, to support social structures that not only strengthen and solidify transition processes but also contribute to building sustainable peace. The examples that follow relate to activities implemented by the six OSCE field operations in South-Eastern Europe. They have been generalized to highlight the lessons they contain independent of the specific contexts in which they were carried out.

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8 UNHCR (2017), ODIHR (2010), UNHCR/OSCE (2001).







# Institution Building

Violent conflicts and crises can have a devastating impact on the institutional set-up required for sustainable peace and democracy. When political and human rights institutions are not functioning, cultures of impunity can be created that severely limit efforts to establish good governance and the rule of law.<sup>9</sup> Media outlets play a particular role and must operate on the basis of professional and ethical standards. If institutions are to survive the turbulent transition toward democracy or be rebuilt in a post-conflict setting, they must be made stronger and more resilient, thereby avoiding collapse under the first sign of stress.

The OSCE has been actively involved in supporting institution building in South-Eastern Europe. This has included capacity building and assistance in establishing relevant legal frameworks. Among others, the OSCE has contributed to the development of independent human rights institutions, electoral management bodies, political assemblies, the media, and key components of the justice and security sectors. The OSCE has also supported transitional arrangements in cases where local institutions were not yet ready to take on their full range of responsibilities.

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9 Cliffe/Manning (2006).

## 1. Ombudsperson institutions

Following an agreement between conflict parties, the OSCE was appointed as one of the international bodies responsible for the establishment of democratic institutions. Also appointed was the local Office of the Ombudsperson, which had been established as the principal protector and guarantor of human rights and the rule of law in the country. With a special jurisdiction, it serves as the central institution for the protection from discrimination, as well as the protection of civil, political, social, economic, cultural, and minority rights.

In recent years, the ombudsperson office has undergone significant restructuring, resulting in the creation of a unified institution with several field offices. To achieve a greater presence in different parts of the country, the OSCE supported the opening of other offices in several locations where the Ombudsperson's presence was insufficient. Furthermore, the OSCE supported the efforts of the Ombudsperson to gain greater financial and political independence, to participate in various international forums, and to improve the capacities of the Ombudsperson's professional staff, for example, in reporting adequately to the UN.

A case management system, supported and implemented by the OSCE, was established to ensure that cases were assigned to lawyers in different offices, irrespective of where the complaint was submitted. This innovation significantly improved the ombudsperson office's efficiency and allowed for the impact of its work to be better measured.

The ombudsperson office's role in promoting reconciliation and building sustainable peace is perhaps best demonstrated by its department that deals with eliminating discrimination. This department received hundreds of complaints annually relating to various forms of discrimination on ethnic or religious grounds, and subsequently issued relevant recommendations to rectify discriminatory practices.

By issuing individual and special reports and recommendations, the ombudsperson office contributed greatly to building trust in existing mechanisms for the protection of human rights and the rule of law. Its reports and recommendations drew the attention of authorities to applicable international and domestic human rights standards and practices, and urged them to take steps toward ensuring greater respect for human rights.

## 2. Unbiased broadcasting

During a country's transition toward democracy and a market economy after a violent conflict, the ethnic polarization and antagonism that pervaded society was reflected in the media landscape. In the immediate post-conflict period, many media outlets continued to exacerbate tensions, eroding inter-ethnic reconciliation and hampering the return of displaced persons and refugees.

Among other members of the international community, the OSCE promoted communication between the different ethnically populated areas of the country. Key to this effort was access for all to balanced news and information, including to enhance informed

decision making in elections. The OSCE supported the establishment of the only inter-area radio network with a country-wide reach. The network's objective was to provide professional, balanced multi-ethnic information to educate voters about election-related issues and candidate platforms. At that time, only half of the population had television, but nearly all had daily access to a radio. The radio network was praised for balanced and accurate reporting.

As the radio broadcasting was too expensive to survive alone in the market economy, the OSCE provided financial support through donor contributions. After the donor support phased out, the radio station was incorporated into the newly-established, country-wide public broadcasting system. The OSCE continued to support the reform of the network in terms of upgrading technical facilities and providing international expertise.

In an ethnically-divided town, the OSCE also supported a project that promoted inter-ethnic co-operation during elections among different local, ethnically-based media. Other activities included trainings that brought together journalists from all ethnic groups and areas on a bi-monthly basis. In many instances, these were the first and only inter-ethnic contacts among civilians in the early post-conflict period.

Throughout the years, the OSCE co-operated closely with local stakeholders and other members of the international community to help the country's media transform and restore trust between people.

### 3. Media sector reform

After a violent conflict had come to an end, the media sector was characterized by a small number of outlets with limited information. To address the need for information, one of the OSCE's first acts was to establish an independent public broadcasting service through a temporary institution that helped regulate the media sector. This temporary institution was succeeded by an independent media commission, which the OSCE monitored, advised, and trained as required.

In the early days after the conflict, news and programmes in the two official languages were only broadcast for a few hours per day. Later, the broadcaster expanded its programming to include minority languages. This process concluded with legal provisions obliging the channel to broadcast in other non-majority languages.

The OSCE provided and maintained support for the public broadcaster to address various challenges, such as independent financing, professional training for editorial staff from non-majority communities, outreach to all communities, freedom of the media, and safety of journalists. The OSCE facilitated a series of roundtables to address long-term financing and assess applicable regional models. Additionally, it hired a media expert to improve production and storytelling, in particular for staff from minority groups.

The public broadcaster has contributed significantly to building sustainable peace by engaging majority and non-majority stakeholders—both locally and across the region—and by organizing inter-ethnic debates, re-broadcasting foreign news in

non-majority languages, and setting up a multi-ethnic children's choir. Singing in the languages of all communities, the choir was directed by conductors from the majority and non-majority populations. Moreover, the public broadcaster aired a project focusing on consequences of violent conflicts in the region.

Apart from its work with the public broadcaster, the OSCE assisted various media outlets. Some of the best practices from this work are illustrated below.

### **Reciprocal journalists visits**

As part of its media assistance, the OSCE sought to build the capacity of journalists from two societies, including through exchange visits. Addressing issues of common interest to the wider region, the events provided a forum for dialogue among media professionals and a platform for problem solving, building confidence, and increasing dialogue among the region's societies.

Journalists from both societies first attended a seminar in one city and then, a year later, in the other. On both occasions, the participants also visited media outlets, and met with government officials and leading representatives of international and local NGOs. For many participants, it was the first time they visited one or the other city and were able to observe the various similarities and challenges of daily life. Participants appreciated the opportunity to liaise and exchange ideas, to be able to share common interests, to make contacts, and to discuss regional co-operation opportunities beyond political obstacles. They also discussed common problems they faced in their professions, in particular



related to the freedom of media when collecting information, and risks when publishing investigative stories. The OSCE resolved freedom of movement challenges to enable the journalist to visit each other.

The exchange of journalists led to similar activities organized by one journalist association without external assistance. Journalists were brought together again, visiting media outlets and writing articles about their experiences. They agreed that the information wall between the two societies had to be brought down and that dialogue was needed between media professionals. Most importantly, the participants realized that the media needs to encourage and support dialogue across societal separation lines and discourage animosity between the two societies.

### **Conflict-sensitive reporting**

The OSCE organized training courses and seminars for journalists from two conflict communities on conflict sensitive reporting, which led to better co-operation and collaboration among journalists and other media professionals in the region.

The OSCE also regularly organized summer schools on journalism for young people from conflict-affected communities. In co-operation with selected media outlets, the OSCE supported journalist apprentices with the production and publication of stories on reconciliation, tolerance, and human rights, with a particular emphasis on marginalized groups. Young journalists from non-majority communities were selected by the OSCE through an open call application system. The best performing participants

were offered internship opportunities at leading media outlets where they published their stories for the local audience. Once employed by the media outlets, these young journalists were commissioned to produce similar stories that contributed to building sustainable peace.

### **Multi-ethnic media programming**

In a multi-ethnic post-conflict municipality, the OSCE facilitated the establishment of a local media station that promoted multi-ethnic programming. Despite challenges to maintain multi-ethnicity at the time, the model set a precedent for the media to collaborate among communities by reaching out to wider audiences. The OSCE trained the media outlet's staff, which was composed of majority and non-majority community members, in collaborating and jointly producing news to be aired in the official languages. The model of multi-ethnic interaction and reconciliation was seen as an important step for society as a whole. The OSCE continued to be engaged with local media, advising on best practices in multi-ethnic programming.

## **4. Democratic and inclusive assemblies**

After a violent conflict had come to an end, the OSCE was mandated to build and support local institutions, including the national assembly. Following elections for the assembly, the OSCE initiated a support initiative to develop an effective and representative legislature, and to support the development of government structures with an emphasis on transparency, ethical conduct,

and democratic governance. To this end, the OSCE provided a comprehensive training programme for assembly members and staff related to parliamentary and policy issues.

The OSCE worked to ensure that assembly procedures were respected and that all assembly bodies were operating transparently in accordance with good governance principles. Some of the assembly's instruments included reserved seats for non-majority party representatives as well as their adequate representation in the assembly's presidency and committees. Another important instrument supported by the OSCE was the establishment of a committee dedicated to community rights, whose main task was to protect the vital interests of non-majority communities. In support of the reconciliation process, this instrument aimed to ensure that the voices of all communities were heard and that their interests were taken into account.

With support of the OSCE and the international community, the assembly was able to assert itself as key public institution and demonstrate its ability to continuously adapt to the evolving political landscape.

The OSCE also assisted in the establishment of the informal parliamentary youth and women caucuses. These caucuses were set up in response to the limited involvement of women and youth members of parliament in decision-making processes, and a lack of communication and outreach to their constituents. The OSCE provided technical and logistical support, and guided and coached the two caucuses in increasing their visibility, legislative input, and outreach. Specifically, the two groups were supported in

initiating outreach activities with all communities and in creating close contacts with representatives of civil society.

## 5. Lessons learned

The OSCE has been engaged in building and supporting functioning institutions that are essential to democratic governance and the rule of law, and has taken a proactive role in raising awareness about the need for such institutions. The establishment of effective democratic institutions was seen as particularly important in transitions to stability and in the building of sustainable peace in post-conflict environments.

Strong democratic institutions, based firmly on the rule of law, facilitate co-operative approaches to problem-solving, thereby playing a key role in terms of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Establishing robust institutions is, therefore, crucial in fostering norms for co-operation. When developing and establishing such institutions, a strong emphasis has to be placed on internal democratic governance, transparency, and ethical conduct. In addition, in multi-ethnic societies, specific consideration has to be given to the equitable representation of all communities and their interests in the work of the institutions. This will help to build trust and confidence. In the same vein, the ability of communities to access public services in their mother tongue is of key importance and should be high on the agenda when developing and establishing inclusive democratic institutions.

Institution building is a long-term process that requires the participation of relevant stakeholders at different levels. This includes political parties as well civil society actors and community and religious leaders. The participation of minority communities contributes to the development of a sense of ownership—enhancing their stake in society at large. It is further crucial to recognize and develop gender-sensitive approaches to institution building. Moreover, demographically-sensitive approaches need to give special consideration to the needs and interests of youth.

Any external support for institution building must be context sensitive and should be provided as long as needed. In order to identify the amount of external support that is (still) required, means of monitoring and evaluating the actual performance of institutions against their respective mandates must be established. At the centre of attention should be the capacity of institutions to fulfil their roles in the service of all citizens, thereby contributing to lasting peace, including political, societal and economic stability. Civil society actors and everyday citizens must be given ample opportunity to weigh in on relevant decision-making processes, for example through public hearings.

Biased media, behaving in an ethically irresponsible manner, can play a major role in increasing political or societal tensions and thereby hinder transitions to sustainable peace. It is therefore essential to focus on the establishment of professional and unbiased media, in support of transitions to stable and democratic societies. In post-conflict environments, this is especially important with a view to reconciliation and dealing with the past.



# Community Security

While security incidents have direct consequences on those involved, they can also have broader implications by decreasing trust in local law enforcement and the rule of law. When security is threatened, people feel less safe to engage in public and political life, which undermines democracy and broader peacebuilding efforts. Security incidents may also trigger an increase in inter-ethnic tensions, with the potential of violence. The OSCE's experience shows that the negative effects of security incidents can be mitigated through timely and adequate responses by local institutions. To that end, the OSCE has been promoting and supporting the capacity of local actors through a variety of initiatives.

## 1. Community safety forums

Several years after the end of a violent conflict, non-majority communities continued to be negatively affected by security incidents that targeted persons, private property, and sites of cultural and religious significance. Some municipalities started to adopt a proactive response, primarily by officially condemning incidents and reaching out to affected communities to make them feel less exposed and more secure.

To support this endeavour, the OSCE assisted in the establishment of numerous community safety forums and trained its members on community policing. The members of these communities were engaged in implementing various local initiatives to improve

security in their localities. The range of initiatives included reconstruction and refurbishment, environmental clean-up, security cameras for local schools and neighbourhoods, capacity building for youth, and traffic safety.

A particular example was the organization of several summer youth camps, which brought together people from different ethnic communities, including youth, religious leaders, and teachers of various subjects, such as cultural heritage protection. The aim of the camps was to promote multi-ethnic co-operation, enhance the roles of communities, and establish communication links between communities, police, and other actors working on community safety. The programme encompassed training on negotiation, advocacy, and various team-building activities.

## 2. Community policing

In an ethnically-mixed society that had experienced armed conflict, the OSCE strived to bring together members of local communities, their leaders, and police to discuss topics such as dismantling police/army check points, freedom of movement, weapon collection, the return of displaced persons, and police redeployment. The aim was to re-establish peace and order, maintain a stable security situation, and enable state institutions—especially law enforcement—to regain control over the entire territory.

Later formalized under the framework of community policing, groups of local volunteers were established at the village level and helped local law enforcement tailor policing to the needs of



all citizens. The primary goals were to increase citizens' access to police and public services, to improve communication, and to introduce community policing principles at the local level. Once the OSCE's support was phased out, the local police took an active role in organizing and running a significant number of community policing forums that allowed for daily issues to be discussed in an open and transparent manner. In this way trust was built on both sides: the villagers and the law enforcement agencies.

However, the fact that the group's members and other citizens participated in the meetings on a voluntary basis without any financial compensation contributed to an inconsistent level of commitment. On the side of the police, this was exacerbated by the need for supervisor permission to attend the meetings.

At a later stage, the OSCE introduced prevention councils, including in ethnically-mixed municipalities. Their task was to address, from a multi-disciplinary point of view, the security problems faced by citizens. The OSCE engaged concretely by co-ordinating with local stakeholders, diagnosing security concerns, and defining a strategy to solve problems that affected the entire community. The councils were part of the national decentralization process, and saw the participation of a broad range of local stakeholders, including representatives of state institutions, religious leaders, NGOs, citizens, community policing representatives, private business, and other persons with social influence. This broader composition allowed for information related to security issues to be easily shared across ethnic lines and between various stakeholders.

As assistance and proposals would be provided to the councils under the community policing framework, the functions of the two bodies were complementary. The OSCE and the local authorities found that both the community policing approach and the councils were useful concepts, as they enabled citizens and representatives of governmental bodies to have direct communication with the main stakeholders on the local level.

### 3. Lessons learned

Inter-ethnic dialogue and co-operation are crucial elements in building sustainable peace. Public safety and security forums established at the local level have had a very positive effect in that regard. In addition to contributing to the maintenance of public safety and security by facilitating trustful relations with citizens and the police, they also helped to establish and foster inter-ethnic co-operation and dialogue between communities.

Public safety and security forums bring together a wide range of stakeholders, including ordinary citizens, community leaders, police, representatives of local institutions, and civil society actors, allowing them to discuss matters of common interest and jointly look for sensible solutions that are acceptable to all. In post-conflict settings, establishing such forums can be very challenging and requires patience and perseverance. However, the OSCE's experience shows that it is possible to overcome the severe lack of trust between conflict-affected communities and their initial scepticism about the benefits of such endeavours.

Supporting inter-ethnic dialogue to build confidence between communities that are or have been in conflict should be seen as a long-term activity. This entails dealing with traumatic memories, as inter-ethnic dialogue can include exchanges about past incidents that have escalated into violence. While this can be a very painful process, the OSCE's experience shows that the trust built through dialogue can create a solid foundation for further reconciliation efforts. Against this backdrop, inter-ethnic dialogue—for example through community safety forums—allows relevant stakeholders to work together to solve problems for their mutual benefit. External actors, like the OSCE, can support such processes by raising awareness and fostering a culture of dialogue and tolerance, thereby supporting the prevention of future conflict.



# Education

The crucial role of education in preventing conflicts and building sustainable peace has been widely recognized within the international community.<sup>10</sup> Over the past decade, three broad discourses have emerged.<sup>11</sup> The first concerns education in crisis situations, which prioritizes the protection of children and tries to minimize the negative impacts of violent conflict on their education. The second emphasizes the need for conflict-sensitive education that does not reinforce inequalities or fuel further divisions. The last relates to education and building sustainable peace, and often assumes a development role for education through reforms to the education sector itself, and by contributing to political, economic, and social transformations.

Education programmes have formed an integral part of the OSCE's efforts in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Accordingly, the OSCE has focussed on promoting education through reform that enhances tolerance and respect for diversity, thereby reducing divisions within affected communities. Such reform has also tackled segregated and other forms of exclusive education systems to ensure access to education for all, with a particular emphasis on minority communities. The establishment of legal and institutional frameworks, support for mediation in schools, and the introduction of civic education curricula also all play an important role. In addition, the OSCE has provided training for teachers, youth, and others on anti-discrimination and conflict-sensitive

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10 UNICEF (2009).

11 UNICEF (2011).

development, thereby contributing to confidence building and the promotion of dialogue and co-operation.

## 1. Education reform

A few years after the end of a violent conflict, the international community identified the crisis in education as a long-term threat to the country's security and stability. Urged to take the lead in reforming the education system, the OSCE became the main actor in this sector.

As a reflection of the country's lingering struggles with ethnic division, the education system remained highly politicized. After the conflict, the education system was characterized by ethnically-divided schools where children were learning from ethnic-specific curricula and textbooks, including on the subject of history. Schools remained physically divided and pupils often had little or no interaction with their peers from other ethnic groups. This contributed to a growing divide in communities through the perpetuation of prejudices and stereotypes. Consequently, young people knew less and less of the other ethnic groups with whom they lived in the same community.

In consultation with the host society, the OSCE developed strategies to ensure the application of minimum education standards. It worked with local and international partners to create a functional legal and institutional framework that would ensure equal access to quality schools. The goal of the framework was

to promote multi-ethnic education and to continue modernisation and quality-enhancement programmes in the region.

Below are some examples of the OSCE's activities in the field of education reform.

## **Teaching history**

Historical narratives have often been instrumental in fuelling conflict and dividing people. The teaching of history has been mobilized to assert the identity of different ethnic groups and to vindicate mutually exclusive historical narratives. The division of curricula and the existence of different—and often opposed—versions of history can pose a considerable threat to social cohesion and obstruct the formation of a shared sense of citizenship. Such situations hamper the building of tolerant, innovative, and civic-minded societies and are detrimental to reconciliation and the building of sustainable peace.

Recognizing the importance of history teaching in a post-conflict society, the OSCE, together with the international community, has supported education authorities in reforming the way history is taught in a post-conflict society. These efforts often resulted in concrete steps, such as the amendment of history textbooks, the modification of teaching methods to include more diverse viewpoints, and the development of common curricula for all students.

As part of this effort, the OSCE worked with the CoE and other partners on the improvement of history textbooks. Namely, the OSCE supported a group of local experts, appointed by education

authorities, in developing guidelines for writing and evaluating history textbooks for primary and secondary schools. Shortly after the guidelines were adopted, a new and substantially improved generation of textbooks was published. To facilitate more effective use of these textbooks on the part of teachers, a number of teacher trainings were organized, and a teacher's manual on multi-perspectivity and contemporary history teaching in schools has been developed, published, and distributed.

Building on past achievements, and aiming to integrate the reform of the broader history-teaching curricula into the work of competent institutions, the OSCE developed and implemented a project on promoting reconciliation through education. The results of the project were manifold, with the most important being the development of a common core curriculum and standards for teaching history. These should serve as a framework for teaching and learning about the culture and common values of people of other ethnic or minority groups.

With the support of the OSCE, the common core curriculum for teaching history has been incorporated into pre-school, primary, and secondary education. The OSCE has also, together with the international community and national stakeholders, organized a conference to present the common core curriculum to education institutions, experts, and the wider public. Throughout the process, the determination and co-operation of education authorities and institutions was vital to the achievement of results.



## Inter-ethnic school activities

In a heavily politicized environment, the education system was functioning under the framework of a fragmented administration and segregated institutions. Curricula were based on ethnocentric principles. As a result, all aspects of school life remained ethnically coloured in the different communities' languages and curricula.

Although the legal framework and educational policies were relatively well developed, these were infrequently reflected in practice. Because of the gap between policy and practice, children and youth were deprived of equal access to quality pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. Following its initial engagement in education reform, the OSCE initiated and supported various activities and initiatives focusing on building bridges within and between divided communities, and promoted a culture of tolerance.

In an area with an ethnically-mixed population, children and youth were attending schools that taught the different communities' languages and curricula. The OSCE organized a series of events that brought schools together across ethnic lines. The activities included workshops, roundtables, study trips, religious activities, and visits to cultural sites.

As a result, the schools established closer co-operation. The events also created opportunities for students, teachers, and parents to meet their counterparts from other ethnic groups and to learn about each other—often for the first time. Although they supported such activities, the national education institutions often

had difficulties recognizing them as a starting point for policies and practices that might help create an inclusive and welcoming school environment. To overcome these perceptions, the OSCE encouraged schools to take the lead in assessing their own levels of inclusion and reflect on whether policy changes were needed. To this end, the OSCE promoted the introduction of the so-called Index for Inclusion methodology<sup>12</sup> as a tool to help schools ensure the participation of all children. Using this methodology, the schools assessed their cultures, policies, and practices, and determined priorities for increasing inclusion.

The OSCE signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education to introduce the methodology in some pilot municipalities. Different criteria were used in the selection process, such as the willingness of the municipality to be part of the project, whether the municipality had minority or returnee populations, or if the municipality was mono-ethnic or ethnically divided.

The initiative was presented to the school directors, after which a joint training on applying the methodology was organized for primary and secondary teachers. Participants also received training on social justice principles, recognizing and combating prejudices and stereotypes, and on partnership building. The trainees later became co-ordinators of the respective activities in their schools. Many of them also participated in other OSCE-supported activities, such as in the ‘network of pedagogues’ (see below).

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12 Booth/Ainscow (2002).

The added value of the tool was that two schools started to work jointly on introducing and implementing the methodology by deciding on joint priorities for all schools in the area regardless of the language of instruction or curricula. The OSCE was invited to continue co-operation and to support some of the activities.

## **Network of pedagogues**

In the midst of violent conflict, secondary schools followed a curriculum that was adapted for each ethnic group. Two ethnic curricula were introduced and education was carried out in two different languages.

The OSCE recognized a need and potential for more organized co-operation between pedagogues across ethnic lines. Consequently, the OSCE supported the formation of an informal network of pedagogues from secondary schools in an ethnically-mixed town. The process started by advocating with schools and pedagogues to establish a joint network.

The network met on a regular basis and pedagogues had, among others, a chance to develop proposals for improving certain aspects in the field of education and their professional development. Since the network members stayed in contact and remained active over several years, some pedagogues even established more concrete collaboration between their schools. This included visiting their peer's school and holding lectures on various topics, jointly working on improving their school's plans for the prevention of violence, or drafting common projects.

Ultimately, pedagogues from all of the secondary schools became members of the network, which is considered the greatest success of the project. The selection of committed leaders of the network, which was done by the pedagogues themselves, was important for the project's success and continuation. The network members also explored the option to formally register the network so as to provide it with a solid legal basis. Overall, the project significantly improved co-operation and communication among pedagogues across ethnic lines.

## **2. Conflict prevention through education**

A country's education system had been characterized by separation among pupils, students, and teachers from different ethnic communities. Youth from the two ethnic communities, which make up roughly 90 percent of the overall primary and secondary school population, followed a separate curriculum in their own language and did not interact with other communities when at school. In primary education, a full curriculum was offered in more than half of the national languages. This multilingual approach led, in some cases, to a limited knowledge of the language spoken by the majority population. Concerning secondary education, there were very few multi-ethnic secondary schools in the country. To ensure access to higher education for all ethnic groups, minority quotas were introduced at state universities. Since many universities, both state and private, started to provide classes in some non-majority ethnic languages, the interest in minority quotas for the students decreased.

The OSCE, in co-operation with the host society, has been instrumental in supporting reconciliation and the building of sustainable peace under the framework of education by fostering relationships across ethnic lines. Following the recommendations of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the OSCE has continually and systematically worked to reverse negative trends and promote more integrated education in the country.

The OSCE has provided stakeholders in the education process, in particular youth, with conflict resolution skills. These skills are necessary to deal with the problems they face in their everyday lives and to empower them as catalysts for positive change in their respective communities. The main aim of the activities was to promote and facilitate intercultural dialogue and tolerance among young people, in particular those from post-conflict areas, as well as to build partnerships that enable active involvement in multicultural work. Examples of such activities are outlined below.

### **Multi-ethnic extra-curricular activities**

Following the adoption of a national strategy on integrated education, the OSCE initiated a fund to expand multi-ethnic extra-curricular activities in primary and secondary schools. Jointly with host authorities and the international community, the OSCE offered support to municipalities, students, teachers, parents, kindergartens, and schools in an effort to increase interaction, understanding, and integration. All interested stakeholders could apply to have joint activities funded, such as information technology workshops, fashion shows, and disc-jockey sets. Students from all

communities became involved in mixed events and after-school activities run by teachers and parents in different languages.

The fund was overseen by an independent advisory board that included members from various ethnic backgrounds, the OSCE, donor and government representatives, and popular local music artists. The fund enabled the implementation of numerous activities that promoted inter-ethnic dialogue and co-operation. It resulted in the interaction of hundreds of kids from different communities for the first time across the ethnic divide. Many schools started new collaborations that paved the way for future joint activities. The initiative contributed to advancing stability, reconciliation and social cohesion in a society where inter-ethnic relations were tense and fragile. In addition, some of the schools became more motivated in seeking their own activities to bring together students with different ethnic backgrounds.

### **Multi-ethnic youth camps**

In co-operation with an implementing partner experienced in multiculturalism, the OSCE organized a series of summer and winter camps for high school students aged 16 to 19 years. Following an open call, participants were selected from all communities with due regard to gender and ethnic balance. The facilitators came from various ethnic backgrounds and spoke the local languages. The camp programmes were highly interactive, and included confidence-building and team-building exercises in mixed groups. OSCE staff participated in all events.

It was observed at the outset that the groups knew very little about each other's cultures and traditions, and held many stereotypes and prejudices. By providing the opportunity to socialize across ethnic lines, the camps allowed the young people to develop new perspectives on living in multi-ethnic societies. With an increased awareness about the sensitivities of each side, participants were able to strengthen their capacities to contribute to the building of peaceful societies.

Following the success of the first summer camp, others were conducted with similar results, highlighting the valid and duplicable inter-ethnic concept that the camps applied. Joining the training teams, participants from the previous camps were able to share their knowledge and experience as student facilitators of follow-on camps.

After an inter-ethnic incident in a former conflict area, the OSCE supported the further application of this concept. Having worked in the region for years, the OSCE had already created a local multi-cultural youth council, which became a hub to foster inter-cultural learning and communication among youth, and helped implement projects promoting inter-cultural dialogue. In consultation with key members of the affected communities—such as youth and neighbourhood councils, primary schools directors, municipal representatives, and local NGOs—it was agreed that the OSCE should organize a summer school for students in the area. Additionally, it was decided to include the neighbouring municipality that was indirectly linked to the incident, as including youth from both towns would benefit the confidence-building process.

The activity also resulted in a joint webpage on social media that increased interest in the multi-cultural council and its work.

The overall goal of these initiatives was to provide students from different communities with an opportunity to interact, socialize, and learn about each other in order to improve inter-ethnic relations, both among them and in the wider community. Over time, the OSCE expanded the scope of its work towards supporting the national and local authorities, youth structures, and civil society organizations in creating relevant youth policies and strategic documents at the local and central levels. In this way, youth engagement could be leveraged for improving inter-ethnic relations.

### **3. Multilingual higher education**

Under one country's laws, national minorities had the right to pre-school, primary, and secondary school education in their language, while higher education was only provided in the state's majority language.

Because of this, the non-majority population had been complaining of discrimination and lack of inclusion in state institutions. Children from the non-majority population had been educated separately in their mother tongue, with only a few hours of instruction per week in the majority language. Following a comprehensive analysis conducted by the co-ordination board responsible for the area with the support of the OSCE and the international community, the majority language curriculum was found to be inadequate. The respective study showed that most students spoke their mother tongue at



home, that their state language skills were low, and that they had little opportunity for inter-ethnic interaction.

Additionally, the country's curriculum for teaching the state language was not adapted to the needs of children of another mother-tongue language. Many ethnic-minority students, therefore, were unable to learn the state's majority language at schools. This meant they often did not have the language skills to participate in higher education in the country or to be employed outside of their linguistic communities.

Most of the students wishing to attend university had to pursue higher education abroad. This contributed to a further segregation along ethnic lines within the country as well as to the inequality and isolation of certain communities. At the same time, the situation created another challenge as diplomas earned abroad were not recognized by the country's authorities. With the help of the international community, an agreement was finally reached to accept foreign diplomas under certain conditions. The OSCE encouraged a compromise on all sides to find a solution for the recognition of diplomas so as to avoid punishing the students for political conflicts.

In light of this situation, the OSCE began supporting the establishment of a multi-ethnic higher education institution in the area by commissioning an expert-led feasibility study and raising funds. The study identified some of the challenges that needed to be addressed to establish multi-ethnic higher education, such as that more outreach was needed to the non-majority population. The study also established that a bilingual faculty would bring students together across ethnic groups, raise awareness among parents

about the need for children to learn the official state language, and serve as an example of joint confidence-building between national institutions and local governments.

The first multilingual, multi-ethnic higher education institution was opened some years later, bringing together students from both the majority and non-majority communities. Throughout the process, the OSCE fostered transparency as an essential tool to resolve issues related to the institution. The OSCE and other representatives of the international community became members of the university committee, together with representatives of relevant ministries, national academic institutions, the national minority council and others.

The OSCE played a pivotal role in fostering communication and mutual understanding between all the parties involved, particularly between national institutions and the minority council. As an added advantage, the institution also began attracting students from abroad who were interested in studying in one of the minority languages.

## 4. Lessons learned

Education is a fundamental element of sustainable peace and democracy. Yet, in polarized societies—particularly in post-conflict settings—it remains one of the most controversial and heavily politicized issues. Accordingly, there are many examples from South-Eastern Europe that show how education has been exploited to reinforce ethnic stereotypes and prejudices. Such co-opting of education has an immensely negative impact on reconciliation, paving the way for further intolerance, segregation, and discrimination.

Ethnic segregation in schools, including ethnically-divided education systems and the physical separation of pupils from different communities, creates blocks on the road to sustainable peace and hinders the building of democratic and inclusive societies. However, functional (multi-ethnic) education institutions at different levels can make a major contribution to breaking down cycles of mistrust and conflict. The OSCE's experience shows that abolishing ethnic segregation in schools leads to increased social cohesion, which is a fundament of peaceful societies.

To support such efforts, external interventions should aim at ensuring that a legal basis for the establishment of a functioning (multi-ethnic) education system is in place. Pupils should follow a common curriculum, rather than one that is ethnically based. Sensitive issues, such as (common) history and geography, should be dealt with in a responsible manner and not foster divisive narratives of the past. To this end, teachers must be properly trained in promoting inclusive approaches to education instead of helping to fortify segregation and separation.

Civic education is but one subject that allows future generations to be brought up as proactive and informed citizens who can work together to build peaceful societies. Extra-curricular activities that bring together pupils associations, teachers and public officials, across ethnic divides can also contribute to building sustainable peace in polarized and conflict-affected societies. Identifying issues of common interest as well as raising awareness about the need for tolerance and mutual respect are essential elements of such processes.



# Electoral Reform

Free and fair elections are a fundament of sustainable peace and democracy. This is specifically the case in deeply-polarized societies or in post-conflict settings where democratic elections can contribute to and complement local reconciliation initiatives. However, it must be noted that in post-conflict environments, election campaigns run the risk of being mobilized against one or another side to the former conflict. This may lead to an increase in tensions, a deepening of existing divisions, or—in the worst case—to a relapse into conflict. Therefore, electoral reform should be put high on the agenda of international actors in their efforts to build sustainable peace and security after violent conflict.

In South-Eastern Europe, the OSCE has played different roles in assisting electoral reform. This has included direct administration of elections when local capacities were weak, but also capacity and institution building of electoral management bodies at national and local levels. The OSCE's engagement also included support for the establishment of voter lists, work with political parties, and support for the active involvement of women and minority groups in political life. The OSCE has further promoted voter education, for instance, through civic democratic education initiatives.

## 1. Democratized election processes

Since the end of a violent conflict, political allegiance in the country has largely been associated with ethnic identity. Due to the lack of trust between the conflict parties, they agreed that the OSCE should directly administer a number of elections. Following the passing of a new election law and the establishment of a national election administration, the responsibility for election administration was transferred to the newly-established national authorities. After the handover, the OSCE adopted a limited guidance and advisory role to ensure proper understanding of the law and compliance with the regulations.

The OSCE's initial focus was on conducting elections, which was done by administering preparations and establishing numerous institutions that dealt with elections, such as the provisional election commission, the media expert commission, and the municipal election commissions. What made the OSCE's efforts successful was a synchronized, country-wide approach to the management of the election process that brought together international expertise and local staff.

The OSCE carried out various activities linked to election-related legislation, and supported the drafting of the election law until its final adoption. Furthermore, the OSCE organized several public hearings on the election law and closely co-operated with parliament and political parties in the organization of public debates across ethnic and political party lines. Best practices from several OSCE participating States and the recommendation of ODIHR served as a basis for this work.

The OSCE recognized the importance of including women in the process of rebuilding the country, particularly in the conflict prevention and reconciliation process. Among others, it supported capacity-building projects targeting women candidates for local and general elections to strengthen their participation in political life. The OSCE played an instrumental role in empowering women to take part in building sustainable peace by ensuring that a gender quota was included in the draft election law. It also facilitated trainings for female candidates from different political parties.

All activities aimed to reinforce democratic structures within political parties and encourage co-operation between politicians regardless of their party or ethnic affiliation. Two decades on, the OSCE continues to support efforts to further contribute to the democratization of the election process and its efficiency.

## 2. Pluralistic political environments

Years after the end of a violent conflict, the political landscape was characterized by a broad political party spectrum, ranging from non-nationalist to nationalist. Most international actors, including the OSCE, agreed that multi-ethnicity was a fundamental requirement for building an integrated, stable and democratic society.

The OSCE focused on supporting new multi-ethnic parties with campaign financing, and by organizing and implementing various capacity building events. The funds available could be

used to support trainings, for example, on how to develop political party platforms. The OSCE developed criteria to prioritize parties. It examined the composition of their leadership and the candidates list, the party's attitude towards non-ethnic issues in general, their support for a multi-ethnic and pluralistic state, and their commitment to democratic principles, including tolerance. For example, publishing election-related news that contained ideas/platforms for the return of displaced persons was an area supported by the OSCE.

Furthermore, the OSCE was instrumental in the establishment of the political resource centres that aimed to provide political parties and independent candidates with the necessary resources to build a pluralistic and multi-ethnic political environment. At one point, the OSCE ran a network of fifteen centres throughout the country. The centres were open to all parties and contributed to a significant increase in contact between political parties, and co-operation among opposition parties. They also enabled party members to establish and maintain direct contact with their supporters and reach out to new voters. Through the centres, local citizens were able to hold their elected representatives accountable and ensure their voices were heard.

Some of the centres' activities included trainings, multi-party development workshops, town meetings, and events to bring together politically active youth from different areas. These events helped identify the kinds of assistance they needed in developing their own activities and strategies. For example, the idea of youth parliament was put forth, which resulted in two inter-areas youth parliament sessions. Thanks to this and other initiatives launched



by the OSCE, contacts were strengthened between youth branches of the political parties from all over the country. Continuing long after activity concluded, such events show the OSCE's ability to support co-operation and communicating across the political party spectrum.

To facilitate dialogue on the return of displaced persons, the OSCE organized several town hall meetings on tolerance and return. With the participation of a multi-ethnic mix of political parties, the meetings allowed for a constructive dialogue with all parties supporting return of displaced persons—an issue which had not before been openly discussed. Previous disagreements on even the timing and conditions for such discussions demonstrated the need for dialogue and information sharing on such contested topics. As a result of the OSCE's continued efforts, the population became familiar with the reality of a pluralistic political environment, including the creation of new parties that provided alternative, peaceful narratives of the past and promoted closer collaboration between people.

### 3. Peaceful elections through dialogue

Soon after the end of violent conflict, early parliamentary elections were held. ODIHR characterized some election stakeholders and relevant authorities as having failed to prevent violent acts in predominantly ethnic-minority communities. Organized efforts to violently disrupt election day made it impossible for voters in many locations to freely cast their ballots. Fresh elections were called, giving the voters affected by irregularities the opportunity

vote in a more secure environment. This was ensured by a heavy police presence at and around polling stations. However, tensions and intimidation remained evident in the interim period. Parties engaged in strong rhetoric which sometimes led to physical violence, despite all parties having publicly condemned violence and intimidation.

To prevent, or at least minimize, further possibilities of violence, in particular in the former conflict areas, the OSCE organized several roundtables prior to the next elections. These brought together the main political actors to use dialogue as a prevention tool. This practice was then applied to several election cycles in numerous municipalities. Securing the participation of municipal heads of political parties, the OSCE was able to facilitate an agreement that there was no place for violence during campaigning. The participants even provided the details of local branch leaders and election co-ordinators who could be contacted if any of their activists caused trouble during the campaign.

The roundtables provided a space for dialogue that helped reduce tensions and increase awareness about issues of concern. The ability to communicate directly with the relevant local institutions, such as the public prosecutor, the ombudsperson, and the police, was much appreciated by all participants. The fact that OSCE, through ODIHR, monitored the process was perceived by the local population as insurance for the future accountability of local politicians. At the same time, the roundtables allowed the OSCE to exercise its early warning role as several issues of concern were raised in the forums, thus identifying possible conflict triggers and tipping points.

## 4. Trust in electoral processes

In providing support to the electoral process, the OSCE's broader objective was to improve public trust in the conduct and competency of the electoral administration and other election-related stakeholders, including political parties and civil society.

In the context of heated elections, which saw isolated violent and irregular incidents, the OSCE decided to observe and monitor the second round. Together with the State Police, it also organized and implemented training for one thousand police officers from all levels to introduce them to their role in the electoral process.

A few years later, the OSCE was heavily engaged in political mediation between the key actors. In an extremely difficult political period, an agreement on electoral reform was reached by bringing political parties together for several rounds of discussions and negotiations, combined with international facilitation and lobbying. The agreement paved the way for further elections. Thanks to the OSCE's facilitation among others, the transfer of power was peaceful, which also contributed to overcoming tensions.

An ad hoc committee on electoral reform within the National Parliament, supported by a technical experts group, was established. The OSCE facilitated the drafting of the new Electoral Law. An OSCE-organized conference provided a forum for discussion among political parties and other relevant stakeholders on the pros and cons of different models of electoral systems.

To increase trust in the elections, the OSCE provided capacity building for electoral management bodies (EMBs)<sup>13</sup>, including through multiple study visits abroad that brought together international and local stakeholders, such as representatives of political parties, members of parliament, and international community representatives. The EMBs remained highly politicized so, when the new EMB was established following elections, the OSCE, together with the international community, organized further training on electoral processes. Its aim was to improve relations between EMB members, which were known to be tense, in particular because of political affiliations. Several members were also new to the job, and some did not know each other. Conducted abroad to provide a neutral place for interaction, the training improved the atmosphere, and the functioning of the EMB as a collegial body.

To raise awareness of electoral processes, the OSCE worked with citizens—in particular youth from remote areas, people with disabilities, and vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as Roma. The most pro-active participants were later invited to take part in capacity-building activities, such as the training-of-trainers on civic democratic education, and the awareness-raising campaign among Roma women and young voters. These training activities were jointly implemented by the OSCE and the EMB, and brought together the election administration, members of lower electoral administration, civil society, and youth activists, including those from vulnerable groups.

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13 OSCE (2009).

To familiarize citizens, youth, and vulnerable groups with the role of civil society in electoral processes, international and local experts and OSCE staff drafted a training manual in co-operation with the EMB. The manual addressed citizens' rights, the election cycle, and relevant legislation, with the aim of enhancing their proactive participation in and understanding of election processes. In this way, the OSCE enhanced public trust in the fairness and legitimacy of the electoral process and its main bodies. This reduced the likelihood that societal divisions would be exacerbated and, therefore, diminished the potential for political violence.

## 5. Lessons learned

Elections are a specifically challenging area with a view to building sustainable peace, and require long-term and context-sensitive approaches. Particularly in post-conflict settings, elections are a crucial step on the path to stability. If conducted in line with OSCE commitments and principles, elections form an essential component of democratic governance and the rule of law, not the least by enabling the peaceful transfer of political power and authority.

The OSCE's experiences in South-Eastern Europe show that external support for electoral processes and reform calls for engagement with a multitude of stakeholders at different levels. Although implementing such a comprehensive approach requires relevant expertise and dedicated resources, it is crucial for the establishment of a functioning electoral system. Awareness raising and capacity building among all stakeholders—through

public debates, training, and civic education—constitute good practices that help to build trust in the system.

Like all activities undertaken to build sustainable peace and democracy, external support for electoral reform should include a gender-sensitive approach and increase local ownership rather than replace it. Although there might be cases when substantial external support is required, for example in post-conflict settings where local capacities have been severely diminished, the long-term objective should always be to enable local actors to handle relevant processes on their own in a sustainable manner. This requires monitoring and evaluation of local capabilities, and strategies to hand over responsibility when the timing is right.







# Reconciliation

Reconciliation in the OSCE area can be seen as a process that aims to overcome conflicts by breaking vicious cycles of mutual misperceptions and divisive memories that often result in violence, through the transformation of political and societal relationships.<sup>14</sup> In post-conflict societies, reconciliation can relate to a variety of processes and initiatives, including transitional justice in cases of conflict-related crimes. In deeply polarized and divided societies, reconciliation processes work toward re-establishing trust, building confidence, and promoting dialogue and tolerance. Reconciliation can be effected at different levels—the individual, the community, and the national—and include larger social or political processes. Some activities implemented by the OSCE in support of reconciliation processes are listed below.

## 1. War crimes trial monitoring

As part of its mandate to develop democratic political institutions at all levels in post-conflict societies, the OSCE puts a particular emphasis on judicial and legal reform as a cornerstone of re-establishing the rule of law and re-building the trust of citizens in the state.

To enhance the fairness, effectiveness and transparency of judicial systems, and thus build trust in the rule of law, the OSCE developed a war crimes trial monitoring programme, which is

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14 OSCE (2012, 2013a).

underpinned by the principles of objectivity and non-intervention in judicial processes. The first principle aims at respecting the precept of judicial independence, thus requiring that all trial monitoring programmes respect and enhance the independence of the courts, both through their design and through the activities of the monitors. The second principle requires that the trial monitoring programme accurately reports on legal proceedings using clearly defined and accepted standards, and applies these standards impartially.

The OSCE conducted an extensive trial monitoring program in a post-conflict context, which included observing and reporting on all war crimes cases across the country. The public, key partners in the justice sector, the international community, and NGOs were the report recipients. All war crimes proceedings were monitored from the time that an indictment was handed up until the verdict became final and binding.

In implementing the monitoring programme, the OSCE assessed and identified systemic issues in the country's judiciary and provided recommendations for the improvement of its legal and judicial systems. The OSCE's guidance supported the state in upholding its constitution, its criminal procedure codes, and internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in fighting the most complex forms of crimes, such as war crimes, terrorism, corruption, and trafficking in human beings. The programme supported the creation of transparency and clarity for citizens, increasing their trust in institutions, and making it easier to talk about the past.

The OSCE also provided extensive capacity building and technical support to improve the quality and efficiency of war crimes processing. This support included seminars, peer-to-peer meetings, and training of trainers across the entire spectrum of the justice sector, such as judges, prosecutors, witness support officers, defence attorneys, police investigators, and legal support staff. The programme set out a plan to better equip and organize the judiciary to process war crimes cases in a manner compliant with international legal norms and human rights standards. Later on, the OSCE published a report that examined the implementation progress of the National Strategy for War Crimes Processing. The report included findings from trials that were monitored by the OSCE, dealing with genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The report further assessed the extent to which the framework for war crimes processing had increased the delivery of justice in conflict-crimes cases, as well as the overall efficiency of the criminal justice system in the country.

## **2. Justice for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence**

A conflict that engulfed several countries in the region was characterized by widespread and systematic rape and other forms of sexual violence against women, girls, men and boys of different ethnicities and members of national minorities. The different types of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV),<sup>15</sup> including systematic rape and sexual slavery, was used by all conflict parties as a tactic to humiliate, intimidate, and displace by force civilians

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15 CoE PA Resolution (2009).

of certain ethnic communities, and as a means of changing the demography of a territory.<sup>16</sup>

The process of reconciliation and rebuilding society involved helping survivors of CRSV and their families deal with their traumas. This required justice in order to create an environment for CRSV survivors that was free from fear and stigmatization. Different from other war crimes, CRSV can be more challenging to investigate and prove, and requires specialized, sensitive approaches that fully respect the rights of survivors while meeting rigorous standards for criminal evidence.

In monitoring CRSV cases, the OSCE used the findings from its trial monitoring programme to design and conduct specialized trainings for judges, prosecutors, and legal associates on CRSV. It also published a series of reports on the prosecution of CRSV cases in the country. These reports outline how CRSV cases are processed by the courts, and put forward recommendations on the processing of CRSV cases for judges, prosecutors, witness-support providers in judicial institutions, NGOs, and the international community. Based on the analytical findings, the reports also examined the implementation status of previous OSCE recommendations.

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<sup>16</sup> UN (1995).

Moreover, the OSCE and other relevant actors have lobbied for an amendment to the Criminal Code in accordance with recommendations made by the OHCHR Committee against Torture<sup>17</sup>, in particular on the definition of rape.

### 3. Property restitution for returnees

War caused a huge number of people to flee. After the conflict ended, countless refugees and displaced persons began to return to their homes across the country. However, the restoration of property was not taking place automatically or without turmoil. It required a new property law and a plan to implement it. Since only few people had managed to return to their pre-conflict homes, the challenge of restitution became evident.

To assist the country dealing with this challenge, the OSCE conducted a legislative review to clarify and harmonize the procedure for property restitution. Represented in working groups for the new property law, the OSCE conducted expert discussions with partners from responsible ministries, the international community, and citizens.

Together with other stakeholders of the international community and their field networks, the OSCE monitored and supervised the implementation of the property law. Through oversight, the OSCE aimed to ensure that domestic mechanisms for resolving property claims were implemented consistently throughout the

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17 For more on the OHCHR Committee against Torture, see: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cat/pages/catindex.aspx>

country. Monitoring served a dual function. It was designed to detect when the process was not functioning satisfactorily and a trigger an intervention. At the same time, it provided a means to consistently remind relevant authorities about their responsibility to implement the property law, thereby promoting a process of cultural change.

In support of implementation, the OSCE launched a nationwide series of workshops to present and discuss amendments to the property, return, and privatization legislation. The workshops were designed to promote rapid implementation of the property amendments by giving legal professionals from across the country an opportunity to discuss them in small groups. Each workshop brought together legal practitioners in order to foster professional contacts, mutual understanding, and a common interpretation of the laws.

Discrimination and harassment against returning minorities was a frequent occurrence. To sustainably encourage further return and integration, the OSCE, together with the international community, disseminated information among returnees about the formalities of the restitution process, and organized town hall meetings that brought together returnees and local authorities to find practical solutions.

## 4. Transitional justice

Through a project, the OSCE sought to create a depoliticized platform to engage in productive dialogue about the country's history. The project co-operated with the government, institutions, activists dealing with the past, formerly politically-persecuted people, civil society, and the general public. By promoting constructive dialogue and a better-informed citizenry, the project contributed to strengthening the country's ability to address systemic, grievous, and sustained violations of human rights and the rule of law.

The project's activities encompassed a survey on public perceptions, desk research, theatre performances, film screenings, TV panels, and other public discussions about the past. Also included was a government-led legal process to open former state security files. To support the process, the OSCE lobbied for the establishment of an independent state body to open the files and process the information. Regular stakeholder meetings were organized, in which the OSCE took a leading role by issuing invitations, contacting journalists and experts, selecting speakers, and moderating discussions.

The OSCE also selected a young person with no relation to the country's past, who it trained to moderate TV panels and discussions. It supported public performances of a play—written by a local playwright and performed by local actors—which were followed by OSCE-moderated discussions that allowed spectators to express their feelings about what they had seen and how they thought the topics should be addressed.

The OSCE promoted discussions about the past as a tool for transition, and the further stabilization and democratization of a still fractious society. By improving citizens' awareness of the country's difficult past and supporting processes to deal with it, the country was better prepared to handle contemporary challenges and promote reconciliation.

### **5. Women's networks as drivers for peace**

One of the OSCE's key roles is to facilitate dialogue between conflict parties, to mediate, and to help them reconcile their positions. To promote dialogue, the OSCE brought together women from two societies that had many unresolved issues. The initiative aimed to promote women who were active in public and political life as role models and promoters of peace, reconciliation, tolerance, and conflict resolution.

The first milestone was to bring prominent women from the two societies together, breaking the tradition of mutual suspicion, distrust, and animosity that had been building for decades. Women members of parliament, journalists, academics, and civil society activists from the two societies met for the first time on neutral territory to talk in an informal setting. The meetings often focused on gender issues, which united women from the two societies and stimulated constructive discussion. Further topics included their social and economic status; their participation in policy making, the labour market, and business; and their general role in public decision making and parliamentary structures.



The initial meeting inspired a series of formal and informal follow-up sessions in different locations, both inside and outside the region. Through their perseverance and engagement in the process, the women conveyed a message of peace and reconciliation. This change of narrative made the initiative resilient to political turmoil and empowered actions that went beyond the limits of daily politics.

The initiative was then extended to other groups of women so they, too, could exchange views. Attention was paid to younger women in both societies as drivers for peace. The empowerment of young women, such as activists from civil society and youth organizations, through education and dialogue was promoted and supported by the OSCE. This included OSCE-supported education opportunities for young women from both societies, for which they could apply in an open call. To empower them to advocate for the advancement of women's rights and reconciliation in the wider region, the women were trained in mediation, negotiation, and women in politics.

The young women who took part created an alumni network that continues to design and implement activities with the support of the OSCE. Among these were workshops and debates that targeted youth, women, and men living in rural areas. The initiative contributed not only to the establishment of direct communication and the building of confidence between women from both societies, but also to the creation of personal and professional networks that can be leveraged for peace in the region.

## 6. Reconciliation through inter-faith dialogue

In a post-conflict country that experienced ethnic polarization and division, the OSCE began working closely with religious leaders to foster interfaith dialogue among local communities.

In support of this effort, the OSCE organized several local initiatives, such as exhibitions, sports events, public lectures, gatherings of religious officials, and visits to different places of worship. Moreover, a visit to the wartime atrocities sites by members of the inter-religious council, provided the first opportunity for religious leaders from different religious communities to jointly pay their respects to victims from other ethnic groups. This event was seen as one of the most important steps in reconciliation and building sustainable peace after the conflict and was welcomed by all ethnic and religious groups.

In addition, through its daily monitoring and advocacy, the OSCE became aware of a lack of dialogue among the religious communities, and between those communities and the relevant institutions. Religious groups complained that they were not all treated equally by municipal institutions, especially regarding the provision and protection of religious property. Also observed was discrimination against religious communities and a weak legal framework pertaining to the freedom of religion.

To gain an in-depth overview of the freedom of religion and belief, the OSCE carried out a mapping exercise which was then used to develop various projects, including numerous monitoring tools. It founded a multi-year initiative to promote

and reinforce society's experiences in conflict resolution and inter-communal reconciliation, showing the diversity and historic tolerance among religions. By supporting joint work among religious communities in addressing issues of common concern, such as improving the legal framework on religious freedoms, the project contributed to the creation of an atmosphere of mutual understanding and tolerance.

Through inter-faith forums that were financially and logistically supported by the OSCE, joint actions were taken by religious communities to solve common problems, such as utility costs of religious facilities and maintenance of graveyards.

As a result of the inter-faith forums, numerous municipalities nominated contact points for religious issues who held regular meetings. Over a period of three years, approximately 30 such meetings were organized by local stakeholders themselves, showing that the ownership of the process had been localized. Some municipalities took the initiative to hold roundtables on inter-ethnic and inter-faith tolerance with youth and women, as well as to organize football tournaments, to hold exhibitions, and to clean graveyards and religious sites. Improvements have been seen in the reactions of religious communities to incidents, such as the spraying of graffiti, hate speech, or damage to religious sites. They now publicly condemn such actions, and municipalities now display a much greater willingness to support religious communities.

To ensure sustainability, the OSCE organized workshops with religious representatives to build their capacity on a number of topics, such as international human rights standards and gender

equality. Furthermore, to reach communities at the grassroots level, the OSCE organized lectures on the common values of different religions, so as to increase understanding and contribute to combating violent extremism.

## 7. Lessons learned

Reconciliation and dealing with the past are long-term, multi-layered, and complex processes that include dealing with conflict-related crimes, human rights abuses, and divisive memories. If not addressed, the transition from violent conflict to sustainable peace becomes all the more challenging as past grievances and traumatic experiences feed future misperceptions, prejudices, suspicion, and hate.

The OSCE's experiences in South-Eastern Europe show that addressing these challenges requires long-term and comprehensive approaches that involve many different stakeholders at various levels. Capacity building—including technical and legal support—for public institutions, the media, and community-level representatives has been a critical part of the OSCE's work to facilitate reconciliation processes in the region.

An important element of reconciliation is transitional justice, which requires the legacy of conflict-related crimes and human rights abuses to be dealt with in order to move forward on the path to sustainable peace. Moreover, the OSCE's experiences show the need for transparency and accountability of reconciliation processes and the stakeholders involved. History must become

de-politicized. While the promotion of tolerance and understanding about different narratives of the past can be useful, it is important to work toward ensuring that such perceptions do not impede the development of common narratives about the future.

The establishment of sustainable and locally-owned platforms for dialogue, including political, community and religious leaders, constitutes an essential element of reconciliation processes. Such platforms give stakeholders the opportunity not only to talk about past experiences but also to identify issues of common interest. In this way, a door to joint problem solving can be opened that might, in turn, help build mutual trust and understanding.

The OSCE's experiences show that external facilitation of dialogue and reconciliation processes—including mediation, if required—can provide valuable support. However, acceptance by all stakeholders of external facilitation is a condition that must be met. Moreover, emphasis should be placed on identifying and working with local “champions of reconciliation”, using them as role models, in particular for younger generations.



# Diversity

Intolerance for and discrimination against specific groups or communities with a view to their ethnicity, language, culture or religious beliefs creates a breeding ground for violent conflict by contributing to the build-up of tensions that might result in violence. Intolerant and discriminatory behaviour, such as hate speech, might be related to past conflicts, corresponding grievances, or traumatic experiences. However, such behaviour can also be linked to the promotion of prejudices and stereotypes, or a simple lack of understanding of “the other”. In South-Eastern Europe, the OSCE has worked for more than 20 years to promote tolerance and respect for diversity. The following examples provide insight into this work.

## 1. Social cohesion

Following an inter-ethnic conflict that saw thousands of people killed, raped, and displaced, poor inter-ethnic relations became part of everyday life. Inter-community interaction was fraught with tension, disputes, mutual recriminations, and occasional outbursts of violence.

Recognizing that tolerance and non-discrimination are fundamental to the building of sustainable peace and stability, the OSCE made a substantial effort and dedicated considerable resources to promoting tolerance and non-discrimination after the conflict ended. Among others, it supported the establishment

of country-wide informal groups to counter the promotion of hate that were comprised of civil society organizations, local administration representatives, religious leaders, and individuals, all engaged on a voluntary basis. These groups brought together citizens, regardless of their ethnic or political affiliations, to promote inter-ethnic dialogue and co-operation.

The initial purpose of the groups was to enable public reaction and/or condemnation of any hate- or bias-related incidents or crimes. The groups also mobilized local communities for joint cohesion activities that promoted dialogue and partnership. These activities contributed to building sustainable peace at the local level by putting the focus on positive stories that accentuated co-operation between various ethnic groups within communities, and by promoting inter-community exchanges.

The groups strongly encouraged citizens to take part in incident monitoring. The OSCE provided assistance by supporting a website that crowd-sourced data on hate-motivated incidents, responses to these incidents, and initiatives to prevent them. Using online applications, citizens had the opportunity to share positive stories or report incidents in their municipalities by filling out a simple form. Overall, social media was essential in the implementation of this initiative.

With the OSCE's support, the groups implemented numerous activities that promoted positive examples in the local communities and the need to respect other people's opinions, feelings, and beliefs. Networking was essential and facilitated interaction between groups that, otherwise, would not have been possible



due to administrative, political, ethnic, or religious divisions. These interactions were so well accepted by the local communities that the OSCE was requested to intensify its support. Additional examples of the groups' activities are presented below.

## **Zero discrimination**

An OSCE-supported Zero Discrimination Day provided an opportunity to bring together members of an ethnically mixed community that had experienced significant discrimination on ethnic grounds. During the day, a discussion panel was organized with high school students that allowed them to exchange their views on the issue. The participants also signed a declaration against discrimination and developed visual messages underlining that discrimination, hate, violence, and other destructive behaviours deserve zero tolerance.

The initiative resulted in regional unity, making use of civil society as a key mechanism to prevent and condemn discrimination and hate. It resulted in a firm commitment by youth to combat hate and all forms of intolerance, while offering mutual support in the promotion of peace.

## **Unity through sports**

In co-operation with the OSCE, a half-marathon was organized to promote reconciliation by honouring cultural heritage. Attracting runners from all over the world, the community was honoured to host such an important cultural and sports event, irrespective of ethnic affiliations.

The event promoted the rebuilding of historical and cultural sites and showed how the town had re-established the trust that was lost when those sites were destroyed. Enthusiasm was high as the town could finally offer normal community activities again. The marathon route passed through key conflict zones, and inhabitants were able to enter previously inaccessible areas for the first time since the conflict had ended. High-level political officials held inspiring speeches that presented the town as a place of unity that provided opportunities for all citizens and visitors.

The event showcased how sports can contribute to social cohesion and promote peaceful life by bringing together people from different ethnicities, cultures, races, and nationalities, all running for one cause.

## **Cultural and environmental activities**

Following a tense pre-election campaign, neighbours were hardly speaking to each other. Trust had been shattered by hate mongering and by politics that benefitted from ethnic segregation. To counter the negative effects of the elections, local NGOs and high school representatives committed to work on community cohesion initiatives that prevented bias and hate.

The first community activity marked World Water Day, and reflected unity among the town's civil society. Alongside local NGOs, high school students from two communities took part in cleaning the local river banks. The activity served as a practical exercise to inspire the wider population to engage in community work and non-political activities, and to move toward a more

prosperous future. This community activity triggered many others, such as sports tournaments with players from different ethnic groups, art murals promoting visible peacebuilding messages, and summer schools for children from different ethnic groups.

In another town, symbolic clean-up actions were organized at national and historic sites. A recreational bike route along the old railway was revitalized, and educational visits to the religious and historical sites along the path took place. The activities connected community members from different parts of town, and attracted positive public and media attention throughout the country. In this way, positive messages were sent about the dedication of citizens to work toward reconciliation through environmental and cultural protection for the benefit of all.

Another such initiative resulted in converting a waste dump into a recreational-sports attraction via a community reconciliation project. The project brought together women from two local communities who, otherwise, had no social contact with one another. During the initial planning meetings, women and youth activists recognized the importance of civil society initiatives in fostering reconciliation.

## **Social cohesion through art**

Post-conflict realities in a country resulted in a deepening of stereotypes and bias. Certain areas became perceived as places that were “owned” by one or another ethnic group. Together with the local anti-hate groups, the OSCE organized workshops and roundtables aimed at combating bias and hate-related

incidents, and implemented activities to foster social cohesion and reconciliation.

One outcome was a photo exhibition that brought attention to these issues, promoting values that empowered social cohesion. Women from different walks of life were portrayed, including sportswomen, business and professional women, artists, young women, women activists, and members of various ethnic, religious, and minority groups. The region was thus portrayed as a place of a positive diversity, where people cohabitated despite their differences, sending a positive message of tolerance.

### **Roundtables against hate**

A significant increase in bias-motivated incidents was registered in a town that was predominantly inhabited by one ethnic group. To identify adequate mechanisms to prevent security incidents, several roundtables were organized on recognizing and preventing hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents. The active engagement of local police was vital in decreasing inter-ethnic tensions, especially during summer when citizens who were living outside the country would visit for holidays. These activities led to a decrease in ethnic tensions and in the number of registered incidents. In addition, the police were recognized as a key stakeholder in raising awareness about the security implications of hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents.

In support of these efforts, the OSCE also developed a database to collect information on reported incidents, responses to them, and preventive actions to combat hate crimes. This information

was used by relevant authorities to develop comprehensive strategies to respond to and prevent incidents that risked deepening visible divisions and exacerbating feelings of insecurity and instability. Moreover, the information allowed for targeted training, awareness raising, informed policy development, and advocacy by the OSCE.

The OSCE also advised national institutions on how to improve and implement anti-discrimination policies and how to improve the capabilities of institutions and civil society to address bias and hate speech. In support of equality for all, the OSCE assisted with the drafting and implementation of legal frameworks and, on the request of local communities, conducted research, public outreach, and training for judges and public prosecutors.

## 2. Lessons learned

The promotion of social cohesion by fostering tolerance and respect for diversity is essential for the building of sustainable peace and democracy in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic societies. The OSCE's experiences show how raising awareness and promoting common interests—for example, through arts, sports or environmental activities—can bridge divides in polarized societies and between conflict-affected communities.

Arts exhibitions and sports tournaments provide non-politicized ways to bring members of different communities together and allow them to get to know each other, sometimes for the first time. This can contribute to a common understanding that everybody

faces similar problems, for instance, in education, access to public services, or job security. The recognition of commonalities can help to break down barriers, establish communication channels, and even promote friendships. Moreover, the OSCE's experiences show the added value of gender-sensitive approaches and activities focused on bringing younger generations together.

Civil society actors, community representatives, and religious leaders are also well placed to reach out to other communities, and can benefit from the international community's support in facilitating such contacts. Engaging religious leaders in inter-faith dialogue helps to build resilience to any kind of incident that might see religion exploited to further inter-ethnic or inter-community tensions.

Initiatives originating at the community- or grassroots level have the specific advantage of being closely imbedded in the actual needs and interests of divided communities. Such bottom-up approaches might, therefore, gain quicker traction than top-down initiatives developed at the national level. That said, any effort to build sustainable peace through the promotion of cohesive societies requires a strong mix of community-level initiatives that are supported by national strategies and leaders.







# People-to-People Contacts

The facilitation of people-to-people is an important component in building sustainable peace. This refers, in particular, to the establishment of contacts within and between deeply polarized societies, or to the re-building of trust between conflict-affected communities in post-conflict settings. People-to-people contacts can take place at local, national or regional levels and include a variety of stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, academics, youth groups, professional associations, business people, sports clubs and artists. Below are some examples of how the OSCE promoted and supported such activities in the region.

## 1. Regional co-operation among youth

The OSCE launched an intercultural dialogue initiative between youth from two countries. The main objective was to foster long-term co-operation between youth from the region and to promote relevant joint policies and programmes in largely ethnically-divided societies.

The initiative began with a five-day summer school on intercultural youth dialogue in one country, which was followed with a winter school on the same topic in the other country. The events allowed young men and women to discuss the experiences and challenges facing youth in their respective societies. The participants comprised young people who had previously been engaged in OSCE democracy activities, OSCE youth ambassadors, and

members of various youth NGOs. To overcome mistrust among parents from the two ethnicities, the OSCE provided escorts to the camps and made sure that the safety of the children was taken seriously. The OSCE also helped to ensure that both a gender balance and a geographic inclusion of young people from remote and rural areas was achieved.

During the events, the participants learned about each other's cultures, traditions, customs, and languages. Break time allowed for the informal exchange of ideas and viewpoints, which contributed to a slow but steady building of trust among participants. The atmosphere was positive from the beginning because several participants had already taken part in OSCE youth activities. At the end of the meetings, participants developed recommendations for their national governments, NGOs, and the international community. These explored possible ways to further advance youth co-operation between the two societies, including joint projects and the creation of an alumni network.

The participants of the summer/winter schools stayed connected through social media and created the group's own site. Many of the participants also maintained private contacts, some returned to the other region as visiting researchers, and others became involved with a broader regional youth initiative. Selected participants also participated in follow-on activities, which helped maintain the momentum of the initial achievements and the confidence gained in working with other communities.

The summer/winter schools represented a first steps toward a meaningful and lasting co-operation that began with dialogue and understanding at the most basic level. The activities brought youth together and provided an unbiased, neutral environment within which they felt free to engage with the past and the present, fighting prejudices and stereotypes. Deepening relations and building bridges among young people was found to be the best way to strengthen mutual understanding and co-operation with a view to promoting tolerance and reconciliation in the region.

## **2. National platform for women**

With women severely underrepresented in decision-making positions in the country, the OSCE aimed to promote women leaders across the political spectrum at the municipal and national levels by providing a platform for mutually reinforcing networking.

The OSCE compiled lists of prominent women from all over the country, belonging to all age groups and professions, including public and political life, civil society, and business. It invited them to meetings in their local municipalities on topics ranging from the identification of issues of concern to all women, their participation in public and political life, and everyday challenges. At first, the OSCE set the agenda, but later on the participants provided the input for the discussions, bringing in topics such as capacity-building for advocacy and negotiation, public relations skills, and the promotion of intra- and inter-party dialogue.

The OSCE facilitated capacity building and networking between women on the local and national levels and across party lines. These events included discussions on women's lack of participation and influence in decision making, gender equality in electoral processes, male dominance in political and public life, and working across party lines boost women's political representation at the local and central levels.

Through an open-ended series of activities to empower women at all levels, an informal network of fifteen hundred politically-active women from across the country and the entire political spectrum emerged. This OSCE-supported network created a conducive environment that encouraged women who previously would not talk to each other to become comfortable engaging dialogue.

Through regular dialogue, bridges were slowly built across the political divide, including the development of joint initiatives to promote women and gender equality. Other initiatives included public calls for co-operation across the political spectrum, lobbying by women's coalitions for amendments to gender quotas, calling for support from key political leaders, and issuing statements. The OSCE continued to support the network in its efforts to become self-sustainable over the long term by strengthening its members' strategic and operational capacities.

The initiative not only affected intra-party dynamics but also the general political landscape. Over the years, the representation of women in politics significantly increased, in particular at the local

level. Many politically active men, even those initially resentful, began to support the initiative and engage in its activities.

### **3. Lessons learned**

People-to-people contacts at all levels support democratic transitions and promote the building of sustainable peace. In South-Eastern Europe, the OSCE implements such activities both at the national and regional levels. The experiences from these activities show that initiatives focusing on youth and women from different ethnic groups are excellent tools in the fight against polarization. By establishing mutual trust, they provide a solid basis for dialogue and joint action. Particularly in post-conflict settings, informal initiatives at the local and community levels that promote co-operation through people-to-people contacts can offer an excellent starting point for further peace and reconciliation efforts.

Women play an especially important role in creating dialogue between communities and facilitating people-to-people contacts. The OSCE's experiences show that women, once empowered to promote dialogue and co-operation, become committed advocates for co-operation and joint problem solving. Empowering women in this way has great potential for bringing people together across the political spectrum and the ethnic divide.

To obtain the most from people-to-people contacts, they should take a broad geographical approach, and include rural areas that may be isolated in terms of exposure to other ethnic, religious, or

cultural communities. As trust building can be a lengthy process, external actors should ensure a long-term approach to ensure the sustainability of their facilitation efforts. This includes the planning of activities, which may take several years before they can be implemented. In this way, confidence between stakeholders can be cultivated and common narratives about their joint endeavours developed. Engaging participants from previous activities in follow-on events is a good practice that allows for knowledge to be transferred, and for newcomers to build on the trustful relationships already established by their peers.







# Conclusion

The OSCE's efforts to foster sustainable peace and democracy in South-Eastern Europe comprise a wide variety of activities. Among others, these include building robust institutions in line with good governance and the rule of law, facilitating dialogue and reconciliation processes, strengthening people-to-people contacts, and promoting diversity, tolerance, and non-discrimination.

The OSCE's multi-dimensional and comprehensive approach to security provides a solid basis for engagement with peacebuilding actors across a broad spectrum, thereby anchoring activities in the local context. This allowed the Organization's six field operations in the region to work together with all stakeholders, including governmental bodies and state agencies, community and religious leaders, politicians and civil society, as well as ordinary citizens interested in joining forces to build lasting peace and security. As a long-term process that requires an inclusive approach, involving all relevant stakeholders is crucial if opposition is to be turned into co-operation, and hate transformed into constructive dialogue.

The OSCE's experiences in South-Eastern Europe highlight the critical role of education in achieving sustainable peace. In conflict-affected societies, education reform should be prioritized since education can be easily misused to deepen dividing lines. Segregated education contributes to (re-)enforcing bias, intolerance and discrimination. Therefore, young people must be provided with opportunities to grow up together across ethnic

lines, and obtain the skills needed to deal with conflict in a peaceful manner.

In highly polarized contexts it is essential to create the space for dialogue in which people feel safe to voice their concerns and explore possibilities for joint problem-solving. Including women and youth early on in such processes will enhance their success by building sustainable frameworks to overcome misperceptions.

Different narratives of the past and diverging perceptions of history should be addressed in a responsible manner, including in the field of education, thereby allowing concerned communities to feel that their grievances are noticed and their voices are heard. The facilitation of reconciliation processes that allow for different narratives of the past to be addressed is a crucial aspect of sustainable peacebuilding in post-conflict settings.

Transitional justice should be based on transparency and accountability, and contribute to building cohesive societies in which diverging narratives of the past do not stand in the way of joint narratives about the future. International actors can support such processes by raising awareness about the need for dialogue and tolerance, and by assisting local efforts to (re-) establish relations across the divides.

The building of sustainable peace and democracy requires the active participation of local stakeholders at different levels, including political leaders, civil society organizations, and members of religious and ethnic communities. Local ownership is thus a key

condition of external successes and must be built into the strategic objectives of international actors.

Attention must also be paid to the geographical dimension of sustainable peace. This means that peacebuilding efforts should not only focus on capital cities and urban centres, but include citizens living in remote areas. Civil society organizations play an important role in this regard, as they have the ability to reach out to communities in ways that governmental structures might not.

The facilitation of people-to-people contacts allows members of different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic communities to get to know each other, thereby enabling them to develop an understanding for “the other”. By focusing on common interests, differences can be overcome and problems can be solved in a co-operative manner. Arts, sports, and environmental protection activities can be excellent areas for joint work in which even small investments can create large dividends.

As shown by the OSCE’s experiences in South-Eastern Europe, any international support for local processes to build sustainable peace and democracy has to be implemented in a context-specific and conflict-sensitive manner. This requires solid knowledge of historical developments as well as an in-depth understanding of the current societal situation. Understanding the prevailing political, socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions will allow for interventions to be anchored in real needs.

Additionally, international actors should continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of their engagements, and adjust them to changing conditions on the ground. Robust monitoring and evaluation should include an assessment as to whether responsibilities can be handed over to local actors in a sustainable manner.

The engagement of international actors like the OSCE in building sustainable peace and democracy requires a long-term perspective and a comprehensive approach. Patience and perseverance are as important as prudent planning and foresight. This is related to both the support needed now as well as to assistance that could be required in the future.

The OSCE's experiences in South-Eastern Europe entail many good practices and lessons to be learned for the future peacebuilding efforts of international actors and their local partners. This reference guide hopes to serve as a source of inspiration for interested stakeholders in building sustainable peace and democracy across the OSCE area.

# List of Acronyms

<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe
<b>CRSV</b>	Conflict Related Sexual Violence
<b>CPC</b>	OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre
<b>EMBs</b>	Electoral Management Bodies
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>HCNM</b>	High Commissioner on National Minorities
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>ODIHR</b>	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>UN</b>	United Nations

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Promoting lasting peace and security has been at the core of the OSCE's work since its inception. Drawing on the OSCE's long-standing experience in South-Eastern Europe, this reference guide provides insight into the organization's activities to foster sustainable peace and democracy. Over 30 practical examples illustrate the work of OSCE field operations across seven thematic areas, outlining the good practices and lessons to be learned for future peacebuilding endeavours. Highlighting how the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security can be practically applied in the field, this guide hopes to serve as a source of inspiration for OSCE officials, policy makers, practitioners, and civil society.

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