

OSCE during Slovenia's Chairmanship – Revitalization, Reform and Rebalance[©]

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For Slovenia, chairing the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe is undoubtedly a great challenge, a unique opportunity for its international establishment, but at the same also an obstacle, that Slovenia can come against, maybe even be unable to overcome. This could have consequences for Slovenia's international reputation, but also in the environment or in the field, where the disaster would arise from. The chairing of OSCE came in a time, when the working of the organisation is paralysed by the numerous internal disputes among the countries involved.

The beginnings of OSCE, the largest international regional organisation, reach back in the seventies of the previous century. It was founded as a Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in Helsinki on 3 July 1973. This is why its working is described as a "Helsinki Process" which got its fundamental document two years later, on 30 July and 1 August 1975, when the cooperating countries signed the Helsinki Final Act. The so called Helsinki Decalogue is based on ten principles: on sovereignty and equality of the countries, refraining from the threat or use of the force, inviolability of the frontiers, territorial integrity of the states, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-intervention in internal affairs, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, equal rights and self-determination of peoples, cooperation among states, fulfilment in good faith of obligation under the international law. The document also establishes three dimensions of cooperation: military and political, economic and environmental, and protection and promotion of human rights and basic freedoms.

The fall of the iron curtain in Europe, and consequently elsewhere in the world, has drawn different borders, established different relations, and wrote the rules of the game anew. As a rule, a large organisation cannot change and adapt easily, and OSCE is no exception. The previous forum for dialogue between the East and West has been faced with the search for a new identity in the changed security and political structure of Europe and world in the last years, but the search is a difficult and long-lasting process. The reputation and power of the organisation in the international consciousness are slowly diminishing, although the political will for its existence and work is still present. The political will itself is the main driving force of OSCE, for the organisation has no legal status under the international law. This means that the decisions are not legally but politically binding for the cooperating countries. On the one hand, for many involved countries, which do not wish to be legally obligated in performing certain acts, membership in OSCE is more acceptable; on the other hand, it is exactly this status that weakens the position of the organisation, which has been a target of reproof that the organisation is ineffective and imbalanced in its work.

Different Views and Interests

Internal structure of OSCE calls for the conflict of interests. The organisation which includes 55 cooperating countries is spread across Europe, Asia and North America, and in the case of some of the eleven partner countries also in Northern Africa and the Middle East. This means that OSCE also covers all the territories, where violence has been smouldering or where the violence looks under control, but peace is more or less fictitious: the Caucasus, with the whole

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scale of intricate relationships, variety of cultures, languages, old and new grudges; Central Asia, with a series of autocratic regimes; problematical Ukraine, which escaped the disaster of presidential elections by a hairpin; and Moldova, which lives for the election on 6 March this year. There is also the Balkans, where the major factor for instability of the region is the unresolved status of Kosovo, and relations between Belgrade and Priština, which swing between hot and cold, and never settle in the range of moderate temperatures.

Slovenia got its chance at chairing the organisation in the circumstances which are governed by the rhetoric, which in many ways resembles the cold war rhetoric; they resemble the conditions, which prompted the establishment of the predecessor of OSCE, KSCE. The differences among the major protagonists, between the United States of America and the Russian Federation, are bigger than those from years ago. "We are not satisfied with the work of OSCE because it is not balanced and is quite insufficient. On the level of political priorities we have confirmed an orientation in Maastricht in 2003 that OSCE has to focus on new challenges and threats. Unfortunately the organisation still puts emphasis on the dimension of human rights and freedoms, while it neglects other fields," said the Russian Permanent Representative to the OSCE, Aleksey Borodavkin. Washington has been satisfied with the emphasis in the work of OSCE so far. To the constant reproach from Moscow, that the military-political, and economical and environmental cooperation are neglected, the Americans react with caution. "We do not demand a reform; therefore, we expect that those who are rooting for changes will formulate the prepositions. USA will then give its opinion. But we oppose a reform, which would cripple the working of the organisation," said the American Representative to the OSCE, Stephan Minikes.

A quick overview of the activities of OSCE shows, that Russia and a group from the Commonwealth of Independent States, who often resort to quoting of one of the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act, namely the one about non-interference in internal affairs, are in the right in some instances. Field missions, offices and centres of OSCE are located "east of Vienna", where the seat of the organisation is, in the Balkans, in the Eastern Europe, on the Caucasus, and in Central Asia. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) with the headquarters in Warsaw, is preparing numerous observing missions of the elections, which do their work mostly on the same territory. The attention of the High Representatives of OSCE to the protection of national minorities and freedom of speech is aimed at the same part of the world. There is a good and obvious reason for this - OSCE works where it is needed. If the recent observing of the US election seemed ineffectual, and it seemed excessive to Americans themselves, than the abovementioned counters truly have great difficulties with ensuring fair and democratic elections. An illustrative example is the presidential elections in Ukraine.

Comparing the conditions in OSCE with a ship in a stormy ocean, the metaphor, which was included in the address by the Chairman-in-Office Dimitrij Rupel, the Slovenian Minister for Foreign Affairs, to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on 13 January, is not surprising. But this ocean is not territorial waters of a single member. "OSCE is not a plaything of a single country, it is not a Slovenian, Ukrainian, Russian, American or French organisation, but an organisation of 55 cooperating states," said the Slovenian Foreign Affairs Minister in Vienna, and at the same time explained that Slovenia sees its role especially as a listener of the viewpoints of the cooperating countries, and as a mediator between them.

Triple R

Slovenia will join the agenda of this year's chairmanship into three key conceptions - revitalization, reform and rebalance; although Minister Rupel does not promise a trick with magic wand. With revitalisation Slovenia will address one of the biggest problems that OSCE is facing at this moment, and which is a reflection of deep discrepancies in the views and interests among the members – the budget of the organisation. Judging by the size of the organisation and its diversified activities the organisation does not have a lot of money at its disposal. OSCE budget receives around € 180 million per year. The major problem is the share of the contributions from individual states. Russia is also very radical with its prepositions in this area; it believes that it should lower its contribution from the 10 percent of the OSCE budget to a mere 1.69 percent. On the other hand, Russia also believes that the share of the USA should rise to 30 percent. The mathematics of these drastic propositions, which will undoubtedly be less severe, is simple: the contributions should reflect the amount of the interest of the individual states – the country which exercises its interests more should therefore contribute more. OSCE currently works under the provisional budget; if the first three months do not bring the solution to this important question, the real problems will begin. It is not only the OSCE institutions in Vienna, Warsaw, Prague, The Hague, Geneva, and Copenhagen which depend on this money, but the activities of the 18 field missions, which are, said Minister Rupel, “the jewels in the OSCE crown”.

Problems, which have been piling up, demand different approaches, and the organisation will have to face a reform. Almost everyone agrees that a reform is necessary, but unfortunately the opinion on its contents again varies immensely. In the Sofia Ministerial Council in December last year, the representatives of the states have agreed on the idea about forming a group of seven prominent people, who will prepare a proposition on the contents of the reform of the organisation. Foreign Affairs Minister Rupel does not mention any names yet, but he said he will choose them until the end of January, and after this the group will begin its work. Time is scarce because the Minister wishes to present a report by the group in the middle of the year. In Vienna he also expressed a hope that it will finally be possible to finish the rules OSCE should reform by, in the Ministerial Council in Ljubljana in December. Minister Rupel also expects European Union to help OSCE in its budget difficulties.

With the third notion, the balanced approach to the work of OSCE, Slovenia responds to the demands of Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States for a greater devotion to the military-political, and economic and environmental dimensions of the organisation. They are actually not only Russian demands, for the reality of the fight against terrorism, which remains a focal point of American and Russian activities, concerns all cooperating OSCE states. Minister Rupel has completed the set of Slovenian priorities: “I see a need for greater activity in migration control, respect for human rights, strengthening of security, managing frontiers, cooperation in the security field, also in the field of prevention of human trafficking.” Care for human rights and basic freedoms remains the centre point of the organisation, promises the Chairman of OSCE. One of the main themes of Slovene chairmanship will be the issues of migrations and integration; Minister Rupel has also taken a stand for the continuation of activities in the field of the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination. Three representatives who have been appointed by the chairman of OSCE last year will start their work against various forms of intolerance: against anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other forms of intolerance.

Enormous Tasks

Besides the unresolved question of the budget, Slovenia received another task from Bulgaria, which should have been taken care of by its predecessor. OSCE needs a new General Secretary, whose job is, among other things, in his three year mandate, which can be extended for 2 additional years, as a representative of the Chairman, to manage the structures and operations of the organisation, cooperate with the Chairman in preparation and leading of meetings, and presentation of the policies and working of OSCE in the international field. Many have hoped that an agreement will be concluded in Sofia Ministerial Council on giving the position to Slovakian diplomat Jan Kubis, but the conflict of interests was too big even here. The only other candidates remaining are an unknown Swiss and French candidate. One of them will have to be named as soon as possible, because Jan Kubis's mandate has expired, but he is prepared to perform the function until his successor is named.

Big tasks for a small country, one can say. The size of the country as such is of no consequence, but a small country means a small diplomatic apparatus, and a small expert background, which monitors the international affairs and forms the standpoint of the country. The Foreign Affairs Minister assures that Slovenia is thoroughly prepared for the difficult task of chairmanship. The OSCE project group under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led by the former foreign minister Boris Frlec, has 16 members. Additional members of the Permanent Mission to the OSCE in Vienna are led by the Representative Janez Lenarčič, this year's president of the Permanent Council. Slovenian Government gave SIT 2.6 billion for the OSCE presidency, of which the majority, 2.1 billion, will be spent this year.

The question, where will the application for chairmanship in Constantinople in 1999 take Slovenia remains. For predicting the results of the chairmanship at the end of this year is still too early, but the task Slovenia took on is undoubtedly difficult. Some predict two possibilities – one is the strategy of mediating between large countries, search for a consensus, protecting the viewpoint and reputation of OSCE as a regional organisation, or the activation of the role of Slovenia in the struggle to prevent the conflicts in the Balkans. Slovenia will not escape the first strategy, which is the move it also predicted. "The success in this year depends on your initiative, your political will, your decisions," said Minister Rupel at the Permanent Council of OSCE to the representatives. At the same time he announced the willingness of Slovenia to help with the question of the status of Kosovo, and in mediation in the dialogue between Belgrade and Priština. Both strategies are legitimate and interwoven, but are also wide apart at certain points. If Slovenia decides on the second option, it will highlight the interests of this part of Europe, but will have a hard time following other crisis areas. For getting the consensus from the large ones, which will not necessarily be interested in the Balkans, it will have to expose itself and take on the responsibility in case of failure. With the fact that the majority of power lays in the hands of the White House and the Kremlin, we must bear in mind that "the art of OSCE diplomacy is that no one is humiliated and hurt", as the former Foreign Affairs Minister and now the International Affairs Adviser to the President of the State, Ivo Vajgl said. This art will come in handy to Slovenia this year. The 2005 is one of the most important milestones for Slovenia's foreign policy since the country gained its independence.