

Conflict Prevention in Practice within the OSCE

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Check against delivery!

Democracy and human rights as long-term sustainable conflict prevention

Since the adoption of our founding document, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, OSCE participating States have recognized that security is not merely the absence of war and that establishing or maintaining a secure environment in the region is not solely a political or military question. The OSCE's security concept goes beyond politico-military issues and includes, as integral parts, human rights and democracy, as well as economic and environmental issues. It has moved away from concentrating on the security of states and governments to encompass more fully the security of the individual human being.

It is one of the OSCE's core principles that developments related to human rights and democracy are not confined to internal affairs of the state concerned but are issues of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States. This reflects the experience that conflict and instability are often caused by a deterioration of the human-rights situation or the lack, or failure, of democratic processes. This is the context in which the OSCE sees its role in conflict prevention, and this constitutes the basis for the particular role and responsibility my Office has in this regard.

This approach to conflict prevention is one of co-operative security based on democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, a market economy, and social justice. This concept's fundamental elements are the comprehensiveness and indivisibility of security and the allegiance to shared values, commitments, and norms of behaviour. This was equally relevant for the prevention of global conflict at the time of the Helsinki accords, as it is now on a limited local and regional level. These are the conflicts that continue to haunt our region. The challenge for us is to develop flexible and targeted responses to crises when they break out and to continue to strengthen the basics – democracy, human rights, and the rule of law – in view of sustainable and lasting conflict prevention.

At the OSCE Summit in Istanbul, the participating States reaffirmed that “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law is at the core of the OSCE’s comprehensive concept of security”, and they committed themselves to “counter such threats to security as violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief and manifestations of intolerance, aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.”

At the time of its adoption, the OSCE’s comprehensive security concept was groundbreaking. Today, in a world faced with a multitude of new threats and challenges, such as local and regional conflicts, it is more relevant than ever. As these threats are multidimensional in nature, they require a multidimensional response. Threats are not simply “politico-military threats” or “human dimension threats”. Security threats must be seen in all their dimensions, i.e., in the possible harmful effect they can have on the various achievements our societies value highly. Hence, there is a human dimension to all threats considered in the current debate. This is true for terrorism, organized crime, and trafficking in human beings, whose victims, first and foremost, are human beings whose security and integrity states are committed to protect. The same is true for the worrying trend of racism, xenophobia, and intolerance, which are on the increase in many parts of the OSCE region. Naturally, lack of economic development principally affects those individuals who are trapped in the vicious cycle of marginalization and poverty.

The ODIHR is the OSCE’s specialized institution for promoting democratic elections, strengthening democratic institutions, and protecting and promoting human rights. In promoting democracy and the rule of law, the ODIHR assists participating States in building institutions capable of promoting and protecting basic human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as conducting free and fair elections. A number of other areas of activity, such as pursuing gender equality and supporting civil society, are also designed to improve basic human security across the OSCE region. The underlying philosophy of pursuing these goals is that democracy and the protection of human rights are the best guarantee for creating fair and open societies, thereby preventing possible crises and conflicts from emerging or from causing harm to the stability of the OSCE area.

Departing from these important fundamental considerations, I would like to add a few concrete observations and concerns to our debate this morning, as it presents the rare opportunity for an exchange among a variety of professionals from different parts of our Organization.

- **Comprehensive, balanced, and coherent approach**
 - In order for the OSCE to make the fullest use of this concept, the three dimensions must be linked closer together in the everyday work of the Organization. *Vis-à-vis* the danger of a tendency to “compartmentalize”, all efforts must be made to create strong cross-dimensional links and synergies.
 - In my own Office, we have been confronted with this effect in our work on human rights and terrorism. Many activities in the OSCE in this area are currently taking place in the politico-military dimension, and it has not always been obvious to include the ODIHR in these activities. Needless to say, human rights have a crucial role to play in tackling the root causes of

terrorism. Prevention needs to be taken seriously and not just for its own sake. Reaction and prevention must be equally emphasized in the OSCE's comprehensive security policy.

- A comprehensive strategy to address terrorism requires tackling insecurities at their root. Claims of domination, discrimination, and denigration of groups and individuals are often the triggering factors to violence. Human rights, in particular the full enjoyment of women's rights, promoting sustainable development and addressing environmental issues should be at the heart of a participating State's policies and action.
- The division of labour of OSCE delegations in Vienna and the assignment of "human dimension officers" should not lead to a situation where the human dimension is shut out from the rest. This is particularly important for Sweden, as it holds the chef de file function for the human dimension among the EU delegations in Vienna. This means that we have a special relationship with the Swedish delegation that we would like to strengthen further.
- **Bridge between the politico-military dimension and the human dimension**
 - The Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security (adopted in December 1994) can serve as the bridge between the politico-military dimension and the human dimension; a bridge that has not been used often enough thus far. It should be explored more thoroughly, as it contains a number of points common to both the politico-military and human dimensions.
 - The Code of Conduct points out that the sources of tensions that may lead to conflict include violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and of other commitments in the human dimension. It also stresses that manifestations of aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism endanger peace and security.
- **The ODIHR's assistance programmes**
 - Several years of hands-on experience with project implementation have helped the ODIHR gain considerable knowledge of handling the operational side of field activities, as well as invaluable practical feedback for its more standard-related work on human dimension commitments in the Warsaw or Vienna meetings. At the same time, the need for more consistent, longer-term engagement and the need to ensure continuity and consistency in its assistance work have now led the ODIHR to consolidate its project-related work into more-comprehensive programmes.
 - The ODIHR is therefore in the process of refocusing its targeted institution-building and capacity-building programmes, while still keeping the possibility for shorter-term projects as a rapid response to emerging needs. The programmatic shift is expected to provide greater continuity in assistance, the chance to build upon existing work in a broader framework, and to link related development challenges.
 - Since 1998, the ODIHR has been systematically providing technical assistance to a number of OSCE participating States: either upon request through memoranda of understanding (concluded with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) or upon mutual agreement through a consultation process with host-country Delegations, capitals, and OSCE field presences.

- One of the main obstacles to effective and sustainable development is the dependency on donor community that frequently emerges in the beneficiary developing states. Outside interests, rather than local actors, determine priorities for development. This stunts the growth of a community of local stakeholders, and the recipient country becomes vulnerable to changes of priorities or loss of interest by outside actors. The importance of local ownership and sustainability can therefore not be recalled often enough.
- **Human dimension events as a forum to renew resolve, sharpen focus, and exchange best practices**
 - The ODIHR fulfils its monitoring role through regular human dimension meetings in Warsaw and Vienna, such as the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meetings, the Human Dimension Seminars, and the three Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings, at which all participating States, other organizations, and a large number of civil society representatives participate.
 - In this context, it is important to stress the follow-up to recommendations made at these events, where a key role is played by participating States' governments. The need for sustained political commitment in the human dimension requires that recommendations made and priorities established in multilateral forums are equally taken into account in the context of bilateral external relations.
 - The ODIHR is developing a concept for a Special Day during the HDIM, which treats international co-operation in the promotion of human rights as a tool for conflict prevention and in post-conflict reconstruction. This day would hence focus on human rights from a security angle, and we hope that we will get the active support from the Swedish Delegation for such an approach.
- **ODIHR support to field missions**
 - During last year's discussions among various OSCE partners on strengthening relations between the Organization's institutions and field missions, several issues emerged as major elements for enhanced co-operation between the ODIHR and missions. In general, missions regard the ODIHR as an external resource for substantive expertise, while their own strengths lie in their presence on the ground, the relationships they have developed with local counterparts, and in their ability to focus on one single country or context. The relationship with field missions should significantly go beyond co-operation in planning and implementing projects.
 - In relation to field missions within the Organization, the ODIHR conceives itself as a thematic back-up, a centre for collecting lessons learned and best practices in the fields of human-rights protection and promotion, democratization, and election observation.
 - I would like to describe one important activity into which we put some effort, and that is training for mission staff in the human dimension. Two months ago, we had the first of what is to become quarterly induction trainings in the human dimension. This training serves several purposes and fills a gap in an area where no training was provided before. In particular, this training explores the particularities of working with human rights and democratization in a security organization. This is very important, as even

the most-qualified human-rights lawyers very rarely are familiar with the OSCE and its political nature. There is thus a greater need to understand the nature of the OSCE in order to be better able to make use of its advantages.

- Another purpose is to explain and thereby strengthen the concept of the human dimension. There has been a tendency in larger missions to divide the human dimension into different departments or sections of human rights, rule of law, democratization, or other combinations. This has often led to a compartmentalization of this area. By treating the human dimension as a whole, the participants also get to know other parts, which hopefully will serve as an incitement for increased co-operation.
- **Women**
 - I cannot help but notice that there are only male speakers on the panel at this event. I would therefore like to take this chance to underline the importance of enhancing gender equality as an important tool for conflict prevention. The importance of involving women in peace-building efforts has been proven by research that shows the connection between the status of women in a society and its level of conflict. Violent conflict is more common in countries with a low representation of women in parliament and where domestic violence against women is more widespread than in more gender-equal societies. Utilizing the knowledge and expertise of women and strengthening the role of women in society is therefore a peace-promoting and conflict-preventing activity in itself. Sweden has a particular role to play in this regard.
 - In my own Office, we are currently undertaking an effort to expand the gender-equality aspect from the existing two-person Gender Unit in the Democratization Section into being reflected in all parts of the Office's work. At the same time, there is currently a review undertaken of the Gender Action Plan of the whole Organization. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the Swedish Government to share their extensive experience in this area and to provide their active input to this review.

In conclusion, I want to highlight once more the need for structured follow-up to decisions and recommendations from the different parts of the Organization. Commitments and Action Plans need continued political engagement to ensure their practical realization, thus addressing concrete concerns and priorities before problems can develop into dangers of security and stability.

Thank you.