

The OSCE and Peace in the Post-socialist Area

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How has the OSCE Fostered Peace in the Post-socialist Area and has it been a Success?

Before any assessment of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and its activities can be made, it is necessary to understand what the organisation is, how it works, and the actors involved in the conflicts occurring in the post-socialist area. The history of the nation-states involved is also vital in comprehending the difficulties facing the OSCE. The following essay will consider these factors and examine the conflicts in Moldova and Chechnya. However, it should be noted that the involvement of the OSCE in the said areas is ongoing. Therefore a true assessment of any development may be premature.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is a regional organisation, currently consisting of fifty-five member states, mainly European but also including the United States of America and Canada. Initially formed as the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) under the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, the organisation did not become institutionalised until 1994 under the Charter of Paris. It was in 1995 that the CSCE became the OSCE and was recognised under the UN Charter.

At its conception, the CSCE was intended to be a forum for cooperation between the East and West during the Cold War[1]. The Helsinki Final Act, in essence, solidified the equilibrium in Europe[2]. In other words, borders would be uncontested, national sovereignty would be reinforced and security-building processes would be sought in order to encourage calm and collaboration throughout Europe[3]. However, at the end of the Cold War in 1989, it was recognised that the original mandate would need to be adjusted in order to address the issues raised with the disintegration of the USSR[4]. The fresh mandate focussed on reducing the tensions within the newly created states[5] such as Moldova, Georgia and the Ukraine but there was also activity in the Russian region of Chechnya.

It was acknowledged that the nature of war had changed since the conclusion of both World Wars and that in order to be successful in maintaining security and cooperation in Europe, there were more complex matters to consider whilst establishing cooperation between conflicting sides. It was with this in mind that the organisation targeted its activities around three areas or 'baskets'. Basket one is the Politico-Military Dimension, which is concerned with issues such as sovereignty and the promotion of confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs)[6]. Basket two is the Economic-Environmental Dimension and focuses on the cooperation of states within the region relating to the promotion of economic development and the combating of environmental degradation[7]. The final Basket is the Human Dimension, which is concerned with gaining universality of human rights through democratic processes and institutions[8].

The functions of the OSCE include socialization, recruitment, rule making, information and intelligence sharing, aggregation, and the creation of norms, especially in regard to human rights. The Parliamentary Assembly has proven supportive in the socialisation of new democratic states as it allows the new members to socialise with those of more experience who may offer support and guidance[9]. It is also the Parliamentary Assembly that ensures the cooperation between the legislatures of the member states. The recruitment process for the OSCE involves an individual being submitted by their state to the Ministerial Council for confirmation[10]. Any seconded positions within the OSCE are paid for by the relevant member state and not the OSCE itself and no member state holds more than one seconded position simultaneously[11]. The Section for External Cooperation, under the Secretariat, is

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responsible for coordinating with other international organisations and for sharing information with them[12]. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) provides technical assistance and monitoring of areas where breaches of human rights have occurred or threaten to occur[13].

Decision-making within the OSCE is carried out within the Permanent Council. This institution is much like the General Assembly of the United Nations. The decisions are made on a consensus-minus-one basis[14], that being that the state at the centre of the issue is not entitled to vote. However, this has only been used once in the history of the OSCE and involved Yugoslavia[15]. It is also within the Permanent Council that field missions, subcommittees and field activities are created although once established, these become the responsibility of the Conflict Prevention Centre, an arm of the Secretariat[16]. The Permanent Council receives its agenda, which it can expand, from the Chairman-in-Office[17]. It also carries out the business of the Ministerial Councils[18].

The Chairman-in-Office directs the Permanent Council in terms of agenda. The role of Chairman-in-Office falls to the Foreign Minister of whichever state holds the office. Although there is no rotational method dictating which state holds the position, it has not yet been held by any country on more than one occasion[19]. The role lasts for a period of twelve months but to ensure constancy, permanence and institutional memory, the OSCE has a Troika System in place[20]. This consists of the former, the present and the future Chairman-in-Office[21].

Ministerial Councils and Summits are held when there is a specific issue to consider[22]. For example, should the OSCE wish to consider setting up a mission in a certain area, a summit would be held with the relevant actors to determine the mandate. Any decision recommended by a Council or Summit is then submitted to the Permanent Council for consideration.

As an international organisation, the OSCE differs from other organisations in fundamental ways. Firstly, it has no forces of its own, which has become a point of criticism but is perhaps the main reason to why the OSCE has enjoyed relative success in areas where others may have failed. The lack of forces essentially means that should troops need to be deployed, such as peacekeepers, this needs to be subcontracted out to other organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and NATO. Secondly, the OSCE concentrates on the political commitment of the actors involved in a conflict rather than the legal obligations[23], as is demonstrated by the UN. In addition to this, the institutions of the OSCE are spread throughout Europe, the region of its activities. For example, the Parliamentary Assembly is based in Copenhagen, the Secretariat is based in Vienna and the Permanent Council is based in Berlin[24].

During conflict, the OSCE has various options to consider. In the case of the Post-Socialist area, this has involved setting up missions such as the Mission to Moldova, established in 1993[25] and the Assistance Group to Chechnya, established in 1995[26]. There have also been activities such as monitoring the performance of the Croatian Police[27]. The mandates to such actions vary from conflict to conflict but tend to share the same broad ambition in achieving peace and cooperation between actors through methods of preventative diplomacy.

Prior to the restructuring in the early 1990s, the OSCE was restricted in the action that it could consider. However, its recognition by the UN allowed the role of the OSCE to expand and to become more involved in conflict prevention and crisis management[28]. It was also now able to legitimise the involvement of other international organisations in activities in the region such as NATO[29] and UN Peacekeeping[30].

Since the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe has been involved in five conflicts within the former socialist area: Chechnya-Russia; Transdnistria-Moldova; Abkhazia and South Ossetia-Georgia; Nagorno Karabakh – Azerbaijan; Azerbaijan-Armenia[31]. The involvement of the organisation has been of varying degrees of success.

Officially, the conflict with the Transdnestrian region began in 1992[32]. There had been tension between the Moldovan government and the citizens of the region since the separation from the USSR. This was mainly due to the nation's turbulent past. Moldova was originally a part of the USSR but in 1918 became part of Romania[33]. In 1944, control of the region was passed back to the USSR and this remained the case until it achieved autonomy at

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the end of the Cold War[34]. To celebrate and demonstrate the newfound independence of Moldova, the government in Chisnau announced its intention to revert the official language back to Moldovan and to return the written language back to the original Latin script[35]. These attempts proved successful much to the dismay of a minority based in the Transdnestrian region that greatly feared that their country was preparing to be unified once again with Romania[36]. In 1992, the 'Moldovan Transdnestrian Republic' declared independence[37], thus leading the tension into open conflict. Russian Forces assisted the Transdnestrians and eventually the Moldovan Police and armed forces were overcome[38]. After several months, the Moldovans withdrew from the region[39].

At the beginning of the conflict, the Moldovans had requested the involvement of the United Nations and the OSCE in mediation but due to the limitations experienced by the OSCE before reformation, there was little that could be done[40]. By the time the OSCE had the freedom to become more involved the conflict had erupted[41]. However, a Ceasefire between the sides was signed in July 1992 in which Russia was made a third party and the Transdnestrians were allowed to participate in peacekeeping activities[42]. At the present time, the OSCE is attempting to persuade the Moldovan government to break this agreement because the Ceasefire arrangement was designed to suit the desires of Russia. This would allow for a new agreement to be established that would promote the needs of Moldova and the Transdnestrians.

The mandate of the Mission to Moldova was to "facilitate the achievement of a lasting, comprehensive political settlement" between the warring sides[43]. This was to be achieved through a number of means: the structuring of a wide-ranging political agenda that would create a channel of communication and allow negotiations; the collection and sharing of information in regard to military activity, specific incidents and the political implications of incidents; the promotion to both sides of the withdrawal of foreign troops; providing advice and expertise and; the visible presence of the OSCE[44]. In 1999, this was expanded to include the extraction and destruction of Russian ammunition and weaponry, and the coordination of monetary and practical assistance to allow this[45]. The inclusion of weapons disposal was a first for the OSCE[46]. There was yet more expansion in 2003 to include the concerns of human trafficking and gender issues[47].

In the initial conflict between Moldova and the 'Moldovan Transdnestrian Republic' there were an estimated several hundred casualties and over one hundred thousand refugees[48]. Since the presence of the Mission to Moldova the numbers have reached nowhere near these[49]. However, the conflict is far from being extinguished and the OSCE perhaps understands that in order to prevent a similar situation in the future, the younger generations of both sides of the conflict need to be educated of their similarities rather than propagandised of their differences. In 2006 the OSCE launched 'Music For Peace', a rock festival aimed at bringing the two cultures together[50].

The Mission to Moldova, established on 4th February 1993[51] could be argued to have occurred after the damage was already too significant, too late to be preventative. The mandate for the Mission to Moldova has not yet been fulfilled but the activities in the country are not over. There have been small steps in the 'fostering of peace' such as an agreement with the government of Moldova to grant the Transdnestrian region special status[52]. Although this is not the full independence that is wanted by those in the region, it is hoped that the continued involvement of the OSCE would enable further peaceful negotiations.

The conflict between Russia and the region of Chechnya is slightly different from the conflict in Moldova in that Chechnya has always been a part of Russia and was not granted independence at the end of the Cold War. However, since the demise of the USSR, tensions in the area have worsened. Perhaps this has been a result of other areas declaring independence and being recognised as such and Chechnya being denied similar significance. As a member state of the OSCE, Russia is obligated to ensure that norms and regulations of the organisation are adhered to[53]. The signing of the Vienna Document in 1994 at the Budapest Summit was an agreement of all new member states to this effect[54]. However, less than a week after this event, Russia launched an offensive against Chechen rebels that involved using heavy weapons against civilian targets[55]. This act was clearly a breach of the agreement that Russia had recently signed although the Russians did argue that it was merely a misjudgement and that they had expected the overwhelmed militants to surrender[56].

The participation of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in the conflict began with the agreement

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between Russia and Chechnya for the establishment of the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya in 1995[57]. This in itself was a curious development because technically the conflict was an 'internal' matter, and Russia had previously voiced a strong opinion against the involvement of anybody else in the issue[58]. The initial mandate for the Assistance Group was to negotiate a ceasefire agreement and end the fighting between the Chechens and the Russians[59]. In addition to this, part of the mandate was the allowance of aid to be sent to the Chechen civilians and assistance provided to citizens who had been displaced by the conflict that would allow them to return home[60]. Some of the projects that were established under the Assistance Group included the provision of clean water, medical supplies and places for children to play and learn[61].

However, cooperation between the Russians, Chechens and OSCE proved to be ill fated and the Assistance Group was forced to withdraw and continue their humanitarian efforts from Moscow in December 1998[62]. In the following year, the international community called for a political settlement to the dispute. This led to the Charter for European Security[63]. In June 2001, the OSCE was allowed to set up a permanent office in the Chechen town of Znamenskoy[64]. The mandate from the previous activity was reinstated with Russian cooperation based on the agreement that there would be no NATO involvement in the area[65]. However, the effort of the OSCE again proved fruitless and in March 2003 the mandate for the Assistance Group in Chechnya was not renewed[66].

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe has not yet successfully 'fostered peace' in the post-socialist area but this is because there was no established peace to foster and any progress is going to take time due to the complexities involved. This essay has only mentioned two of the many conflicts that the OSCE has been involved in and, with the exception of Chechnya, the work of the organisation is still being carried out. The Cold War ended nearly twenty years ago and during this time, the OSCE has continued its establishment in the international arena as a viable alternative to air strikes and troop deployment. It has understood that war is no longer as clear-cut as it once was and that for any kind of peace to be established, intricate work needs to be undertaken by all parties of a dispute. It also understands that this takes time and its commitment is surely its true success. As far as the actions of the OSCE are concerned, it is impossible to carry out negotiations between the parties of a dispute without cooperation at some level. In both Moldova and Chechnya, the OSCE has worked towards building security and cooperation but the failure of any commitment to long-term peace cannot be attributed solely to the organisation. A key actor in both conflicts is Russia and many believe that until Russia changes its foreign policy, a long-term solution in any post-socialist area is unlikely. In Moldova, Russia continues to provide weapons to both sides and the ceasefire that was put in place is one that was intended to benefit Russia and neither the Moldovans nor the Transdnistrians. In Chechnya, it is the Russians who initially refused to co-operate with the terms of OSCE involvement despite having signed the agreements to do so. Perhaps the words of former President Yeltsin best explain the problems in the post-socialist area and why any conclusion appears to be beyond the reach of the OSCE at the present time, "Everyone knows that we Russians do not like to obey all sorts of rules, laws, instructions, and directives-any kind of previously established regimentation of behaviour. We are a casual sort of people and rules cut us like a knife"[67].

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