

Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP)

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Background Paper

Workshop C: The OSCE as a Key Partner in the East-West Dialogue

There is no alternative to constructive dialogue when it comes to guaranteeing security and stability in the long term. This dialogue requires reliable, firmly established platforms and structures for preserving security and stability or rebuilding lost trust.

As a consensus-based organisation, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) with its 57 participating states from Vancouver to Vladivostok stands for an order of peace based on common values, fundamental freedoms and human rights like no other institution. Emerging from the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which was established in 1975 as part of the process of détente between East and West, it stands above all for dialogue between East and West, and North and South.

Since the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, a system of political commitments based on a comprehensive and co-operative concept of security has steadily evolved, encompassing the so-called "three dimensions" of the OSCE: the politico-military dimension, the economic and ecological dimension, and the human dimension. The fact that the OSCE operates on the principle of unanimity, that coercive measures are as a matter of principle not envisaged, and that the consent of the states concerned must be sought in the event of a crisis or conflict underlines the essence of this organisation as a platform for dialogue.

This dialogue takes place in many forms and at all levels. High-level annual Ministerial Councils and routine weekly consultations of the ambassadors in Vienna provide a solid basis for in-depth political exchanges at government level. At the same time, the OSCE maintains an institutionalised, intensive exchange among parliamentarians within the framework of its Parliamentary Assembly and ensures the involvement of businesses, academia and representatives of civil society through numerous regular conferences and events.

The cornerstones of the European peace architecture, which we have taken for granted for decades, are, however, being called into question in some areas today. Our European security architecture has been shaken by numerous crises and conflicts. The Ukrainian conflict has shown that the OSCE must adapt to new challenges, while at the same time

the importance of established communication structures has been reaffirmed.

Today, states and societies are confronted with an unprecedented array of global challenges that cannot be solved by a single country alone. Confidence-building measures and arms control play a central role in creating transparency, minimising risks and restoring security in Europe. But seeking joint responses to challenges, such as terrorism, extremism, cyber-attacks and the consequences of flight and migration, as well as more closely cooperating on the economic and environmental issues, also contributes to confidence-building.

Since the beginning of the Helsinki Process, the European Union (the European Communities) has played a decisive role in the work of the OSCE (CSCE). It participated in the negotiations on the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, and in 2006 the EU's participation in the OSCE was enshrined in that it was given a seat alongside the participating state currently holding the rotating EU Presidency. All EU Member States are participating states in the OSCE, and the EU and its Member States are now an important source of extra-budgetary funding for OSCE activities.

In addition, the EU is increasingly involved in regions of the OSCE participating states (such as the Balkans, the Southern Caucasus and Eastern Europe) – within the framework of its first crisis management operations under the CSDP and with the signing of Stabilisation and Association or Partnership and Cooperation Agreements. This has also led to the necessary coordination "on the ground" between EU representatives and the heads of OSCE field operations.

- How can the OSCE play a stronger role in eliminating mistrust and protecting the Helsinki Principles and Commitments aimed at achieving sustainable peace in Europe?
- Should enhanced cooperation between the EU and the OSCE be sought? If so, what shape could this take?