

ENGLISH only

Presentation for the OSCE Chairmanship Workshop on Post-Conflict Rehabilitation:
Stabilization, Reconstruction and Peacebuilding, Working Session 1

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL AND MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS IN SUPPORT OF STABILIZATION, RECONSTRUCTION AND PEACEBUILDING

Ambassador Gary D. Robbins

Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

Good afternoon everyone and thank you, Mr. Chairperson, for inviting me to speak today. I would like to thank Ambassador Feruta in particular for moderating today's discussion.

The topic this afternoon is how to improve coordination within the international community, as well as cooperation with the host country, in building a sustainable peace in post-conflict societies. This theme returns with regular intervals to the attention of decision and policy-makers. Already in 1997, the OSCE's Copenhagen Ministerial adopted a decision on the 'Development of Cooperation between Mutually Reinforcing Institutions', focusing in particular on contacts between the OSCE and agencies of the United Nations family.

I will talk today about the practical forms that this cooperation takes in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), where I lead the OSCE Mission. I will not be going into much detail regarding the policy areas on which field missions should focus in a post-crisis situation, as this will undoubtedly differ from country to country, and from mandate to mandate. But it is worth pointing out some common factors of the post-conflict rehabilitation work of OSCE missions across the Organization's area of operation:

- facilitation and mediation of dialogue to re-establish trust;
- support for the reform and building of institutions that serve the needs of all citizens;
- assistance in the return and reintegration of displaced persons and refugees; and
- creation of conditions that promote physical security through, inter alia, confidence-building measures.

In BiH, international organizations operate in a somewhat unique environment, which is the legacy of the Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) that ended the country's armed conflict in 1995. The DPA tasked different organizations with different roles, and in the case of the OSCE, this was initially a focus on human rights, military stabilization, and the organization and conduct of free and fair elections. The DPA's division of workload meant that coordination between the international actors involved in the stabilization and reconstruction of BiH also required specific mechanisms.

This primarily centered, and still does, on the Peace Implementation Council, or PIC, which is charged with overseeing the implementation of Dayton. The PIC is the embodiment of the international community's role in the governance of BiH. This role, which is exercised through the High Representative and his Office (OHR), is to last until the country is deemed sufficiently self-sustaining and politically stable.

The PIC is comprised of 55 countries and organizations, including the OSCE, which support the peace process in a variety of ways. For example, through political and economic assistance, providing troops and police forces, or running reconstruction programmes. In 1995, the

London peace implementation conference also established a Steering Board as the executive arm of the PIC. The PIC Steering Board, which consists of eight countries, the EU, the EC, and the OIC (represented by Turkey), provides the High Representative with political guidance, and meets on a weekly basis under his chairmanship at the level of Ambassadors. Three times a year, the Steering Board meets at the level of political directors. The High Representative also chairs a weekly meeting of the so-called Board of Principals (BoP), which consists of all the major international organisations present in BiH, including the OSCE.

In such a highly-institutionalized environment, coordination is not an empty word, because -- rather than operate in a vacuum -- each organization's mandated tasks ultimately aim towards the same goal of a stable and sustainable BiH. Permit me to cite three examples.

Political coordination between the OSCE Mission and the OHR has been essential for our work in strengthening national institutions. A case in point was the handover of managing the electoral process. Originally tasked with organizing and conducting elections after Dayton, the OSCE began in the early 2000s to transfer this responsibility to BiH's Central Election Commission (CEC), which the Mission had helped to establish. Consultation with the OHR was essential in this transition as, initially, both the High Representative and my predecessor retained executive votes in the CEC. Together, and with the agreement of the CEC, the OSCE and OHR agreed to reduce their involvement to an advisory role, and we hope to reduce that role further -- to only a monitoring function -- in the near future.

A similar level of cooperation was needed to reform the defense sector. In this area, the OSCE worked together with BiH authorities, OHR and NATO on three elements: first, to merge armies that had previously been each other's enemies into a single military force that answers to the civilian authority of the state of BiH; second, to create a Ministry of Defense at the state level; and finally, to increase democratic control of the armed forces through the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. Such cooperation was and is still driven at the working level, and politico-military representatives still meet regularly in order to coordinate action on issues such as the destruction of surplus arms and ammunition.

A third example: With the Council of Europe (CoE), the OSCE has forged a solid partnership across many of our mandated tasks. We take advantage of the CoE legal commitments that BiH has entered into, in fields ranging from minority protection to anti-trafficking, which then guides our cooperation. We enjoy a particularly close relationship in the field of education reform, which has included joint activities to promote democratic school governance as well as support for the training of authors of textbooks. Our cooperation is expanding to include the EU and we are currently pursuing the possibility of joint OSCE-CoE-EU meetings with the various Ministers of Education in BiH to tackle the political challenges of education reform. These initiatives will provide the basis for similar joint initiatives in the future, possibly extending to judicial reform or refugee/IDP return.

Reality on the ground also changes, as some actors step up their activities and others scale back. In 1999, the OSCE Mission's partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was central for the process of sustainable return of refugees and the restitution of property to their pre-war occupants. In 2011, our cooperation with the EU increasingly takes centre stage as it gradually assumes the role of lead organisation within the international community. Of note, in June 2008, BiH signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU, moving one step closer to becoming a potential candidate for membership.

This changed environment is taken into account in our mission statement, according to which the OSCE Mission, and I quote: "assists BiH in meeting its OSCE commitments and in pro-

gressing towards its goal of Euro-Atlantic integration by strengthening security and stability through completion of peace-building within the Dayton framework". Accordingly, and as appropriate, we work together closely with EU representatives in areas where our field presence, policy priorities, and competencies accord with those of the EU. This involves not only a close relationship with the double-hatted High Representative/EU Special Representative, but also with the EU Delegation as well as the EU Police Mission and EUFOR ALTHEA that have been deployed under the EU's authority. Allow me to expand with a couple of examples.

Among the international community in BiH, the EU is the actor with maximum leverage to induce change through the prospect of membership. Often, it is of interest for the OSCE Mission to have its observations also reflected in EU policy in order to achieve real progress on issues linked to the EU reform agenda, such as rule of law. Accordingly, the OSCE Mission regularly provides the EU Delegation with informal inputs for the European Commission's annual Progress Report. This process has not always worked optimally in the past, sometimes to the Delegation's regret. So this year -- at our behest -- the EU Delegation opened consultations with its partners at a much earlier phase in order to ensure a better flow of information before its message to BiH authorities is formally formulated.

This type of policy cooperation and guidance relies very much on real added value, in this case the OSCE's in-house subject area experts. It has worked particularly well in the case of BiH's adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and the unification of BiH's Ombudsmen into one institution at the state level. Both of these reforms were OSCE Mission priorities that were included as conditions in the EU's roadmap for a liberalized visa regime for BiH.

As I mentioned earlier in relation to defense reform, the OSCE Mission also maintains close links with NATO, EUFOR, and the EU Delegation on a number of cross-cutting security issues. At present, this cooperation is most strongly manifested in our shared concern over the disposal of BiH's surplus of weapons and ammunitions, and improvement in the management of stockpiles. In 2006, the OSCE and EUFOR, together with UNDP and NATO, formed an expert working group to coordinate efforts in assessing the quantities and ascertaining the condition of surplus ammunition and the suitability of storage locations. The work of this group has proved to be indispensable for the international community in providing appropriate advice and assistance to BiH.

These efforts are complemented by regular meetings between the politico-military representatives of the international community, chaired by the OSCE. The purpose of all these groups is to share information and to address issues with one voice whenever possible. For example, because of its mandate and field presence, EUFOR is the primary source of information for the OSCE on the export and movement of arms and ammunition in BiH.

In areas where mandates have common goals, regular dialogue is necessary in order to avoid mandate overlap becoming activity overlap. For example, the OSCE coordinates its activities on prison reform with the EU Police Mission (EUPM) in order to complement each other in tackling all aspects of this reform, from prison management to preventing ill-treatment. Within our trial monitoring programme, the OSCE Mission has worked closely with EUPM in monitoring a number of high-profile organized crime cases to make sure that both international as well as domestic legal standards are fully respected. We have also cooperated at times in the distribution of information leaflets or publications through our respective networks of contacts.

Of course, ultimately, coordinating the workload between international organizations only works if domestic institutions are willing to get on board. In this sense, the change of mental-

ity that international actors have had to go through has been profound. In 1995, when the war ended, domestic interlocutors were often absent. Institutions still had to be built or strengthened. The international community had to rely on a strong executive international presence. In 2011, the onus is much more on domestic decision-makers. Their lack of progress, particularly on the EU agenda, has however created a difficult situation for the international presence in the country. This presence remains under UN auspices, with the High Representative as its most senior figure, as long as the conditions and objectives for the closure of OHR are not fulfilled.

Nevertheless, in anticipation of progress that would allow BiH to eventually satisfy these conditions and objectives, a review of the coordination mechanisms created by Dayton is becoming ever more warranted. With the goal of maintaining an effective form of coordination and a regular exchange of information, this review should reflect that the EU will have the leading role within the international community in BiH, and that the OSCE – which is at present the largest civilian international organization in the country -- will have the largest international footprint of any kind, with the gradual downsizing that is likely for the military presence of EUFOR.

These examples illustrate that political and policy coordination on the ground, unsurprisingly, relies heavily on regular working-level contacts, joint efforts, and ad-hoc coalitions between organizations with similar mandates. It is true that commitment to better coordination among international organizations is a common feature of policy documents and high-level statements. It is also true however that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The aims nevertheless remain the same, regardless of whether coordination is informal or institutionalized as in BiH.

These aims are:

- to share information and regularly take the initiative to consult;
- to speak with one voice whenever feasible; and
- to avoid overlap wherever possible.

Themes such as how to cooperate better re-appear particularly strongly whenever resources are scarce and budgets are strained. I would, however, warn against treating coordination between international actors as some kind of magic potion to increase financial efficiency and avoid wasted resources due to duplication. In my experience, this is much more of a headquarters perception than the reality on the ground, as it is rare for organizations with similar mandates, other than donors, to really duplicate each other's efforts. A better question to ask is how to find complementarities in the activities of partner organizations.

I understand that the Conflict Prevention Center will be drafting a compilation of best practice examples of coordination in the field, which would be a useful document of reference. I would note though that effective coordination and cooperation in the field relies on the quality and initiative of personnel on the ground, rather than headquarters or an additional level of administration. From a field perspective, giving mission more control over human and financial resources would allow them to adapt more quickly to the work of other organizations when needed. I would like to refer specifically to a proposal made last October by Switzerland at the Vienna Review Conference leading up to the Astana Summit. Though not new, the Swiss delegation again raised the idea of multi-year budgeting, at least for long-term projects.

I raise this issue because in the 1999 Review Conference there was much praise for, and I quote: “the OSCE’s flexibility, availability of funds, ability to deploy quickly and to adjust operations according to emerging tasks”. More than ten years later, it is worth reflecting whether this still the case. Our flexibility in BiH, for example, is hampered to a certain degree by the effect of dwindling budgets. While budgetary pressures are understandable in a time of

fiscal restraint, there has been no corresponding reduction of demands made of our field mission. Quite the contrary. And in the case of the OSCE Mission to BiH, this has translated into BiH citizens now filling six of every seven staff positions. It is true that a high reliance on national staff offers distinct advantages, particularly in embedding expertise in society and compensating for a regrettably high turn-over of international staff. It is also true, however, that this situation is in part required by financial constraints, and that it entrenches certain areas of work, limiting flexibility.

Coming back to the issue of coordination, a particular practice that has worked well for the Mission to BiH is our Liaison Officer with office of the OHR/EUSR. This position is funded by the OSCE. It has ensured a qualitatively better flow of information than we have with many other organizations, and has allowed us to establish better links to coordinate and partner on initiatives and activities wherever appropriate. We fully intend to transfer this position to the reinforced EU presence once the OHR closes or transitions its activities significantly.

This might also be an option to pursue at regional or institutional level. The EU is able to rely on its delegation to the OSCE, the UNHCR operates a liaison office in Vienna, and I understand that the Council of Europe will be dispatching a similar liaison soon. The OSCE can benefit from operating and augmenting similar offices, to cooperate at an operational or planning level and to complement the political role played by the embassies and permanent representations of the OSCE Chairmanship. Perhaps the possibility of secondments from and to international organizations can be explored, to alleviate the budgetary impact of full-fledged liaison offices.

Another interesting path to explore is a proposal made by the US delegation in May of last year as part of the Corfu Process. It raised the idea of Track Two diplomacy to get civil society on board in reconciliation efforts. Post-conflict rehabilitation is a long process, requiring more than just investment from international organizations. The US proposal introduced the possibility of a special coordinator with the NGO community at headquarters level. I think this is worth exploring at the level of missions as well. Our focus so far has been much more on building the capacity of community actors, or implementing projects, rather than partners with whom we have a regular exchange of information and whom we get involved in the bigger picture.

These are but a few concrete recommendations on what the OSCE can do in very practical terms to improve coordination and cooperation with other organizations. I hope the experiences of the OSCE Mission to BiH have been informative, and I look forward to our discussion.

Thank you.