OSCE: A Natural Home for Europe's Neutrals?

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Introduction

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is one of the least understood components of European security. It has been suggested that it grew out of the USSR's desire for a formal recognition of the post-war territorial status quo in Europe, and the West's desire to achieve progress in military security and later to address humanitarian concerns[2].

The Helsinki process and the resulting OSCE were neither intended nor structured to deal by themselves with the most serious military challenges during the great East-West differences of the Cold War: namely, the risk of sudden attack by large conventional armed forces forward-deployed in the heart of Europe and the attendant threat of early nuclear escalation. But what OSCE could provide policy makers was a different sort of security tool: a relatively unique forum for substantive discussion, and in some cases negotiation, on various European security problems in a broad multilateral context that was not based on any group membership or affiliation.

The OSCE has unique attributes, the most important being that is regarded as the most inclusive Euro-Atlantic forum for conciliation and joint action. Its geographical diversity stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok, and it includes all of the Central Asian republics that were once part of the USSR. As the only pan-European security organization, the OSCE has played a fairly important role in the realm of ameliorating past hostilities and security-building. To some, however, the OSCE is known primarily if not exclusively for its human rights advocacy as the product of the Helsinki Process in 1975. Indeed, the relationship between the full observance of human rights and security remains fundamental to the OSCE. Others think of the OSCE still in terms of its former identity as the rotating CSCE. The fact, though, is that the OSCE has gained prominence in its own right because of the visible and effective role it has played in enhancing overall security within and among states[3].

This paper attempts to show the extent to which neutral states have acted strategically in the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and its predecessor the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). That means the extent to which they have acted to preserve and enhance their security while at the same time contributed to the stability, development and efficacy of CSCE/OSCE. In this context, the discussion looks at how neutral states functioned in the CSCE; what strategies did they employ and if and how the institutional fabric of the CSCE/OSCE proved conducive. The latter is of great importance for it is the nature of the institution that did shape the role and strategies of the neutrals, especially during the Cold War. Of course, the behaviour and actions of neutral states should not be seen as unique to the CSCE/OSCE. Rather, it followed patterns that have characterised the neutrals in other international organizations where the stakes were similar or – more importantly – where the decision making process were favourable[4].

Institutional Overview

As one of the largest and most active regional security organizations in the world, in 2009 the OSCE comprised 56 participating states from all of Europe, most of North America and parts of Eurasia. Since the Helsinki Charter was adopted in 1975, the participating states have found a common normative ground in the CSCE/OSCE.
The OSCE characterizes its approach to regional security as both cooperative and comprehensive.Cooperative in the sense that the OSCE is broadly inclusive in nature: it is not directed against any country; all participating states have a consensus-based equal status. Co-operative security is the underlying principle of the OSCE. It starts from the assumption that security is indivisible, and that the co-operation of all parties is required to guarantee security, peace, and stability.This understanding has led the OSCE participating states to adopt a comprehensive approach to security, which is illustrated by the OSCE's geographical scope (reaching from Vancouver to Vladivostok).

Although ignored in several debates on security, the comprehensive approach of the OSCE aimed at dealing with an unusually wide range of security-related issues, including preventive diplomacy, political and military confidence and security building measures, arms control, human rights, democratization, election monitoring and steps to strengthen both economic and environmental security. In line with its documents, the tasks of the OSCE are threefold (known as the Helsinki baskets): security issues, economic, scientific, technology, and environmental issues; and human-dimension issues[5].

This approach to security has meant that although originally conceived as a mechanism for fostering dialogue between East and West in the Cold War period, the OSCE reinvented itself to participate in the architecture of Europe by mostly monitoring political risks. Unlike security military regional organizations such as NATO, the OSCE monitoring activities have developed the function of warning members about growing political risks as well as providing systematized information to exert pressure when members fail to live up the OSCE commitments[6]. Despite the fact that the OSCE is a 'soft' security organization, its reports on elections and human rights, *inter alia*, contribute to the legitimization of the performance of its members in these areas. In fact, although OSCE peacekeeping capacities are limited, the OSCE Chairman-in-office may appeal to organizations like NATO or the EU (UN) to enforce sanctions on OSCE member states that deliberately and repeatedly violate OSCE norms and agreements[7]. Currently, the OSCE's 19 missions or field operations are working to advance security, human rights and conflict resolution from the Balkans to Central Asia, the largest one being in Kosovo. The geography of the displayed missions reflects the fact that numerous former centralized economies and CIS countries are struggling to improve their democratic political performances[8].

Since its inception, the OSCE has achieved a high level of legitimacy in its core business of norm-setting. By adopting the Paris Charter in 1990, the OSCE participating states have paved the way for the recognition of democracy as the only legitimate principle of governance within the OSCE area. With this, these states have directly linked the quality of interstate order to their ability to organize internal sovereignty along liberal democratic lines. Although this consensus has opened the door for constructive intervention within the system of each state (by political means) and outside the territory of any given state, the OSCE cannot enforce actions against the will of a participating state.

The institutional structure of the OSCE has matured gradually since the adoption of the 1990 Paris Charter. Today, the OSCE operates with a complex but rather light structure[9].In general, all OSCE bodies decide by consensus. Deviations from the consensus principle are foreseen in cases of clear, gross, and uncorrected violations of OSCE commitments. In this case, the so-called Prague mechanism of 'consensus minus one' can be activated against a participating state. Similarly, the Ministerial Council can decide by 'consensus minus two' in cases where two states cannot agree on resolving a dispute. The consensus rules were specifically designed to reflect the ideal of sovereign equality. This has been agreed upon as the fundamental principle without any dissention.

The main decision-making bodies and administrative structures are based in Vienna; two institutions are based in Warsaw and The Hague, respectively. The heads of the participating states meet every two (or more) years for summit meetings, which set out the strategic guidelines of the OSCE. Between summit meetings, the OSCE Foreign Ministers meet in the Ministerial Council to discuss issues of importance to the OSCE. The regular body for political consultation and decision-making is the Permanent Council, which consists of the permanent representatives of OSCE states. Originally established to prepare the Ministerial Council meetings, the Senior Council has lost importance. Since 1997, the Senior Council has only met at the annual Economic Forum. Finally, the Forum for Security Co-operation is the regular body that deals with arms control and confidence-building and security-building measures.

The most important operational institution is the Chairman in Office (CiO), which rotates annually among the participating states. Supported by the previous and the succeeding Chairmen, the CiO is responsible for executive action and the co-ordination of the OSCE's activities. In addition, the CiO can also take recourse to the Secretary General and the Secretariat, which provides administrative support. The role of the Secretary General and the Secretariat is rather limited, as they have no political mandate. Among other bodies, the Secretariat includes the Conflict Prevention Center, which runs the Operation Center, and the OSCE Coordinator on Economic and Environmental Activities.

In 1992, the Office for Free Elections (established 1990) was renamed the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The ODIHR, whose normative basis can be traced back to the basic principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, was given expanded functions along with its new name.Among other things, it organizes annual Human Dimension Implementation Meetings, serves as a framework for "assisting the new democracies in their institution building," facilitates co-operation in training, and develops co-operation with the Council of Europe and non-governmental organizations.

The ODIHR has four main sections. The Election Section promotes democratic elections by monitoring them and by giving election training and assistance in drafting legislation. In observing elections, the ODIHR cooperates closely with the parliamentary assemblies of both the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The Democratization Section runs programs to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law, promote human rights, civil society, and gender equality, and to fight trafficking in human beings. A small Monitoring Section follows human rights developments as well as the participating states' compliance with OSCE human dimension commitments, thus fulfilling an early-warning function. Finally, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, established in 1994, serves as a clearing-house for the exchange of information and for assistance for Roma- and Sinti-related policies.

The post of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) was established in 1992. The High Commissioner provides early warning and early action in response to tensions involving national minority issues which have not yet developed beyond an early warning stage but could affect peace and stability in the OSCE area. The HCNM is not a minority ombudsman, but belongs to the security dimension of the OSCE. Since the High Commissioner works on the basis of the OSCE's human dimension principles, the office combines the security and the human dimensions in a unique way, thus creating an innovative instrument for early warning and conflict prevention. The HCNM works independently, impartially, and confidentially. He decides when and where to engage and in what form, but has no power to impose solutions on opposing parties.

The Representative on Freedom of the Media was established at the 1996 OSCE Lisbon Summit; The FOM's mandate is basically twofold. First, assuming an early-warning function, the FOM observes relevant media developments in participating states and advocates and promotes full compliance with OSCE principles regarding freedom of the media. In doing so, he co-operates closely with the Permanent Council, ODIHR, and the HCNM. Second, and in close co-operation with the CiO, he concentrates on rapid responses in cases of serious non-compliance, seeks direct contact with parties involved, assesses the facts and contributes to conflict resolution.

The Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) is a decision-making body for negotiations on arms control, disarmament, and confidence-and security-building measures (CSBM), as well as regular consultations on security related matters. It is expected to help reduce the risk of conflicts and will follow the implementation of agreed-upon measures.Since its establishment in 1992, the scope of the FSC has gradually expanded. It covers such diverse activities as the harmonization of arms control and CSBM obligations, the global exchange of military information (concerning, for instance, force planning and defence conversion), and co-operation with regard to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Although the FSC has lost some of its original importance due to the activities of other international organizations (mainly NATO), the 1994 'Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security' was a landmark example in norm-setting. The code sets out rules for the effective and democratic control of armed forces and provides norms and restrictions for internal security missions of armed forces. In addition to the aforementioned key institutions, the OSCE has also established a Parliamentary Assembly and the Court of Conciliation and Arbitration in Geneva, which aims at the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Institutional Performance

The various details of the OSCE's organizational evolution over the years may prove to be much less important than the political insights that might be gleaned from a consideration of the OSCE experience with its missed opportunities. This might offer useful lessons on two fundamental questions: First, how to sustain a meaningful regional dialogue on cooperative security in the face of significantly differing interests and expectations among its potential participants, especially when the diplomatic field is littered with past disappointments.Second, how to use such regional arrangements as a means of buffering and managing the longer-term political and security challenges, posed by substantial and ongoing change in the region's overall strategic environment[10].

As an experiment in advancing regional security and cooperation, the OSCE ensured its relevance not by papering over the serious differences originally existing among its participating states, but rather by providing both basic principles and a standing process through which its participants could regularly review the practical implications of those differences.As an organization, OSCE retained a politically based flexibility that enabled it to evolve radically to meet new circumstances and new needs of its participants[11]. In the Cold War strategic environment the negotiating process that started at Helsinki and has been going on for more than three decades laid out certain basic principles of behavior[12]. In substance, much of this was not overly different from other multilateral charters and agreements arrived at in the U.N. context. But in establishing review mechanisms and follow-up meetings, the Helsinki process reflected a built-in assumption of profound differences among its participants. In that sense, the OSCE phenomenon was different from Europe's experience with either NATO or the EU, all of whose members were presumed to share a basic set of common interests from the very start.

In this way, the OSCE was able to escape the fate of too many summit-level initiatives: high-sounding commitments announced in communiqués that quickly fell into disuse and political neglect. By providing for the regular review and frank discussion of the status of all of its participants' implementation of their Helsinki commitments, the OSCE generated many lively, heated exchanges (it still does). But, paradoxically, this focus on constant review ensured that participating states increasingly had to take these OSCE discussions seriously. Further, over time, a number of smaller states came to see the OSCE as a useful vehicle by which they could air their own special security concerns and flag emerging problems in their immediate region. This gave, in effect, a political early-warning function to OSCE.

In its philosophy and practice, the OSCE process was designed to reaffirm an equal status and legitimacy for each of its participants and their respective security concerns, thus reinforcing a sense of stability to the overall system of European security. But, as events played out, the OSCE did not represent a frozen state of European affairs, nor was it meant to reinforce a totally static environment. On the contrary, a recurring emphasis on Helsinki's basic principles provided for and actively encouraged processes of peaceful and positive change, both among states and, no less important, within their societies.

A special contribution of OSCE was thus to legitimize a wide-ranging regional discussion of what actually constitutes security that led to the adoption of the cooperative and comprehensive approaches. The OSCE provided both a multilateral framework and a supportive political culture in which such issues could be discussed as the legitimate concern of countries of the region as a whole. The normative framework of the CSCE emerged from the participating states' collective attempts to develop rules and standards through which stability and security could be maintained. According to Flynn and Farrell, 'the framework was consciously created, it addressed critical new security issues that states either could not or did not want to deal with through traditional means to security, and it enabled new forms of collective action.'[13]

Paralleling the dramatic changes in East-West relations from 1989 onward, the Helsinki process came to evolve into the OSCE of today, a regional institution no longer based on a Europe sharply divided, but rather a post-Cold War institution with a new operational emphasis on joint efforts in democracy-building, conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation[14].As an institution, OSCE did not become obsolete because it remained politically based, was relatively light in its bureaucratic structure, and was able to perform some regional tasks with much less difficulty and expense than other organizations, such as the United Nations. With a relatively low public profile, it enjoyed a certain freedom to experiment with new tasks and, on occasion, even to fail without great repercussion.

Effectiveness was a pivotal issue in the process initiated in Helsinki. This concerned in practice all decisions – from the Helsinki Final Recommendations, adopted 30 years ago to the CSCE Final Act (1975), the Paris Charter for a New Europe (1990) to the decisions of the successive OSCE summits over the last decade (Helsinki – 1992, Budapest – 1994, Lisbon – 1996 and Istanbul – 1999). The respect for human and minority rights, political pluralism, building of the state of law and the support for democracy and the institutions of civic society in particular were of key importance for the settlement of disputes and conflicts, crisis management and eradicating the sources of tensions and potential new conflicts. It goes without saying that the mandate of the Organization, adopted in Paris in 1990 and supplemented two years later in Helsinki (1992) fully reflected the new needs and challenges.

In this regard, it is important not to forget the trial-and-error aspect of cooperative multilateral approaches to regional security. For instance, European and American policy makers developed, only after some fits and starts, a realistic sense of what an institution like OSCE could, and could not, best contribute. As constituted, OSCE could not provide hard security against threats of aggression or intimidation through its own military guarantees or collective defence arrangements.But what it could offer was a fairly important security supplement: an all-inclusive process by which mutual confidence building and reciprocal reassurance could help to lessen the political likelihood of any such threats arising.

OSCE's relevance and its instances of success in overcoming specific barriers to East-West cooperation were made possible only by sustaining a visible balance of power, the effective deterrence of threats, and a resulting stable peace in Europe. This security environment was made possible, through some very difficult periods, only by the durability of other regional relationships and institutions, such as NATO and the EU. Thus the contribution of OSCE to the notion of cooperative security within Europe could not be divorced from these other key institutions. Despite occasional half-hearted mutterings out of Moscow (and periodic qualms among some in Washington), the OSCE never represented a serious attempt to replace existing alliance structures or other security relationships.And by the late 1990s, there was the growing possibility for Eastern states to integrate into these very groups at the core of the West, NATO and the EU.

Over time, OSCE also became an instrument for managing the effects of strategic change. As the European landscape began to change radically with the fall of the Berlin Wall, OSCE's role as the only all-inclusive European body dealing with security issues, however 'soft' in nature, came to be seen as a special political asset. On the one hand, OSCE's trans-Atlantic nature recognized the indispensable contribution that the United States brought to security and peace in Europe. On the other hand, its pan-European cast made clear that all states should have a legitimate and equal seat at the table. This latter aspect of OSCE proved to be particularly useful in the political management and reassurance of those states most affected by drastic strategic change with the break-up of the Soviet Union: a potentially isolated Russia and its anxious smaller neighbours.

In that context, it is worth emphasizing the OSCE's role in confidence building.The OSCE's agenda has been such that European and American policy makers have been able to balance the broad political discussion of comprehensive and cooperative security with a much narrower and practical focus on those measures that could bring greater transparency and predictability to regional military affairs. In this long-term process, OSCE's most important contribution to reciprocal reassurance has rested with its provisions for extensive verification, confirmation and accountability[15].

The participants in the OSCE process sought to address this particular challenge by providing for a standing venue requiring regular follow-up discussion in a largely non-politicized and supportive multilateral context. Over time, these discussions have lent themselves to the negotiation of new measures. Many of these have moved beyond the original military concerns to deal increasingly with less traditional emerging threats to common security[16].

A smaller number of OSCE participants also negotiated and subsequently updated the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty regime. This long-term effort established a structure of stable, predictable and verifiable numerical limits on the conventional ground and air equipment holdings of the largest European militaries. Even with subsequent political changes throughout Europe, CFE continues to govern those military levels and deployments within Europe. The resulting levels of U.S. and NATO ground and air forces thus came to be inversely proportional to the political progress Europe had achieved in overcoming its past Cold War divisions[17].

At the end of the day, the relevance of the OSCE experience may rest with the more strategic question of how any such effort at regional-security dialogue can be made meaningful and most profitably sustained in the face of ongoing political differences and military change. In this broader context, the OSCE expressed fairly successfully the strategic imperative of institutional and political inclusiveness and equality.

Its focus, at least initially, on modest practical contributions to immediate problems through a carefully defined series of tangible steps to enhance political-military transparency, predictability and stability within a larger network of relationships proved extremely appropriate.At the same time, the specific process of dialogue was designed to be both sustained and performance-based, with extensive verification mechanisms as well as regular opportunities to review progress in the implementation of commitments undertaken and to develop new ones.Over time, this process linked the goal of regional peace and stability not just with a resolution of outstanding border questions but to more comprehensive objectives as well: promoting good governance, fundamental freedoms and enhanced economic and environmental cooperation throughout the region, as well as encouraging the broader participation of all elements of each society in support of these goals.

Neutrals

The CSCE/OSCE process has been interesting to analyse in itself, because, especially during the Cold War, it represented a unique channel of overall East-West communication. It was the result of protracted and arduous work. It facilitated the solving of many difficult problems between 1975 and 1979, a period when extreme tension and détente alternated on the international scene. In spite of many obstacles, such as the intervention of the USSR in the Horn of Africa or its invasion of Afghanistan, the process persisted.

Throughout its Cold-War existence, the Helsinki process acted as a discussion forum, and more importantly, as a standard-setting instrument. Its basic function was to elaborate norms and practical commitments of a politically binding nature. These norms were enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, the Belgrade, Madrid and Vienna Concluding Documents. The process experienced many difficulties. In the Belgrade follow-up meeting (19977-78), USSR and US clashed regularly. The Madrid follow-up meeting (1980-83) was the most difficult one in the history of the Helsinki process, mainly because of the imposition of martial law in Poland, the invasion of Afghanistan and in particular the shooting down of a South Korean civilian airliner by Moscow, which cast a shadow over the whole meeting. Eventually, the Helsinki process endured the test. In these two meetings the neutral and non-aligned countries - the N+N Group – played an important role. Especially in Madrid, it was to a significant degree thanks to the N+N Group who came up with fresh ideas and compromise solutions that the process could continue.

According to Karsh, the postwar experience of the European neutrals has demonstrated that the gulf between neutrality and international cooperation is significantly narrower in practice than in theory. In their conduct on both the universal and regional levels, the European neutrals have succeeded in demolishing the long-standing image of neutrality as a policy based on isolationism and abstention[18].In the early years of the Cold War, it was widely claimed that neutrality had lost its viability as an international institution and foreign policy option. However, the positions of neutrality were not definitely fixed. Profound changes took place from the 1950's onwards, as was for example indicated in 1975 by the CSCE Final Act, which authoritatively recognized the rights of states to neutrality[19].

The three characteristics of the Cold War system which affected the problem of neutrality more than any other developments are first, the fairly fixed and pervasive East-West bipolarity which was based on a fundamental and persistent ideological and socio-economic confrontation; second, the balance of nuclear terror, and third, the atmosphere of international tension arising from the preparation of war by both parties, their ideological animosities, their tests of strength in crisis situations, and their mutual suspicions and misperceptions and misperceptions which were fed by the scarcity of inter-bloc communication. However, although these features were constant characteristics of the Cold War system, they did not develop overnight, and they have also varied considerably over time[20].

Given inherent, highly asymmetrical involvement and partiality in the fundamental ideological and socioeconomic East-West confrontation, and given excessive dependencies on the West, the question was how to avoid involvement in the East-West conflict? This question not only applied to the possibility of a systemic war, but had continued relevance in all subsystemic conflicts. All this meant that European neutrality suffered from an inherent and chronic problem of credibility since the advent of the Cold War. Would the neutrals be able to resist the temptations and domestic pressures to get involved in the conflict in support of the defenders of their own western values?

And would not their excessive dependencies on the West force them to do so even if they wanted to remain neutral? Both questions were fundamentally questions of credibility and respectability of their neutral status and policies. The problem of respectability, in particular, limited the neutrals' possibilities of gaining maximum appreciation in the East, while in the West resulted in some instances and especially during the early years of the Cold War in strong negative views, especially in the US[21].

Within the context of the continued marginal depolarization of the Cold War system and the period of détente from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the policies of the European neutrals tended largely to converge with each other on major international fora such as the UN, the EEC, and in European security in general. Perhaps the main development was the restraints on Finland's international participation diminished and it was increasingly identified as another European neutral. The context of aggravated Cold War tension from the late 1970s onwards did not bring about any spectacular changes in the basic constellation of European neutrality[22].The neutrals managed to mitigate the adverse implications of regional cooperation for their neutrality. From the early 1970s onwards they skilfully capitalised on the evolution of détente to play an important role, far exceeding their power potential, especially through the CSCE[23].

The neutrals managed to play an almost fundamental role in the CSCE. They succeeded to keep the conference alive during the much polarised conditions of the late Cold War but also in the day-to-day negotiations on finding consensus on many different issues. The CSCE was perhaps the only forum for a direct dialogue between the superpower where the neutrals had an equal voice – at least in principle – and their compromising strategies were conceived as sincere attempts to contribute to the continuation of a process that would maintain regional stability and enhance their own neutrality and security.

From the early stages of the CSCE process, the European neutrals (with the exception of Ireland which participated in the process as part of the then EEC) did join forces with the non-aligned states to establish the so-called N+N Group. Activities of the European neutrals within the CSCE largely took place within the wider context of the work of the N+N Group. The Group developed into an 'intermediate zone' between East and West, fulfilling such vital functions as mediation, good offices, consensus building, as well as initiation of new proposals and approaches. These functions have been instrumental in keeping the delicate edifice of the CSCE resilient to East-West dichotomy.Neutral states did tend to perceive these functions as an integral part of the foreign and security policies. They engaged in them for a number of reasons, notably to safeguard their own security and to display international solidarity and to accumulate new resources for their neutral policies.

Thus, in the spring and the summer of 1974, during the Geneva phase of the CSCE, the N+N Group contributed in preventing the process from running into a dead end over Human rights. Similarly the Group had a decisive part in the introduction of the concept of Confidence Building Measures into the CSCE process in general, and its incorporation into the Final Act of the 1975 Helsinki Summit in particular. Also, during the CSCE follow-up meeting in Belgrade (1977-78), Madrid (1980-83), Vienna (1986-87), as well as at the Stockholm Conference on Disarmament in Europe (1984-86), the N+N Group made considerable efforts, and not without success, to keep the process alive in the face of renewed Cold War tensions.

In the main arena for neutral policy and cooperation, the CSCE process, bridge-building during the Cold War mainly implied safeguarding the continuity of the multilateral process and preventing it from becoming a battleground for ideologically charged confrontations. These concerns remained central to the activities of the N+N states throughout the 1980s. But as the East-West confrontation mellowed and was gradually replaced by a more cooperative relationship, the bridge-building function of the N+N Group became both more ambitious and more complicated.

With the Stockholm Conference and the Vienna Follow-up Meeting the arms-control component of the CSCE Process acquired greater prominence and importance. Although the agreements of Stockholm and Vienna were primarily the result of the new rapprochement between the superpowers, the N+N states in both instances performed important functions as intermediaries. However, in performing these tasks, the N+N Group encountered increasingly difficult problems of internal coherence and coordination.

The issues at hand, touching on the national interests of each of the states, were viewed differently in the various N+N capitals, even within the core group of the N+N caucus. In spite of these difficulties, the N+N Group eventually managed to reach agreement on a joint proposal for the Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting. The proposal served as a basis for the final bargaining process and for the mediation by the neutral coordinators of the Baskets of the CSCE Process. Once substantive negotiations started on CFE among the 23 military alliance members, however, the N+N states were back to their traditional role in the European security field, the "soft" issues of CSBMs and related processes[24].

According to Lehne and Neuhold, the N+Ns were able to act as bridge builders, because the OSCE process offered them an additional and very fitting multilateral and quasi-institutionalized forum[25]. In other words, the OSCE allowed the European neutrals the opportunity to express their views and engage in creative diplomacy in ways hitherto impossible. As Mosser has noted, 'it is doubtful that the NNAs would have had any impact at all on the superpowers without the benefit of the CSCE (and to be fair, the crumbling of the détente process), as can be seen in the minimal role of the NNA played in the CFE negotiations, which took place on the margins of the official CSCE process.'[26]

The reasons why the N+Ns were so effective in the CSCE process, particularly in its human and economic dimensions can be attributed to the fact that their compromise proposals were attractive to the West precisely because from a Western perspective the neutrals were not a third party but really part of the West.They were acceptable to the East because from the point of view were not Western states in the full sense of the word but more of a third party. This might also help to explain why has not been possible to play a similar role in the military dimension of the CSCE process. In this area the N+Ns were unambiguously a third party for both sides, and their usefulness was never really accepted by the West.

Neutrals in OSCE Post-Cold War

During the Cold War, neutral states all upheld neutral positions as an attempt to stay out of conflict and thus a strategy to protect their own independence and territorial integrity. National security has been an obvious dimension of these states; conceptions of neutrality. The causal understanding of a neutral stance as protective to conflict lies at the heart of a strategic decision to 'stay neutral'. It is, thus, understandable, that the post-Cold War decrease of threats would lead to a compromising post-Cold War stance towards neutrality. At the same time, however, while the causal relationship between neutrality and Cold War security imperatives has disappeared, the normative dimension persists. In other words, a link between neutrality and identity can be identified, in the context of a constructivist framework of explanation.

Since Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the EU, the formal guiding-principles of their security and defence policies have gone some adjustments. Austria remains committed to the 1955 Neutrality Act, and holds international status as a non-allied state[27]. Yet, the concept of neutrality has changed or rather it has taken on a new meaning. Especially, membership in the EU with its ESDP has little to do with traditional understandings of neutrality. The latter has become a function that does not extend beyond the negative definition of non-membership in NATO and it indicates the changing meaning of the concept even within its existing legal framework. Sweden pursues a policy of non-participation in military alliances and its security doctrine continues to uphold military non-alignment as a distinctive mark[28]. After the Cold War, Stockholm has replaced the term 'policy of neutrality' with the expression 'non-participation in military alliances' and has become involved in security and defence cooperation schemes that run counter to the neutral tradition of the country. It took part in the NATO PfP, participated in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council; it has sent military personnel to work with NATO and others in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. It has done everything short of NATO membership. Finland has also kept military non-alignment as a key-element of its security and defence policy[29]. However, it supports the development of EU's ESDP.

In conclusion, neutrality survives only insofar as military non-alignment persists. The neutrals' post-Cold War engagement does justice to the label 'post-neutral' states. The neutrals are now prepare to undertake military operations – even if the EU's scope is limited – they participate in permanent civil and military committees charged with planning and conducting such operations. Although they are considerable differences as to how they perceive their engagement, it is clear that it is the result of the profound post-Cold War structural change in the international security field.

However, what seems to be certain is the realization that in this environment there is no longer any need for a mediator or bridge-builder between states on different sides of the block. The block does not exist. The neutrals found themselves with few possibilities to exercise a similar to Cold War impact in shaping Europe's security dynamics. Instead, they came to recognize rather early that the EU and NATO are the only powerful actors for managing change. In such a context, the OSCE – while important as part of Europe's security *acquis* – has been undermined by its position in the 'weak side' of the new security architecture. It is not considered an important agent of enhancing either neutrality or national security.

It could be argued that the OSCE fell victim to its success as far as the neutrals is concerned. In reality, during the Cold War, it challenged the neutrals' security model. First, it led to the Europeanization of their security. The CSCE process has driven home the fact that it was no longer possible to think about their security in an isolated manner, separated by the overall European security system. Through the CSCE process, the neutrals became part of the European Cold War security dynamics and it came to represent a salient and immediate part of their security imperatives and a powerful form for enhancing their neutrality position. Yet, these in an environment with clear fault-lines and very specific security options – rather non-options. In such an environment, the CSCE was a unique setting in which the neutrals were able to unite their resources, gain prestige and present unified proposals and initiatives that could not be dismissed outright by the superpowers.

In a different environment, following the collapse of the Cold War international system, the OSCE found itself at a crossroad. Like other international institutions, it was – and still is - challenged by a rapidly changing security environment.The need to readjust to the new realities, in particular, the globalization of security challenges, where a purely regional concept of security policy has become in many respects obsolete when not considered in its global context has been enormous.

Today, the OSCE has become without any doubt less important on both sides of the Atlantic[30]. In this, it is not alone as other European and transatlantic institutions face similar questions. Unlike these institutions however, the problem is more acute for the OSCE as it is not a 'hard security' organization such as NATO, lacks the economic and structural incentives of the EU or the global character of the UN both in geographic and substantive terms and, most importantly, has seen some important elements of its activities, such as conflict management taken over gradually by more powerful actors. Moreover, members from Central and Eastern Europe have lost some interests in the OSCE. Their priorities have naturally shifted to their participation in the EU and NATO. Moscow also considers that the OSCE has come to a standstill in respect of security, economics and democracy, and its present priority is improving dialogue with NATO and the EU.

Two decades after the end of the Cold War the dominant perception is that the role of the OSCE – in the context of the Euro-Atlantic security – as marginal. Therefore, the urgent question is whether the OSCE can shape itself to be fit and credible for the future or, more bluntly, what would its members – and in particular the old/new neutrals want to use it today and in the future for? Just an ad hoc 'service providing' institution or one of the pillars of Europe's security architecture, unique because of its inclusiveness and legitimized through its comprehensive agenda and membership?

During the Cold War, the OSCE proved its relevance by addressing the participating states' concerns and by initiating innovative and sometimes groundbreaking mechanisms. In the 1990s, it developed a considerable network of field presences and played a not negligible role in conflict prevention and rehabilitation. Today the OSCE has to adapt to a new security environment where non state actors and asymmetrical threats are challenging the traditional approaches to security in the multilateral context. The OSCE can respond bureaucratically or be creative and think 'out of the box'. This however can be achieved by building on its strengths from the past, that is through – not only in words – a comprehensive and cooperative approach to security as well as by finding the right balance between the different dimensions, most particularly the human and security dimensions.

Conclusion

According to Ghebali, there are three factors affecting negatively OSCE's future: the enlargement of the EU and NATO, the shortcomings in the institutionalization of OSCE and Russia's dissatisfaction with the OSCE's political and institutional development[31].It is true that the political role of the OSCE has been undermined by the expansion of the EU and NATO.

The two offer public goods – security and economic development – that OSCE is unable to deliver. Also, the institutional physiognomy of the OSCE is incomplete - even vague – and for some susceptible to manipulation. At the same time, Russia represents 'the crux of the OSCE crisis'[32].For the Putin and Medvedev administrationsOSCE functions along double standards lines while its human dimension has been overdeveloping at the expense of the politico-military and economic dimensions. Moscow also contended that the OSCE did not anymore address the threats and challenges of the region, choosing instead to become marginalized in a security architecture dominated by NATO and the EU. In the face of these factors, more than ever, the question is what are the goals and what are the reasons behind keeping alive such an organization, especially if so many OSCE functions and tasks are carried out by other European security institutions, particularly by NATO, the European Union and the Council of Europe?[33]Although these are problems that cannot be easily dismissed, some argue that the OSCE 'has the potential to bounce back and enjoy a new lease of life.'[34]

In search of a brief answer to such a question one can say that the role and position of the OSCE within the European security architecture was determined by three factors: Firstly, a comprehensive approach to different dimensions of international relations. Secondly, flexibility understood as an ability to adapt to a changing international environment and to undertake new challenges. Finally, the fact remains that the OSCE still provides the most framework for a partnership between 56 states of Europe, Central Asia and North America. However, for the OSCE future the most urgent necessity is to redefine its tasks in order to adapt to an evolving security environment. What does it mean in practice? Today, the specific position of the OSCE among the European security structures is defined by its ability to search for pragmatic *ad hoc* solutions, instead of sticking to stringent procedures bound by a bureaucratic cast. In the case of many issues that the OSCE dealt with in the past – there were no defined rules or precedents. The framework defined by the OSCE legitimized the principle of efficiency and effectiveness. Such an approach offered a priority to a consensus and legitimacy.

The OSCE played a considerable role in the past and will also be able to play a role in the future under one fundamental condition. The participating states must ensure that the norms and procedures, as well as institutions and mechanisms that are at the disposal of the OSCE meet their needs. The assessment of the various multilateral international structures is frequently flawed in one respect. The governments and the public opinion perceive these institutions in an abstract way, separately from the political will of states. Multilateral security structures can fulfill the tasks entrusted to them only provided that the states are interested in making good use of the structures.

Security is not a static but a dynamic process. On the contrary, the institutions and organizations have a static nature. It is crucial to timely adjust the OSCE institutions to the needs and requirements of the time. This means in practice that in the future the OSCE as the broadest Euro-Atlantic structure may be able to respond to the needs of the Euro-Atlantic community of states more adequately than many other institutions and organizations. In the face of new threats and challenges as well as new security policy priorities this geopolitical factor alone has a considerable strategic significance that cannot be overestimated. The reason for this is that the epicenter of the potential and existing upheavals is not in Europe, but on its peripheries and in the areas directly adjacent to Europe and Central Asia. Moreover, the OSCE has a unique experience in settling internal issues. It plays a pioneering role in this regard. If the main threat to peace on a global scale is terrorism pursued by non-state structures, the presence of the OSCE could be strengthened in the areas of Northern Caucasus and Central Asia where the threat exists with particular intensity. In this context, the scope of its activities can be extended, encompassing the tasks that go beyond the competence of NATO and the EU. It is not only the question of a broader geographic scope, but also of the specificity of activities and the experience in building democratic institutions and the state of law.

However, while the OSCE may be suitable in dealing with this and other key threats – like organized crime, the illegal arms trade, political repression, refugee flows and the denial of human rights – neutrality is not a vehicle for augmenting influence anymore. And, while, Russia should be drawn into a more active and creative relationship with the OSCE, it is not the 'post-neutrals', within the OSCE framework, that can offer the potential for settlement and/or amelioration of grievances. Rather, it is another more daring wave of reform that could lead to its transformations into a proper international institution.

Endnotes

[1]Dr. Kostas Ifantis is Associate Professor in International Relations at the University of Athens. Dr. Sotiris Serbos is a Lecturer in International Politics at Democritus University of Thrace.

[2]ArieBloed, Monitoring Human Rights in Europe: Comparing international Procedures and Mechanisms (Dordrecht, MartinusNijhoff, 1993), p. 5.

[3]It is indicative of its success that in 2008 the OSCE's annual budget reached 164,2 million euro, while in 1994 was just 21 million.

[4]Michael W. Mosser, 'Engineering Influence: The Subtle Power of Small States in the CSCE/OSCE' in Erich Reiter and Heinz Gaertner (eds) Small States and Alliances (Heidelberg, Physica-Verlag, 2001), p. 66.

[5]Nina Græger and Alexandra Novosseloff, "The Roles of the OSCE and the EU," The United Nations and Regional Security. Europe and Beyond, eds. Michael Pugh and Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu (Boulder: Lynne Riener, 2003), p. 81.

[6]Roberto Dominguez Rivera, 'Contributions of NATO, EU and OSCE to European Security: Threats and Risks', Jean Monnet/Robert Schuman Paper Series, Vol. 5, No. 7, University of Miami, April 2005, p. 20.

[7]Ibid., p. 82.

[8]The OSCE website, www.osce.org, contains a wealth of information on that organization's past history and current activities. A similarly useful source is the website of the Helsinki Commission of the U.S. Congress at www.csce.gov/helsinki.cfm.

[9]The description was compiled from the OSCE Handbook 2007, www.osce.org.

[10]Graig G. Dunkerley, 'Considering Security Amidst Strategic Change: The OSCE Experience', Middle East Policy Council, XI, 3, Fall 2004, at http://www.mepc.org/journal_vol11/0409_dunkerley.asp, accessed on 15/07/2009.

[11]Ibid.

[12]See the Helsinki Final Act, August 1, 1975, at www.osce.org.

[13]Gregory Flynn and Henry Farrell, 'Piercing Together the Democratic Peace: The CSCE, Norms and the Construction of Security in Post-Cold War Europe', International Organization, vol. 53, no. 3, Summer 1999, p. 512.

[14]Transformation of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe into the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe was recorded in the Budapest OSCE Summit Declaration 'Towards Genuine Partnership in a New Era', at www.osce.org.

[15]The sorts of political-military confidence-and security-building measures (CSBMs) that the OSCE made possible throughout Europe have involved the following: Regular exchange of basic information on the national forces of participating states, their major weapons systems and their deployments; Periodic opportunities for participating states to explain and discuss their respective national-defence policies and doctrines; Pre-notification of planned military exercises and opportunities for the mutual observation of such events; Mechanisms for multilateral consultation on the occasion of unusual military activities; Dedicated communication links to exchange such information among participants in a secure and private manner; Regular meetings to discuss questions that have arisen about implementation practices. Details of these measures themselves, the evolution of earlier agreements within the OSCE dating back to the Stockholm Conference of the late 1980's, are laid out in the Vienna Document on the Negotiation of Confidence and Security-Building Measures (VD-99) agreed at the Istanbul OSCE Summit, November 1999, at www.osce.org.

[16]For example, the 2002 OSCE Annual Security Review Conference dealt with the security problems that international terrorism poses for all countries, focused on new measures for conventional ammunition-stockpile security and destruction, enhanced export controls on man-portable air-defence systems, and steps for greater security in travel documents. Examples drawn from the Congressional testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Jones on 'U.S. Policy Towards the OSCE' of September 9, 2003, available at www.csce.gov/helsinki.cfm.

[17]Text of the adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, agreed in November 1999, can also be found at www.osce.org. Of special note is the degree of transparency and verification afforded by the Treaty's provisions.

[18]Efraim Karsh, 'International Co-operation and Neutrality', Journal of Peace Research, vol. 25, no. 1, March 1998, p. 66.

[19]HartoHakovirta, East-West Conflict and European Neutrality, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 4.

[20]Ibid., p. 37.

[21]Ibid. 52-3.

[22]Ibid., p. 63.

[23]On May 1969 Finland launched its initiative, which led to the opening of multilateral negotiations for the CSCE three years later. The initiative was primarily designed to ease Soviet pressure on Finnish neutrality and to deal with the pending question of recognition of the two German states. The conference itself was for a long time the main ambition of Finnish foreign policy. Offering Helsinki as a host to the talks and thereby making neutrality an indispensable condition for convening the security conference became the crown jewel in Finland's strategy towards the USSR in the years 1969 to 1972. See Thomas Fischer, 'Ending the Cold War in Europe. 'A mustard seed grew into a bushy tree': The Finnish CSCE initiative of 5 May 1969', Cold War History, vol. 9, no. 2, May 2009, pp. 177-201.

[24]Their possible contribution on central security problems were viewed by most states, including the neutrals themselves, as marginal, and by some, the US in particular, as undesirable. Karl E. Birnbaum, 'New Roles for the European Neutrals? Traditional Functions and New Challenges for Neutral Policies in Europe', in HanspeterNeuhold (ed.), The European Neutrals in the 1990s: New Challenges and Opportunities (Boulder, Westview Press, 1992), pp. 196-7.

[25]Stefan Lehne and HanspeterNeuhold, 'The Role of the Neutral and Non-Aligned Countries at the Vienna Meeting', in ArieBloed and Peter van Dijk (eds), The Human Dimension of the Helsinki Process (Dordrecht, MartinusNijhof, 1991), p. 35.

[26]Mosser, op. cit., p. 71.

[27]Martin Kruger, 'Austria' in Hanna Ojanen (ed) Neutrality and Non-Alignment in Europe Today, FIIA Report, 2003, pp. 9-13.

[28]Anders Bjurner, 'Sweden' in Ojanen, op. cit., pp. 41-45.

[29]HannuHimanen 'Finland', in Ojanen, op. cit., pp. 19-26.

[30]Gerard Stoudmann, 'The way forward or is the OSCE fit for the 21st century?', Helsinki Monitor 2004, no 4. Speech delivered at the OSCE Annual Security Review Conference, Vienna, 23-24 June 2004.

[31]Victor-Yves Ghebali, 'The OSCE Between Crisis and Reform: Towards a New Lease on Life', Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Policy Paper No 10, Geneva, November 2005, p. 12.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Adam D. Rotfeld: Does the OSCE Have a Future? Paper presented at the OSCE Cluster of Competence Annual meeting (Sept. 2002) and at the ISF Meeting (Zurich, 14-16 Oct. 2002).

[34]Ghebali, op. cit., p. 19.