CHAPTER 16: EU-OSCE cooperation

Summary

This paper assesses the state of the relationship between the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and discusses the limitation and challenges to that relation, as well as opportunities and forms of future cooperation in civilian crisis management. It concludes with supporting the proposal for an in-depth discussion between the OSCE and the EU on their respective roles and ways they can support each other in practical terms in civilian crisis management activities.

OSCE and the EU: natural-born partners?

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU) have been described as “natural-born partners” by High Representative Solana. Indeed they not only have similar aims, and their activities are largely complementary, they also put into place a multitude of forms and frameworks for consultation, cooperation and coordination.

Since the momentous decision of the European Union to embark upon civilian crisis management activities and the Feira meeting of the European Council in June 2000 where priority areas in civilian crisis management were identified, more and more attention has been paid by experts to the implications of this development for the OSCE. Some observers asked whether the evolving Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)/European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) is designed to support or to sideline the OSCE, because its operations can be undertaken either autonomously or in support of the UN or the OSCE.

Indeed, prior to those decisions, the role of the EU in relation to field operations was to provide significant political and financial support to the existing operations of other organisations, especially the OSCE.

However, as of today, a concerted and serious discussion about the way forward has not taken place even within the respective organisations. This may be due to some rather complex considerations of the EU’s and OSCE’s future roles and standing. The EU developing crisis management capabilities, especially of the civilian kind, which are deployed in the OSCE area, will bring with them opportunities but also risks to the relations between the EU and the OSCE.

State of relationship

In the 1990s, the increasing number of actors involved in stabilisation activities in the OSCE area and the large scope of international cooperation with this aim resulted in coordination difficulties. In an attempt to remedy this situation, the OSCE participating states engaged in discussions on the possibility of establishing a framework for cooperation with its partners. These discussions led to the adoption of the Platform for Co-operative Security at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999, which constitutes a part of the OSCE Charter for European Security.

According to the Platform, its goal is: “to strengthen the mutually reinforcing nature of the relationship between those organisations and institutions concerned with the promotion of comprehensive security within the OSCE area”. The main instruments and mechanisms for cooperation foreseen in the Platform include: regular information exchanges and meetings, joint needs assessment missions, secondment of experts by other organisations to the OSCE, appointment of liaison officers, development of common projects and field operations, and joint training efforts.

Consultations and the exchange of information take place at the field level with European Commission delegations and EU Special Representatives, at the headquarters level
with staff meetings and visits, and at the political level with Ambassadorial and Ministerial EU-OSECE Troika meetings. Very often, both partners cooperate closely on various project activities. This is the case, for instance, in the zone of Georgian-Ossetian conflict, where the OSCE and the EU interact in developing ideas for future activities, and the European Community is supporting various OSCE initiatives such as a multi-million Euro Economic Rehabilitation Programme. The OSCE Mission to Georgia also provided backing to EU rehabilitation initiatives.

The EU’s European Neighbourhood Policy, although not developed with the primary aim of closer cooperation with the OSCE, may have the effect of bringing the EU and OSCE closer together in a number of regions. Similarly, the growing involvement of the EU in Central Asia, as reflected in the recent appointment of the EU Special Representative (SR) for the region, may have the effect of creating closer and more effective ties. The EU political contribution to negotiation processes, with the involvement of, or under the auspices of the OSCE, has recently developed, pointing to synergies and the potential to contribute jointly to addressing unresolved conflicts in the OSCE area. For instance, in Moldova, the OSCE supported the inclusion of the EU, alongside the US, in the framework for negotiations on the political settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict. Close coordination of the positions of both partners regarding this conflict is taking place, including at the level of the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the EU SR.

Finally, the EU provides considerable support to OSCE’s field operations. The EU Member States individually provide significant staff and financial contributions. Where the EU has established its own crisis management operations in the OSCE area, frameworks for consultations and exchange of information have been established. To provide examples, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the so-called “Group of Principals” meeting, chaired by the EU Special Representative and involving the OSCE Head of Mission, has formed a well-functioning basis for cooperation since the end of the 2001 conflict.

Limitations and challenges

While much is said on both sides about opportunities for cooperation, references are seldom made to the limitations or challenges that clearly exist. Most limitations are of a political nature. The key limitation for the EU and OSCE in their relationship is their different membership. The broader membership of the OSCE, with its 56 participating states, implies by necessity a broader spectrum of policies and interests. In such a setting, EU Member States cannot assume that they will be able to always set the agenda of the OSCE. The consensus-based decision-making process in the OSCE must take the interests of all its participating states into account.

The doubts raised by a number of participating states about the general direction of the work and role of the OSCE point to a division which some have referred to as the “values and commitment gap” emerging between, for example, the EU countries and the US on the one hand, and a number of other states on the other. One of its expressions is differing attitudes towards the field operations of the OSCE, and in particular the balance of its activities, especially in the human dimension, and its political and reporting role. Should far-reaching changes to the way the OSCE field operations function be introduced, the value of those field operations to the EU may also decrease.

A further aspect that may limit cooperation in civilian crisis management somewhat is the selection of the theatres in which the EU and the OSCE may become active. The EU Security Strategy defines geographic priorities beyond Europe, and thus the EU can act out of the area of its membership and define its interests more globally. The OSCE, on the other hand, is active largely in its own area, in particular through its field operations deployed in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Most recently, in response to a request by Afghanistan and interest from a number of its participating states for the OSCE to become more active in adjacent areas, the OSCE has assisted elections in Afghanistan twice on an ad hoc basis – this, however, is bound to remain an exception.

While the general aims are similar, the specific priorities of the EU and the OSCE do not always coincide fully. Significantly, there is no mechanism in place for the partners to coordinate during the EU’s planning stage for programmes and activities (apart from regular exchanges at various levels). Consequently, it is sometimes felt in the OSCE that support from the EU could be better administered to certain, specific programmes of the OSCE, such as police assistance efforts in Caucasus and Central Asia. Finally, with the increase of the EU’s involvement in field activities, the competition for qualified staff is bound to increase.

Future cooperation

The OSCE is well-placed to tackle the threats and challenges to security identified in the security strategies of the EU and the OSCE, and the EU and its Member States could be instrumental in ensuring that the potential of the OSCE is fully realised.
Dynamic developments in the security situation in the OSCE area might soon require a much closer operational cooperation. In particular, if tangible results are achieved in the framework of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement process, the two partners will need to intensify their contacts on this issue to exchange information and to seek to coordinate their respective efforts. In particular, the extent of the reconstruction and security needs in the zone of conflict will require the involvement of various international actors who have made commitments to provide necessary human and financial resources. The OSCE could provide a flexible coordinating framework for various international activities in the region. Active participation of the EU in all stages of this process would be of particular importance, as it would be hardly imaginable that any serious international effort in the zone of conflict could be implemented without the EU.

Cooperation between the OSCE and the EU on Kosovo will also be crucial and might actually define the future character of the relationship. The OSCE and the EU are expected to take on an increased role following status discussions, in particular to assume some of the functions performed at present by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, UNMIK. The first step in defining future responsibilities was the creation of an informal Steering Group on contingency planning for future arrangements. Initial discussions indicated that the envisaged roles of the OSCE and the EU might not be always fully compatible and/or complementary. Thus both partners engaged in a dialogue with a view to seeking synergies, avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring that tasks and responsibilities are delegated according to comparative advantages and the practical experience of the relevant actors. As stated recently by Martti Ahtisaari in Vienna: “Managing the division of labour with other actors, such as the OSCE, and the coordination and the mobilisation of resources of the international community will not be solved easily. Lessons from Bosnia and Herzegovina should be carefully mirrored to the case of Kosovo.” As far as the status negotiations are concerned, the OSCE would have benefited from being better informed about developments and their repercussions for its presence in Kosovo.

Mechanisms for consultations and contacts

The existing forms of interaction on civilian crisis management should be further streamlined. A systematic exchange of regional and thematic expertise and lessons learnt at all levels should become a standard practice in relations between the two partners. OSCE representatives should also be able to participate regularly and more fully in relevant meetings in Brussels, including in the Political and Security Committee, Working Party on the OSCE and the Council of Europe, COSCE, and relevant working groups. Finally, as observed by Martti Ahtisaari, “a practical step to facilitate dialogue might be to strengthen the institutional representation of the organisations at headquarters level”.

While the European Commission has its Delegation in Kosovo, the OSCE lacks structures that could provide permanent liaison with the EU.

On a more technical side, interaction between the Situation Rooms of the OSCE and the EU should be strengthened, particularly through a more active exchange of information. Principles for such exchanges should be clearly defined by both partners to ensure uninterrupted flow of vital information between the two headquarters.

Joint activities

In regions of common interest, joint fact-finding missions could be organised with the aim to prepare joint reports and/or contribute to the development of proposals on ways to achieve common goals. Depending on the case, such activities could involve representatives of other international organisations and NGOs. This would help to improve international interaction on topical issues, increasing the impact of the relevant findings, improving the prospects for the implementation of relevant proposals and contributing to a more efficient use of existing human and financial resources.

Thematic missions

Thinking is also developing on new types of OSCE operations which address more effectively the broad spectrum of new threats and challenges to security. For instance, according to the Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on Strengthening the Effectiveness of the OSCE issued on 27 June 2005, such thematic missions “could look at a specific issue in one country, or (…) ensure coherence in the work in a broader regional/sub-regional context.” If created, such missions might become yet another framework for OSCE-EU interaction in a particular geographical area or related to a horizontal issue, such as counter-terrorism; the fight against

5. Ibid.
organised crime; the prevention of trafficking in human beings, drugs and arms; the promotion of rule of law and good governance; and justice sector reform.

Frameworks for co-ordination of field activities
The introduction of an improved coordination mechanism regarding the present and future activities in the field, including training programmes, is necessary to ensure that efforts are not duplicated, and that such activities correspond to actual needs. Such a mechanism could, inter alia, foresee a system of cross-reference pools of experts and lecturers. Moreover, both partners could be organising joint training and induction programmes for future members of field operations. First initiatives on the latter issue have already been made.

Activities of the OSCE funded through extra-budgetary contributions
The EU is among the biggest donors to OSCE’s activities funded through extra-budgetary contributions. An agreement defining the modalities for the use of EU resources by the OSCE is being negotiated between the partners, and should have the effect of clarifying and simplifying for the OSCE aspects of technical and bureaucratic requirements for cooperation in this sphere.

Administrative issues
The OSCE has acquired vast experience on issues related to the staffing of field operations, as well as procurement and the integrated management of assets. This experience could be shared with the EU experts, who have expressed interest in learning from the OSCE.

Concluding remarks
Cooperation between the OSCE and the EU on civilian crises management issues has been developing steadily over the last few years and is a function of the good relationship between the two partners. In most cases, the interaction between the OSCE and the EU has been very successful. Some elements of competition are bound to remain, particularly due to the varying memberships. Yet, there are some areas where improvements are possible and necessary.

It becomes increasingly clear that the interaction between the OSCE and the EU would improve if full advantage were taken of all the various possibilities for practical cooperation described above. Therefore, while future cooperation between the OSCE and the EU should remain flexible and non-bureaucratic, it seems that the time has come for both partners to review their relationship and to look for ways of making it more operational. Some argue that the best way to do this would be to develop a formal agreement on modalities for cooperation between the OSCE and the EU, while others think that a less formal, common catalogue of cooperation modalities, like the one between the OSCE and the Council of Europe, would be more appropriate. From our perspective, the format for future agreements does not seem to be of primary importance. What matters is that the OSCE and the EU manage to find a common understanding on their respective roles in civilian crisis management, their comparative advantages, as well as ways they can support each other on practical issues. The sooner a serious dialogue on these issues begins the better for both partners and for the entire system of international cooperation on civilian crisis management in the OSCE area.
Since 1992 the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe/Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE/OSCE) has deployed some 30 field operations at the request of the host countries. Its first field deployment ever was the short-lived CSCE Missions of Long Duration in Kosovo, Sandjak and Vojvodina, in the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. The longest continuously-serving field operation is the Spillover Monitoring Mission to Skopje, also established in 1992, now with a broader mandate from the original conflict prevention tasks (i.e. blocking any spillover of the Yugoslav war).

The second longest-serving OSCE field operation is the Mission to Georgia. It is worth noting that from 1999 until the end of 2004, the Mission also included a border monitoring operation (BMO). The BMO observed a 280-kilometre stretch of the mountainous border between Georgia and the Chechen, Ingush and Dagestani Republics of the Russian Federation.

The largest OSCE field operation ever was the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) deployed in Kosovo prior to the NATO campaign in 1999. Today, the largest field operation is the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK), some 900 mission members.

Currently, there are 19 field operations across the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the southern Caucasus and Central Asia. In total, about 3 000 OSCE staff are employed in field operations, the majority locally-contracted. The largest operations are in the Balkans, although a gradual shift of the Organisation’s financial and human resources towards the southern Caucasus and Central Asia began recently.

Although varying greatly, all mandates of OSCE field operations share the fact that they require the consensus of the 56 states that are part of the Organisation, including the host states. So far, the OSCE has only deployed field operations on the territory of its participating states. Mandates always cover one or more of the three dimensions of the OSCE’s work (political-military, economic/environmental, human) and often refer to activities related to one or more phases of the conflict cycle with which the OSCE – as a UN Chapter VIII regional arrangement – is available to assist: early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management or post-conflict rehabilitation.

All field operations cooperate in a political and practical sense at headquarters, field office and project levels with the OSCE’s main partners among international organisations (the United Nations, Council of Europe, European Union and NATO) as well as with subregional organisations and international and locally-based non-governmental organisations.

In their activities, field operations receive active support from the OSCE Secretariat, including from its specialised units, and from OSCE Institutions.