



OSCEval News is the evaluation newsletter of the Office of Internal Oversight.

Its aim is to provide insights into the OSCE's work in evaluation, by sharing key evaluation findings and conclusions, as well as new developments regarding the OSCE's overall evaluation culture.

Evaluation is a management tool that contributes to decision-making, strategic planning, and organizational learning.



This edition of OSCEval News is dedicated to the external evaluation of the OSCE's

### Strategic Policy Support Unit (SPSU).

The evaluation was commissioned and managed by the Office of the Secretary General, and conducted by an external consultant. The Office of Internal Oversight provided back-stopping services and advice during the process.

### Introduction

This external evaluation was conducted by a consultant at the request of the Office of the Secretary General as part of the project design of the pilot project 'Strategic Policy Support Unit' (SPSU). The SPSU (originally the Strategic Policy and Planning Cell) was established in the OSCE Secretariat upon the initiative of the OSCE Secretary General (SG) at the end of 2017 through an extra-budgetary (ExB) project. An external evaluation was foreseen in the project design for the end of 2019. In accordance with the Terms of Reference for the evaluation, it assessed the relevance, effectiveness and added value of the work of the SPSU during its start-up and initial operational phases.

### Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation followed the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) standard evaluation criteria, with a particular focus on the relevance, effectiveness and value added of the project. The methodological approach taken was participatory, and based on a desk study of documents and structured/semi-structured interviews. While the list of stakeholders to be interviewed was provided by the Office of the Secretary General, the final choice of interviewees was taken by the

evaluator (within the available time-frame and considering the availability of interview partners).

### Project Description

The SPSU, which is staff by a Head and four seconded senior professionals, is located within the Executive Management unit of the OSG and reports to the SG through the Director of the Office of the Secretary General, who serves as the Project Manager for the ExB project. While the unit was established at the end of 2017, it has only been fully operational for approximately one year.

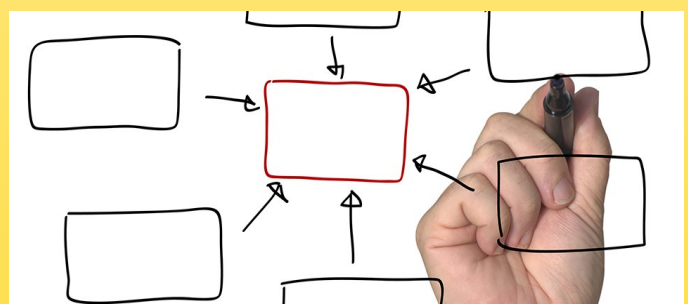
The SPSU aims to provide expert advice, background information, analysis and other support to the Secretary General, including in his role of advising the Chairmanship/Troika. The objective of this project was to increase the strategic planning and policy support function of the Secretariat, and to thereby enhance the Secretariat's capacity to support the Chairmanship-in-Office to fulfil the goals of the OSCE.

This is to be done, inter alia, by analyzing the security situation in the OSCE area and beyond, and identifying gaps and opportunities for attention and (re)engagement of the OSCE; providing policy advice and recommendations on regional and thematic issues for the SG and Troika; and coordinating, facilitating and taking part in informal dialogue to generate policy-relevant outputs.

### Evaluation Findings and Conclusions

#### Relevance

In terms of relevance, the evaluation concluded that the work of the SPSU was overall aligned with the objectives identified in the approved Revised Project Proposal, and that its objectives and outcomes were aligned with programmatic and budget documents of the Secretariat. The evaluation further noted that among stakeholders, there is acknowledgement of the need for longer-term and/or analytical perspectives and strategic support in the OSCE, but that the various stakeholders' views of the relevance of the work of SPSU in this regard was not uniform. At the core of the differences are interpretations of the roles of the SG, Chairmanship/Troika and participating States. Issues related to the need for better stakeholder engagement were also raised.



## Effectiveness

In terms of effectiveness, the results of the SPSU's work (provision of advice, strategic support, written products, informal events as platforms for dialogue) were overall acknowledged as effective by those who had access to them and/or benefitted from them. However, some issues raised in this context were the need for more focus on outcomes in the SPSU's project design, the underutilization of the SPSU due to a lack of knowledge on the part of stakeholders in the Secretariat on how to solicit its services, lack of access by participating States to some types of its products and their overall visibility, and insufficient engagement and follow-up by participating States of opportunities provided by informal dialogue.

The evaluation raised some issues related to the use of financial and human resources. While the governance of decision-making and management procedures as they pertain to the SPSU were found to be largely clear and well-established, co-operation and coordination issues within the Secretariat require attention from senior management.

Gender representation among SPSU staff was a concern voiced by some stakeholders. The evaluation noted that the SPSU was largely successful in assuring the representation of women and men and treatment of relevant gender equality-related considerations in the events it organized or supported. It also contributed to the prioritization of gender mainstreaming in the Secretariat's Programme Outlines and Programme Budget Performance Report documents. There was, however, room for more co-operation with the Gender Section on mainstreaming gender issues in longer term planning and analysis, and strategic approaches.

The evaluation noted SPSU's use of informal planning and monitoring tools, and suggested the application of additional instruments (a structured self-evaluation exercise, more formal collection of feedback in-house and during its events), and noted the need for more structured co-operation and planning with, and guidance from, the Chairmanship/Troika.

## OSCE Added Value

In terms of value added, the evaluation found that the SG and the Chairmanship/Troika reported overall high levels of added value. Among interviewed representatives of participating States, some differences were detected, as were among interviewees from the Secretariat. Among the latter, lack of clarity on workflows and on complementarity of efforts, as well as weak attribution and feedback mechanisms were noted, and should be addressed.

The evaluation also noted SPSU's efforts in communication, outreach and partnership, but pointed out the need to further step up such efforts. More collaborative working methods within the Secretariat on strategic support issues, and creating a shared understanding of what the SPSU is and what it stands for, as well as communication and outreach strategies vis-à-vis participating

States are needed.

On communication, outreach and partnership outside of the OSCE, some good practices were noted, but the evaluation pointed out that a lot of the communication, outreach and partnership was ad hoc and should be enhanced.

The evaluation concluded that the current 'business model' of an ExB-funded unit inside the Secretariat focusing on strategic support, longer term and analytical issues may be challenging to sustain, and thus stakeholder engagement and financial strategy continue to be key issues for the unit.

## The way forward

The SPSU project is the first of its kind in the OSCE. It constitutes a contribution to the Organization's efforts to overcome the implications of one year budgetary and Chairmanship cycles which make any longer-term planning and analysis difficult. While among stakeholders, there is acknowledgment of the need for a longer-term perspective, and primary beneficiaries of the SPSU's outputs and outcomes (SG, Chairmanship/Troika) acknowledge its contribution, not all stakeholders believe that the creation of the SPSU in the Secretariat is the right place or correct way of addressing the need. Ensuring longer-term outcomes will require a degree of acceptance, support and ownership from all stakeholders, as well as the willingness of donors to commit ExB funds, or ultimately participating States' support for placing it in the UB.

On the basis of the evaluation general recommendations were provided, touching upon improving the SPSU's project design; ensuring a strategic approach to its activities and that they feed into the achievement of longer-term objectives; further improving gender mainstreaming in the SPSU's outputs; building a more structured relationship with the Chairmanship/Troika; developing outreach/communication strategies vis-à-vis delegations of OSCE participating States and other Secretariat units; developing a financial strategy; strengthening complementarities and fostering a culture of exchange and co-operation on longer-term and strategic support issues across the OSCE Secretariat.

Following the end of the 2020 Chairmanship, and on the basis of recommendations contained in this report, the SPSU's outcomes should be once more reviewed, including through self-evaluation and stakeholder consultation as a basis for further decisions on the future shape and tasks of the unit.



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**OSCE Secretariat**

Office of Internal Oversight  
Wallnerstrasse 6  
A-1010 Vienna, Austria  
E-mail: [oiio@osce.org](mailto:oiio@osce.org)