

The OSCE and the Future of European Security

In 2017, under Austrian chairmanship, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) faces a difficult task: Europe's path back to collective security is a rocky one. However, Vienna, as an experienced mediator, could restore lost trust between Russia and the West. The US under President Donald Trump is embarked on an uncertain course.

By Christian Nünlist

On 1 January 2017, Austria took over the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Together with countries such as Switzerland and Finland, Austria is one of the “OSCE nostalgists” who are still strongly engaged in the pan-European security organization. During the Cold War, the neutral Alpine republic under Chancellor Bruno Kreisky had mediated in the Helsinki Process as an impartial and honest broker between East and West.

Since 2014, the need for bridge-building between Russia and the West has become acute once more. The Russian military intervention in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, in contravention of international law, have called into question fundamental principles of the OSCE such as respect for the territorial integrity of states, the inviolability of borders, and abstaining from violence or the threat of violence.

At the same time, the exacerbation of the conflict made the OSCE more relevant again as the organization provided useful services by defusing tensions and maintaining channels of communication. An inclusive and consensus-based body, the OSCE has been the most important international forum for the management of the Ukraine Crisis. In particular, the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) deployed to Ukraine in 2014 has since provided valu-



At the Ministerial Council in Hamburg, Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz presented the priorities of the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship in 2017. *OSCE*

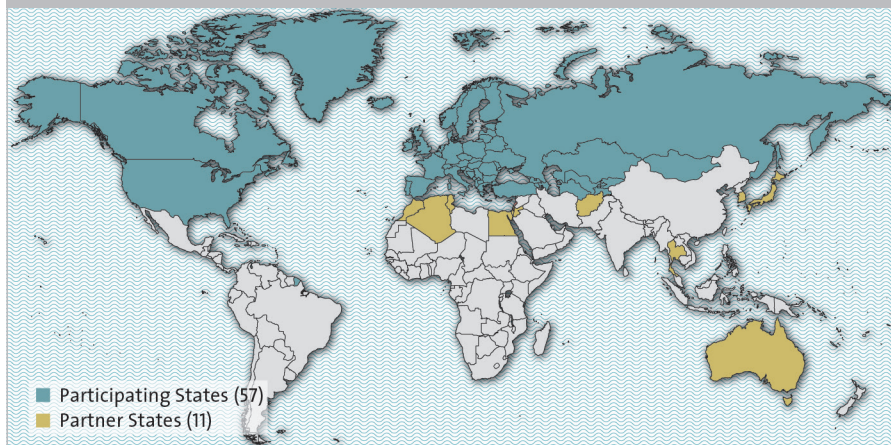
able pragmatic assistance on the ground in Eastern Ukraine, for instance by negotiating local ceasefire agreements.

In 2017, Austria can shape European security policy more strongly than usual and take on more responsibility for security and stability in Europe. The Chairmanship-in-Office (CiO) is the most important position within the OSCE; it is here, not with the secretary-general's office, that most of the formative power resides. As CiO in

2017, Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz will mediate in acute crises and coordinate all of the OSCE's activities while also representing the organization externally as the “voice of the OSCE”.

However, it would be a mistake to pin too high hopes on the Austrian chairmanship or on the OSCE itself. In 2017, the general climate of international politics still does not seem favorable when it comes to resolving the grave crisis of the European Se-

From Vancouver to Vladivostok: The 57 OSCE Participating States



curity architecture. On the one hand, there is great uncertainty over the future of US foreign policy. Will the US under President Donald Trump continue to take the lead within the Western community of values, or will Trump make a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the expense of (Eastern) European interests? On the other hand, the imminent elections in the Netherlands, France, and Germany are currently upstaging the dialog over European security in the capitals of Europe. This further limits the scope of action for Austrian OSCE diplomacy.

Nevertheless, it would once more be advisable today, as it was during the Cold War in the Helsinki Process, to use the multilateral and inclusive format of the OSCE to negotiate a new *modus vivendi* for peaceful coexistence in Europe among the 57 participating states (including the US and Russia), despite differences in values, interests, and historic experiences. What is required is not a “Yalta II” between Putin and Trump, nor a “Helsinki II”, i.e., a renegotiation of the 1975 Helsinki principles; but possibly, a “Paris II”, an update of the Paris Charter of 1990 for the modern age. For tasks such as these, the OSCE is ideally suited, and Austria is also an ideal first moderator who could instigate such a multi-year structured dialog within the OSCE.

From Helsinki to the Ukraine Crisis

The OSCE is a child of the Cold War. From 1972 to 1975, in painstaking multilateral negotiations at the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), 35 states agreed on a core of ten binding political principles for peaceful co-

existence in Europe, based on an innovatively defined, broad and comprehensive conception of security. In addition to the traditional political-military aspects, the CSCE’s Helsinki Final Act of 1975 also took into account economic, ecological, and human rights aspects of security.

In November 1990, the then 35 participating states of the CSCE issued the Paris Charter, which proclaimed “a new era of democracy, peace, and unity”. Subsequently, for a few short years, Russia and the West exploited the latitude afforded by cooperative security policy in Europe to the fullest extent. However, the European Security system very quickly began to move in a different direction than Moscow had hoped: There would be no upgrading of the pan-European CSCE/OSCE. Instead, the West preferred to go with the exclusive NATO alliance (without Russia as a member) as the main instrument of stability and

It would be a mistake to pin too high hopes on the Austrian chairmanship or on the OSCE.

peace in Europe. Moreover, Russia’s transition to a democratic market economy soon came to a halt: Already in 1993, the reformers suffered a serious defeat at the parliamentary elections. Three rounds of NATO expansion eastwards were intended to ensure stability in Central and Eastern Europe, but they weakened the joint vision of inclusive European security proclaimed in 1990, despite special formats for dialog between Russia and NATO or the EU, respectively.

In spring of 1999, the rift between Russia and the West became fully apparent. President Boris Yeltsin criticized NATO’s unilateral action against Serbia without a UN mandate in the Kosovo War. Since then, Moscow has increasingly tended to view the OSCE as a strictly Western agency that aims to foster democracy and bring about regime change in the post-Soviet space. OSCE election observers and field missions to monitor human and civil rights would subsequently be dismissed by Russia as illegitimate interference in the country’s internal affairs and as violations of state sovereignty. In the 2008 Georgia War, Russia made clear that it was prepared even to use military means and to violate the precepts of the CSCE/OSCE in order to prevent Georgia joining NATO and to preserve its claim to dominance in its traditional sphere of influence. This Russian show of power was repeated in 2014 in Ukraine.

At the same time, the crisis in and around Ukraine helped to re-energize the OSCE, which had by this point largely lapsed into obscurity. As the West concentrated on building up a credible deterrence within NATO to ward off a repeat of the Crimea scenario in the Baltic, the OSCE was again appreciated and its role enhanced. Today, the OSCE once more constitutes a recognized forum for dialog that can help deescalate the crisis and foster a return to cooperative security, in line with the West’s established double strategy of *defense cum détente*.

Priorities and Challenges

Austria has identified three priorities for its chairmanship: First of all, to defuse the Ukraine conflict; secondly, to combat jihadist radicalization, especially among young people. Third, the re-establishment of trust between OSCE participating States. With Austrian diplomat Martin Sajdik, the head of the Trilateral Contact Group, one of the country’s own diplomats is

in an important position for implementing the February 2015 Minsk Agreement. Moreover, by nominating terrorism expert Peter Neumann of King’s College London as OSCE Special Representative on Combating Radicalization, Vienna sent an important signal at an early stage. Neumann intends to submit a report on model projects and guidelines for governments in the area of deradicalization by the end of 2017. Generally speaking, during its leadership of the OSCE, Austria intends to leverage

the reputation as a neutral bridge-builder that the country gained during the Helsinki Process and to accentuate its profile as a mediator between East and West.

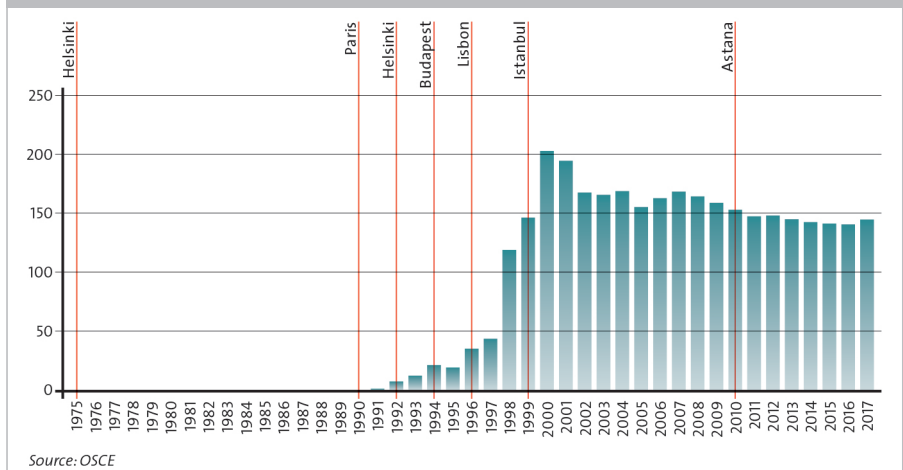
Austria's longstanding qualities as mediator will also be required in 2017 when it comes to new appointments of key positions within the OSCE. At the end of June, Lamberto Zannier's term in office as OSCE secretary-general expires. Moreover, Dunja Mijatović, the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media, and High Commissioner on National Minorities Astrid Thors are both due to be replaced. Both mandates already expired in 2016, but in both cases, the OSCE states were unable to agree on a successor. The mandate of Michael Link, director of the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), expires in 2017, but can be renewed for another three years.

Given Russia's criticism of the OSCE in the areas of human rights, freedom of the media, and election monitoring, the Austrian chairmanship will have to display a good deal of finesse and diplomatic skill in the reappointments of these important OSCE positions.

Back to Diplomacy

Realistically speaking, neither the Austrian chairmanship nor the OSCE in general can be expected to resolve the Ukraine conflict in 2017 or to mediate successfully in the overarching conflict between Russia and the West. In the consensus-oriented OSCE, this would require the political will of all 57 OSCE participating States – and the decades-long alienation of Russia from the Euro-Atlantic security architecture cannot be reversed overnight.

Budget Development and OSCE Summits, 1990 – 2017



Source: OSCE

Various experts have made concrete suggestions as to how cooperative security in Europe, currently severely damaged, can be brought back to life. Among these voices are the Panel of Eminent Persons (PEP), which published its final report "Back to Diplomacy" in 2015, or the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions and its report on "European Security", presented in December 2016. The PEP suggested a "robust process of active diplomacy" that would include short-term measures for avoiding military incidents and a long-term dialog on the shared principles of European security, to be concluded with an OSCE summit.

The OSCE Network argued that a "code of conduct" should be negotiated as a way of fostering diplomatic confidence-building and resuming the dialog with Russia. It

recommended measures for alleviating the ongoing conflict and for improving communication.

Interests, Not Values

Such a return to selective cooperation with Russia would be in accordance with the historic role of the OSCE, which was created during the Cold War as a forum for communication between enemies. Due to the mutual distrust that currently prevails, only selective, interest-based cooperation between Russia and the West is plausible. Pragmatic collaboration in areas governed by mutual interests, especially in areas such as dealing with climate change, political violence, or other global and transnational challenges, may help to build trust incrementally as a basis for more sustainable cooperation.

There is nothing new about the OSCE's focus on areas of shared interest. When considering the decisions approved by the OSCE Ministerial Council since 1999, it is noticeable that consensus decisions were primarily achieved when it came to combating terrorism, organized crime, or cyber-threats.

An encouraging success of the German chairmanship in 2016 has been the revival of conventional arms control in Europe. The initiative presented by German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in August 2016 was initially derided, since progress in the sphere of arms control seemed a distant prospect given the disparity between Russia's position and that of the West. Ultimately, however, the OSCE Ministerial Council held in Hamburg in

Switzerland and the OSCE: A Success Story

For Switzerland, which is neither an EU nor a NATO member, the OSCE is the second most important international security organization after the UN. For this small, neutral country, **participation in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)** during the Cold War was a valuable lesson in foreign policy. Together with other neutral and non-aligned states, Switzerland mediated between the Western and Eastern blocs, and in doing so earned the respect of both Washington and Moscow. Historian Philip Rosin labels this approach "influence through neutrality" in his book on the role of Switzerland in the CSCE.

Switzerland also gained much praise from other countries for its two terms as CiO. In 1996, Switzerland's activities focused on the implementation of the Dayton Accords, making a crucial contribution to the **stabilization of Bosnia** after the civil war. In 2014, Swiss diplomacy provided valuable services in the **management of the Ukraine crisis**. OSCE activities launched under Switzerland's aegis (the Special Monitoring Mission, contact groups, the Minsk Agreement, economic connectivity) continue to form the main areas of OSCE activities in Ukraine three years later.

In 2017, another chapter may be added to the success story of Switzerland and the OSCE: Ambassador Thomas Greminger, who left a considerable mark on the Swiss OSCE chairmanship in 2014 in Vienna, has applied to **succeed OSCE Secretary-General** Lamberto Zannier, who is leaving the job after two three-year terms at the end of June 2017.

December 2016 achieved consensus and approved the advancement of Steinmeier's initiative within the OSCE, as well as an informal structured dialog on threat perceptions and mutual security-policy interests. This "Hamburg Mandate" legitimizes Austria to move forward with Steinmeier's initiative within the OSCE in 2017.

Principles: A "Paris II"?

In the longer term, however, the OSCE naturally faces a problem if the participating states can no longer achieve consensus on the jointly negotiated principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. Moreover, the OSCE is also further away than ever from the vision of a values-guided security community between Vancouver and Vladivostok (cf. the Astana Declaration of 2010).

Consensus among the OSCE members on a renegotiation of the 1975 principles is currently unrealistic. After all, the "Helsinki

A new negotiation process aimed at formulating a "Helsinki II" is unrealistic.

ki Decalogue" has served its purpose well for over four decades. In this respect, the PEP report argues – employing an apt metaphor – that the rules of traffic don't have to be changed just because one driver ran a red light. Thus, a new negotiation process aimed at formulating a "Helsinki II" is unrealistic.

There seems to be more latitude when it comes to a "Paris II", or a substantiation of the Helsinki principles for a new age. Just as the 1990 Paris Charter spelled out the precepts of the 1975 CSCE Final Act in concrete terms, as applicable to the envisaged European peace order after the end of the Cold War, it appears that today a dialog across the entire OSCE is needed to interpret the principles defined in 1975 for the present day. The underlying assumption would be that the vague principles negoti-

ated at the time remain relevant, but that they must to some extent be newly interpreted – through the consensus-oriented, multilateral diplomacy that has proven itself within the OSCE. Such a political process could contribute to confidence-building between Russia and the West and repair the damage done to the 1975 "OSCE Bible" in recent years.

A "Yalta II" with Trump?

However, suspended above Austria's OSCE chairmanship of 2017 is a sword of Damocles – the looming insecurity over the future course of US foreign policy under Donald Trump. If substantial progress and success are to be achieved, the US position within the OSCE will be a critical element.

Trump could apply the paradigm of a transactionalist deal bilaterally with Putin to meet the narrowly defined, short-term self-interest of the US, breaking up the established order of the West and splitting and weakening the transatlantic community. A "Yalta II", a new great-power agreement like the one reached in the Crimean resort

in 1945 between the Big Three – Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill – to define and recognize boundaries and spheres of interest, seems an impractical notion. Anyone seriously entertaining the historical analogy would soon remember that another Yalta first requires another new world war, and that a new Yalta pact would be diametrically opposed to the 1975 principles and the spirit of the OSCE. However, both Putin and Trump would certainly be open to the idea of a "Big Two" deal – much to the consternation of America's (Eastern) European allies, who fear an arrangement concluded without their participation and at their expense.

In addition to Russia's alienation from the European Security architecture, there is thus a real possibility that the specter of Washington's estrangement under Trump

Recommended Literature

Panel of Eminent Persons (PEP). [Back to Diplomacy](#) (November 2015).

OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions. [European Security: Challenges at the Societal Level](#) (December 2016).

Arie Bloed. [OSCE Principles: Which Principles? Security and Human Rights](#) 25 (2014), pp. 210–220.

Petri Hakkarainen / Christian Nünlist. [Trust and Realpolitik: The OSCE in 2016](#). *CSS Policy Perspectives* 4, no.1 (2016).

Kari Möttölä. The OSCE at 40: Looking at the Abyss of a Fault-Line. *Security and Human Rights* 25 (2014), 161–167.

may be realized in 2017. In truth, however, the US had already renounced multilateralism and the OSCE under George W. Bush. And not even Barack Obama, a multilateralist president, could be convinced to attend the OSCE summit in Astana in 2010. It was only during the Ukraine Crisis that the US once more came to appreciate the long-neglected organization.

It is impossible to tell at this stage whether the OSCE's multilateral diplomacy can be brought to Trump's attention; indeed, whether the Trump administration will keep the US anchored within the Western community of values, or whether the West will become further fragmented, is currently very much an open question.

Dr. Christian Nünlist is a Senior Researcher at the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich. He is a steering committee member of the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions and the author of many publications, including ["Testfall Ukraine-Krise: Das Konfliktmanagement der OSZE unter Schweizer Vorsitz"](#) (2014) and ["Building Trust in a Turbulent Year: Germany's 2016 OSCE Chairmanship"](#) (2016).