



Open, safe and secure

Managing borders in the OSCE area

“Border”: What does the word really mean? Edge, margin, frontier, limit, dividing line or obstacle? For most people — indeed, for entire nations — it is the equivalent of all these. Some of us, though, grew up using another term: the “Iron Curtain” and the “Berlin Wall”, the cause of human misery that was only too painfully real for us. Still other synonyms for border in many parts of the world are “exit visa”, and worse, mine-littered fields around one’s home.

Ebertstrasse, Berlin, 1989

Reproduced with permission by Brian Rose from his book, *The Lost Border, The Landscape of the Iron Curtain*, Princeton Architectural Press, September 2004. Available at Amazon.com

BY MARIANNE BEREZC

Governments, too, interpret borders in many different ways. The way they manage and secure their borders holds tremendous political, economic, ecological and humanitarian consequences for their citizens and their communities — and beyond.

But on one thing governments agree: Borders pose difficulties and challenges, and national officials are duty-bound to protect people from the dangers that lurk



around crossing-points, whether they be trafficking, smuggling or terrorism.

At the same time, most authorities are also fully aware of their fellow citizens' yearning to live in freedom and to enjoy the right to criss-cross State frontiers as a normal part of daily life — to learn more about other cultures, conduct business and trade, or simply visit family and friends who live “on the other side”.

Policy- and decision-makers, therefore, must ensure that they approach the issue from two angles: providing open borders while making them secure.

The notion of “open and secure” borders emerged formally within the Organization with the adoption of the OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century by the Ministerial Council in Maastricht, in December 2003.

The official document provided the OSCE with a mandate to develop a security and management concept, based on two main assumptions:

- Threats of terrorism and organized crime are often interlinked. Since the challenges of globalization and security threats are inherently transnational, these need to be countered with a set of common synergetic approaches.

- With qualified experts at their disposal and a vast reservoir of experience to tap into, participating States as well as the OSCE itself *can* tackle these new threats and challenges.

In 2004, work towards developing a border security concept was launched under the Bulgarian Chairmanship. Progress was well under way within an informal working group led by Belgian Ambassador Bertrand de Crombrugghe. However, remaining discrepancies in positions between participating States could not be ironed out in time for the group to present the concept to the Ministerial Council in Sofia in December 2004.

Paying tribute to the group's valuable accomplishments thus far, the OSCE foreign ministers decided that it would be wise to carry the discussions over into 2005. They agreed on basic parameters to keep the negotiations on track, based on proposals and ideas that had been drawn up by participating States.

In the meantime, since Ambassador de Crombrugghe was poised to take up a new set of responsibilities related to the 2006 Belgian Chairmanship under the OSCE Troika, the 2005 Slovenian Chairmanship chose me to succeed him as head of the working group.

Comprehensive and flexible: Assistance in border management reflects OSCE philosophy

Building on earlier commitments and international obligations, the OSCE's Border Security and Management Concept reflects the Organization's cross-dimensional work and comprehensive and flexible approach.

The Concept covers the principles and goals of co-operation and spells out concrete ways and means to achieve them, based on “realism and pragmatism”.

A strong emphasis has been placed on the OSCE's support for collaboration between border-related agencies within

a State, as well as co-operation at the national, regional and international levels between States.

The potential role of the OSCE is defined — as facilitator, as provider of general and specialized forms of assistance, and as a forum for exchanging good practices. Activities are open to the OSCE's 11 Partners for Co-operation.

The Concept is also designed to strengthen the capability of the Organization to tackle threats stemming from outside the OSCE area



Skopje, January 2006: Mountain border police are taught emergency first-aid.

through better co-ordinated and more targeted co-operation with international organizations.

— Marianne Berez



Zagreb's main customs checkpoint: Croatia's efforts to prevent illegal cross-border activities without impeding legitimate trading have been paying off.

Looking back, I have to admit that the group's deliberations during this phase were far from easy. We had been given a clear signal from Sofia to hammer out a framework for co-operation among participating States, and we had the advantage of building upon the previous year's discussions. So why was the work proving so difficult?

Ironically, a major stumbling block was precisely the fact that delegations were keen to come up with a well thought-out concept. Experts had their own distinct understanding of what such a concept should look like, according to their respective States' national interests and objectives.

Some countries consider the military as their most effective means of securing their borders; others, having earlier decided to protect their borders through a joint approach with their partners and neighbours, are now introducing a shared, structured mechanism of administrative measures and institutions based on common norms and standards.



CHEV WILKINSON

Ambassador Marianne Berez has been Head of the Hungarian Mission to the OSCE since January 2003. Her engagement in European security issues started in 1986-1989, when she was a member of the Hungarian delegation to the Third CSCE Follow-up Meeting in Vienna. Later, she was appointed Head of her Foreign Ministry's OSCE Division, and, later on, Deputy Director-General of its Department for Security Policy and Arms Control. She completed her studies in Moscow, specializing in international affairs and journalism.

Further complicating the matter is the fact that borders in the OSCE area present a widely diverse picture. Some borders are fading away, remaining only on paper, or imprinted in the memories of aging parents and grandparents. Several are not even regulated or delineated. Others merely exist in history books, their lines traced according to the authors' nationality. And then there are those that continue to be reinforced by killing minefields.

These are just some of the reasons why it took the OSCE two years to draw up its Border Security and Management Concept.

Our work in border management did not come to an end with the Concept's much-awaited stamp of approval from participating States at the Ministerial Council in Ljubljana in December 2005. On the contrary, the stage had merely been set for actual implementation. The Working Group on Non-Military Aspects of Security, established by the Belgian Chairmanship and headed by Ambassador Peter Lizák of Slovakia, has been exploring the way ahead in translating the concept into practice.

After my close involvement in the subject during the past year, I dream that one day, in the not-so-distant future, borders between States will simply vanish from our maps and our minds. Who knows, perhaps delegations of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in the Galaxy (OSCG) will be discussing the elements of an inter-galactic concept of border security and management.

Till then, however, we have to do our utmost here on Earth to make the lives of its inhabitants not only more free and more open, but also more safe and more secure.



The changing face of borders

Common security concerns call for shared solutions

The pendulum has swung from isolationist policies in the direction of closer cross-border co-operation in the OSCE area, calling for greater clarity and coherence in the border strategies of neighbouring countries, says OSCE Border Adviser Johann Wagner in an interview with Patricia N. Sutter, Editor of the *OSCE Magazine*. A former investigator of transnational criminal activities with the Bavarian Border Police, he explains why border security managers need to look beyond improved personnel skills, expensive gadgets and new uniforms.

What's the most popular misconception about borders and keeping them secure from today's new threats?

Most people are aware of certain aspects of border management; everyone has crossed a border at some point in their lives. But that does not give the whole picture.

We usually don't think of "green" and "blue" borders — land and water border zones between two control points — where there is no visible demarcation to indicate the existence of a border. It is difficult, almost impossible, for officials to monitor these zones around the clock, metre

by metre. This makes them attractive entry points for the new threats you refer to — from the smuggling of drugs, weapons and humans, to illegal migration.

Is there such a thing as a "borderless Europe" and "open borders"?

Not in the strict literal sense. Western Europe's Schengen regime, for example, has resulted in greater freedom of movement across frontiers because of looser controls at internal borders, but it does not mean that there are no longer any national boundaries. These are matters that fall under the sovereignty of States.

Some years after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the break-up of Yugoslavia, emerging developments — globalization, the European Union's enlargement and contemporary security challenges — presented the new States with a new dilemma: How do they go about ensuring that their borders allow human, economic and cultural interaction to take place with the minimum of restrictions, while keeping out illegal and criminal elements?

So, you see, borders have started taking on a different role. Security is no longer just a national concern. Since the threats have

Management of borders in Northern Dalmatia, Croatia, has been upgraded.
Photo: EC/A.Zrno



EGZ ZESTIC-FONET NEWS AGENCY

A border official describes procedures at Horgos in northern Serbia.

become shared ones, border strategies and policies have to have greater clarity and coherence than ever before.

Surely an effective border security and management system doesn't just involve monitoring, which was emphasized in earlier OSCE activities?

The OSCE's new Border Security and Management Concept makes it clear that a professionally-managed system covers everything from adequate facilities and technology to the continuing education of border staff and police forces. Proper policies and an operational framework must be in place. Agencies responsible for immigration, customs, anti-terrorism and judicial matters should co-ordinate and exchange information more systematically with border authorities.

What border-related situations did you encounter in post-conflict areas?

When I joined the United Nations' border service team in Sarajevo in October 1998, one of my first tasks was to help survey each and every metre of the borders of

The Kosovo-Macedonian green border runs across the summit of Mt. Kobilica.



SPILLOVER MONITOR MISSION TO SKOPJE/PETER BOOKER

Bosnia and Herzegovina with its neighbouring countries. This was three years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords. We worked with SFOR — the NATO-led Stabilization Force — in creating a data base and registered our findings in the Global Positioning System, or GPS.

Many of the border bridges had been blown up, so we had to go off the main paths. We were never absolutely sure when we might stray into areas littered with anti-personnel landmines. It could be quite scary.

Later, I headed activities to train the border police, focusing on major land crossing points and four international airports — Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar and Tuzla. Don't forget that the country had been deeply "embedded" within Yugoslavia and had not had any international borders, so the border police had to start from scratch.

I must say we were encouraged by the results of these first efforts. At the Sarajevo airport alone, over one year, officials were able to detect about a thousand false travel documents. Most were found on travellers destined for the Schengen area. That meant that some people were making piles of money producing those papers! Some were professional criminals, some were merely desperate.

Now, just eight years later, look at Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its border security operations have improved with the help of its international partners. The country is now a strong candidate for membership in the EU. Progress doesn't happen overnight, but it *does* happen.

Has this positive record been repeated throughout south-eastern Europe?

In fact, last year, the south-eastern European region marked a turning point when most of the countries finished transferring responsibility for the control of borders — including both green and blue borders — from the military to a civilian border police.

A major task — training ex-soldiers to become civilian border police — is almost completed. What's needed next is to push ahead with their transformation into a special branch of the police force. But even if improved skills and new uniforms and equipment are important, the transformation should not stop there; border police should also be vested with the authority to investigate criminal activities at the border.

After all, we're always talking about countering crime and other illegal cross-border activities such as the smuggling of

stolen cars, and this can only be tackled by professional border police with a strong executive mandate. That's our concept of modern border policing in western Europe. Right now, not all border police forces in the Balkans are authorized to carry out investigations themselves. This weak position also gives rise to bribery and corrupt practices at the border.

But doesn't this trace back to the fact that border and police authorities are poorly paid in many countries?

It's no secret that some border officials do enrich themselves, especially those in countries with inadequate rule-of-law institutions. The temptations are just too great. But at the same time, you also come across border personnel, just like the ones I saw in Afghanistan, who don't even own a decent pair of shoes. These are the people whom we expect to be at the forefront of combating terrorism and preventing the smuggling of weapons of mass destruction!

But of course the whole issue is much more complex than it appears. It's also tied in with lack of reform and the need to design and adopt proper legal structures. In some cases, old and inadequate border laws still apply, pending parliamentary approval of new border-related legislation.

How can the OSCE best make a contribution to improving the way borders are managed?

The OSCE is not a funding agency. Besides, even if financial resources go a long way towards purchasing modern technological tools, for example, that's not everything. I believe there should always be a good balance between the provision of technical assistance, training and equipment.

There is broad agreement that the OSCE is in a favourable position to concentrate its overall efforts on promoting cross-border co-operation at either the bilateral or the multi-lateral level.

In July, the OSCE is organizing a regional workshop in Dubrovnik which will give national authorities a chance to tell us, their international partners, where we made mistakes and where we succeeded in helping them to co-operate across borders.

A related event, but on a larger scale, will take place in October in Vienna. Participants will be able to share good practices with one another.

And of course an essential assistance route is through our OSCE field missions and operations. [See pages 12 and 13.]



OSCE MISSION TO BIAHARIN POZJIC

What valuable lessons have been learned from the past?

As I said earlier, some States had had no experience at all in border management, so the initial tendency was to put up an expensive border-control infrastructure designed to keep former "brothers" out. Now old neighbours are uniting again. The willingness to search for common solutions is reflected in the OSCE's first large cross-border co-operation programme, which is helping authorities in south-eastern Europe to work together to meet EU standards. The pendulum has swung in the other direction, and the region is better off for it.

Border units at the "Pavloviča Most" crossing between northeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are especially vigilant.



OSCE/MIKHAIL EVSTAFIEV

Johann Wagner, Border Adviser, joined the border team of the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre in December 2005. He is a graduate of the Bavarian Police Academy in Munich with almost three decades of practical experience in border management in south-eastern Europe and in Ukraine and Afghanistan.



Cross-border co-operation

South-eastern Europe shows the way forward

Having come from an international NGO devoted to the humane treatment of people held in custody, I was used to dealing with only one side of the interaction between civil society and the State. Since joining the OSCE's border team less than two years ago, I believe I have gained a far better understanding of the concerns and interests of both sides of the equation.

BY ANTON PETRENKO

I have become much more aware about how crucial it is to support the State, too, in its own efforts to secure the safety of its citizens in a manner that respects their rights and freedoms.

This was precisely the goal of the just-ended South-Eastern Europe Cross-Border Co-operation Programme, so far the largest of its kind carried out by the OSCE. The initiative traces its roots to the Ohrid Border Process [see box, page 11], in which the OSCE is one of the four main actors.

In the course of 2004 and 2005, the OSCE co-organized 11 three-day regional seminars with the Governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Slovenia. The aim was to enable border officials to learn from each other's national experiences and to adopt cross-border co-operation agreements in such areas as the exchange of operational data and the establishment of border police liaison offices with neighbouring countries.

Participants included 172 border practitioners and officials from five south-eastern

European countries and 52 of their counterparts from Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Hungary, Slovenia, Turkey and Italy. A number of international organizations, among them NATO, the EU, the Stability Pact, and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), sent a total of 34 observers.

When I took on the role of Programme Manager in October 2004, the project's first phase was just winding up. My immediate task was to prepare and co-ordinate the final and second phase, comprising five regional workshops in 2005.

I was impressed by the calibre of the border officials taking part as they presented their ideas on a host of issues, including the demilitarization of border control, regionally co-ordinated advanced training for border police and for surveillance of blue borders, inter-agency co-operation, and practical aspects of cross-border co-operation along green borders.

A remark by one of the officials unwittingly captured the spirit of the gathering: "As long-serving members of our national security services, many of us directly experienced the trauma of the conflict that tore our region apart. We then had to struggle to establish our newly independent State borders. Now, here we are, actively re-building professional contacts and co-operating with one another to improve security on both sides of our State borders."

Upon completion of the Programme, we

Lezha, Albania, April 2006.
Border and migration police
are trained on the use of
surveillance equipment.
Photo: OSCE/Jack Bell

ran a survey to assess the activities' immediate and longer-term impact on the participants and the countries they represented. We also sought to draw lessons from the exercise that could be replicated elsewhere.

Most respondents said the seminars had enhanced their professional knowledge, expanded their network, and restored mutual confidence. They also appreciated the on-the-spot opportunity to familiarize themselves with EU guidelines concerning integrated border management and to develop standard operating procedures according to their needs.

As encouraging as this feedback is, the shortfalls of this first regional programme are proving equally invaluable to our efforts to ensure that the OSCE lives up to its commitments under the Ohrid Border Process. In designing future activities, the OSCE borders team will bear these key lessons in mind:

- It is clear from the mixed performance of countries in concluding cross-border co-operation agreements during the seminars that any follow-up action should take a targeted approach, taking full consideration of countries' specific circumstances. We should not forget that the resources placed at the disposal of border agencies vary widely from country to country — as does the political will on the part of national authorities to implement border co-operation.
- Although the Programme served as an appropriate forum for sharing good practices within the region, future OSCE activities should integrate various experiences by recognizing that some countries, such as Croatia, are further along in following EU standards in border manage-

ment than others and should be given a more prominent role to play.

- In carrying out the Programme, the OSCE established close co-ordination between international partners to avoid duplication. However, more needs to be done to achieve maximum efficiency.

Perhaps the most significant lesson we learned was that no effort should be spared to ensure that countries take ownership of the process of improving the way they manage their borders. The international community can only assist.

One participant expressed it best: "Considering our countries' different stages of transition and degrees of acceptance of EU standards, we could not have 'crowned' our work at the OSCE seminars solely with the signing of final agreements. This does not diminish the value of the seminars; on the contrary, we will apply the knowledge and expertise we gained from them towards drawing up concrete documents on cross-border co-operation."

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OSCE/MIKHAIL EVSTAFIEV

The Ohrid Border Process

It all started with a NATO initiative, launched in early 2002, aimed at strengthening stability in the south-eastern European region by developing a strategy to tackle border security issues.

Later placed under the umbrella of the Stability Pact with the participation of the EU and the OSCE, the initiative was expanded to reflect the European concept of an integrated border management system.

To guide the Process, the following principles were adopted:

- The ultimate goal should be the adoption of EU standards on integrated border management.
- The common goal should be the creation of open borders with security guarantees.
- Effective co-operation at regional and sub-regional levels should be promoted.

At the landmark Regional

Conference on Border Security and Management that took place at Lake Ohrid on 22 and 23 May 2003, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro and their four partner organizations committed themselves to a **Common Platform** — core goals and principles that would be followed in implementing agreed guidelines.

They also endorsed the **Way Forward Document** — a plan of action, set within a time frame, oriented towards the reform of national legislation and structures, and the development of regional co-operation.

The participating countries reaffirmed the principle of regional ownership, with their four international partners offering to give strong support to their efforts. The OSCE's contribution was to focus on



NATO HQ SKOPJE PHOTO

Ohrid, 22 May 2003. The heads of the Stability Pact, the OSCE, NATO, the host country and the EU meet the press.

improving civilian aspects of training of border police, assisting in institution-building and promoting regional co-operation.

To take stock of progress achieved and identify any gaps and constraints in the Ohrid Border Process, three review meetings have been held so far: in Belgrade (November 2003), Tirana (October 2004), and Sarajevo (November 2005).

This year represents a milestone since the target for com-

pletion of the measures under the **Way Forward Document** is 31 December 2006. Recently, participants at an intermediate review meeting assessed the implementation of the action plan and agreed to continue the Process for one more year. A formal decision will be taken at the next annual review meeting in November 2006.

Jean-Claude Meyer
Military Liaison Officer
Conflict Prevention Centre

Tailoring responses to individual needs

Relevance and practicality are the hallmarks of the OSCE's on-the-ground activities in border security and management. The Organization responds to individual requests for assistance from host countries, working closely with Ministries of the Interior, target groups, and national and international partners. Some recent examples:

» OSCE PRESENCE IN ALBANIA

Focus: Enhancing the operational capability and effectiveness of the Albanian Border and Migration Police in dealing with cross-border and organized crime.

Activities, led by the Presence's Department of Security Co-operation, include:

- » Supporting and facilitating regular joint border co-operation meetings between the Albanian Border and Migration Police and their counterparts in neighbouring States;
- » Training 120 police personnel assigned to Albania's green border in the use of night-vision equipment, recording devices and navigational tools;
- » Training 12 police instructors to conduct courses independently and to promote wider use of the equipment;
- » Providing police with operational support for the installation of solar generator systems as back-up in case of power cuts at eight key border-crossing points;
- » Conducting training, within the EU CARDS programme for the Western Balkans, to help police in handling irregular migration and in combating



Lezha, Albania, April 2006. Albanian border and migration police improve their skills in map-reading.

trafficking in human beings by emphasizing the importance of a pre-screening system; and

- » Helping key police personnel assigned at major border-crossing points to improve their communication skills in English.



Skopje, May 2006. Border police simulate real-life situations to improve their response capability.

» OSCE SPILLOVER MONITOR MISSION TO SKOPJE

Focus: Supporting the establishment of the country's border police.

Since 2004, the Mission's Police Development Department has:

- » Trained some 1,435 personnel from the Ministry of Defence to become border police officers. Five sessions were held in 2004 and 2005, each course comprising two months of instruction in basic policing and one month in specialized border policing matters;
- » Trained members of the border police, staff of the Ministry of Interior, and instructors of the Idrizovo Police Academy to develop their leadership, managerial and communication skills;
- » Provided training to station commanders, who serve as first-line managers; and
- » Supported the efforts of members of the border police to upgrade their professionalism in such areas as identification of forged documents, computer skills, first aid, self-defence, and language training in English, Greek and Albanian.

» OSCE MISSION TO MOLDOVA

Focus: Co-operating closely with the EU Border Assistance Mission (EU BAM), which has been operating at the Moldovan-Ukrainian border since December 2005. The shared goal is to promote transparency and stability in the region.

The Head of the OSCE Mission is on the Advisory Committee of EU BAM and a Mission staff member attends the monthly co-ordination meetings. The OSCE provided EU BAM with assistance during its early phase, before its deployment. Since then, the Mission has been providing EU BAM with objective information on conditions within Transnistria through:

- » Daily patrols and monitoring in the Transnistrian region; and
- » Meetings with Transnistrian officials and business leaders as well as with Moldovan authorities.



Moldovan-Ukrainian border crossing point, summer 2005. The international border at Khristovaya is controlled by Transnistrian authorities. The OSCE Mission patrols the Transnistrian region regularly and shares information with the EU BAM.



Georgia, April 2006. Training for border guards includes helicopter search-and-rescue operations in mountainous areas.

» MISSION TO GEORGIA

Focus: Helping the Georgian border guards to build their capacity to manage the country's borders under a quick-impact training assistance programme. Since early 2005, a team of 50 people, including 30 international experts, has been implementing the training assistance programme from the OSCE Mission headquarters in Tbilisi and from four other regional centres.

Early achievements reflect the Mission's experience in border-monitoring from 2000 to 2004:

- » A total of 700 mid-level and non-commissioned officers in the Georgian border guards service have successfully completed training. Some have been identified as potential future instructors.
- » Skills needed for summer and high-altitude winter conditions were taught, covering rescue operations and security rules in hazardous mountainous areas; planning and management of border units during the day and at night; patrolling, observation and reporting; maintenance of special equipment; and map-reading, communications and first aid; and
- » Helicopter search-and-rescue operations in various types of mountainous terrain and all kinds of weather conditions were the focus of a recent three-week training course for 18 Georgian border guards, pilots and flight engineers.

In the meantime, preparations are under way for the Mission's new Capacity-Building Programme for the Georgian Border Police starting on 1 July. To be implemented over one year, activities will assist the Border Police to create their own training system, operate more effectively, and enhance their ability to conduct joint operations with neighbouring services.

A team of 50 personnel, including 26 international experts, will implement the programme from Tbilisi, as well as from two other regional centres in Lilo and Omalo.