

The Role of the OSCE in Regional Security & Stability

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Let us start with defining of what OSCE is, where does it fit in a regional context, and what is its mission. The OSCE is the primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation, which comprises 55 Participating States on a wide geographical area from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The origins of the OSCE lie in Cold War period after Helsinki and Geneva negotiations led to the Final Act of 1975.

The Organisation applies the comprehensive and cooperative approach to security throughout its activities and deals with the responsibilities of regional arrangements or agencies in the maintenance of international peace and security. Unlike other security-related organisations, which, as a rule, are concentrating on specific aspects of overall security situation, the unique feature of OSCE allows it to cover and consider the political-military, economic/environmental and human dimensions as closely inter-linked and equally important for the maintenance of peace and security. So the OSCE can take a broad view on the security developments in its area.

The OSCE activity in the region is complemented by cooperation between all Participating States (and its Permanent Council in Vienna) and with a wide range of other international organisations. The main partners of the OSCE in the region are the United Nations and the specialised organisations and agencies of the UN system, in particular the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, The UN Development Programme, the International Organisation for Migration, the World Food Programme, the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, Council of Europe (collocation), the EU and others. Also, the OSCE is engaged in close cooperation and joint efforts with local and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Present Activities

The OSCE has four missions operating in the South Caucasian region: in Georgia (Tbilisi), Armenia (Yerevan), Azerbaijan (Baku) and for the Minsk process. In 1992 the Georgia mission was created, active in all dimensions within Georgia but with its main area of interest in South Osetia, where the main purpose is to facilitate the political settlement, to eliminate the sources of tension and to promote political reconciliation. The OSCE mission in Georgia supports the UN in the Abkhazia conflict. In regard to the Mission's activity in the Abkhazia conflict less progress can be reported.

Now the Georgia Mission is tasked with monitoring movements across the Georgia/Russia border in the area of the Chechen Republic and Ingushetia. The successful operation contributed to decreasing the tensions and thus to the stabilisation of the overall situation in the region.

Decisions to establish OSCE offices in Baku and Yerevan were taken in 1999, and the offices became operational in 2000. The Yerevan Office was opened in March 2000. Their mandates are very similar and concentrate on promoting the implementation of the OSCE principles and commitments as well as the cooperation of Armenia and Azerbaijan within the OSCE framework, in all OSCE dimensions. It has identified a number of worthwhile, grass roots, cross-border projects, which would assist the economic and social development of the Republic, and of the region as well.

The OSCE has four main Field Presences in three states of South Caucasus. The organisation is trying to assist the South Caucasian states in their efforts aiming at stabilisation of the situation in the region. In particular, the OSCE is tasked to assist resolution of conflicts, consolidation of democracy, improvements in the field of human rights and economic cooperation within and outside the region. The wide ranging mandate of the OSCE mission covers all these three dimensions.

The OSCE became involved in the Minsk process and the resolution of Nagorno Karabakh conflict since 1992 when it was asked to convene a conference in Minsk under the auspices of the organisation to provide an ongoing forum for negotiations on peaceful settlement of the conflict. The conference never took place but its designated participants have been meeting and operating since as the "Minsk Group" in a continuous effort to find a political solution to the conflict. Three Co-chairs work permanently and are very active in mediating between the parties. In 1995 the OSCE Co-Chairman-in-Office appointed his Personal Representative to monitor the cease-fire agreement and line of separation. His task is to create conditions for deployment of an OSCE peacekeeping operation post-settlement. The Personal Representative is permanently based in the region.

Just to complete the OSCE mission representation in the region one can mention the activity of Assistance and Advisory Group to Chechnya. OSCE institutions, very active in the region, are working through the field missions, for instance: The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), and the Co-Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental (Activities) Affairs and (The Media Representative) Freedom of the Media Office. They are closely monitoring developments in the region and offering their support each in its fields of expertise. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is also very interested in developments in the Caucasus and especially in the consolidation of the parliamentary system of government.

On a higher level, the OSCE can provide and do provide a venue and platform for broader discussions of regional security and cooperation structures. The OSCE membership includes all but one of the main players in the Caucasian debate. **The future agenda of OSCE is based on the assumption that key to stability is resolution of conflicts.** The OSCE Missions are structured on these lines, of ensuring respect for democratic institutions, rule of law and respect for human rights. Ultimate responsibility is with the states concerned; the OSCE can only advise and assist.

Regional Strategy

Cooperation at all levels of society makes sense from every point of view: economic, social, cultural and to a greater or lesser extent, political. OSCE uses a variety of structures and mechanisms to draw the region closer together and place the Caucasus into a wider geographical context. Although no consensus on such structures has been reached yet, all regional states accepted the benefits of such an approach.

The solution of all the questions and problems is in the hands of regional participants themselves. They need to resolve the conflicts around “unrecognised states” and create the environment for discussion and dialogue. Solutions can not be imposed. Outsiders, whether individuals, foundations, national or international players can only encourage, sustain and support.

The regular exchanges of information on the overall situation and on the activities of every partner organisation contribute greatly to the mission of the OSCE. In this regard, the NGOs have a very important role to play. They are an invaluable source of information and expertise and their assistance in implementing the regional strategy of the OSCE in the Caucasus would be highly encouraged. Furthermore, the NGOs are important partners of international organisations in developing and implementing joint projects in various fields, ranging from humanitarian assistance to preparing drafts for legislative reforms and facilitating their implementation. The magnitude of the problems and needs in the region requires this very close interaction of all the organisations involved. This current cooperative venture is a bright manifestation of the close interaction and cooperation of NGO and international organisations, OCSE, NATO and others.

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