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# OSCE

## Focus 2017

# Empowering the OSCE in Challenging Times

# Reflections and Recommendations

Conference Report



*The conference venue: Villa Moynier  
in Parc Mon Repos, Geneva.  
Photo: Wikimedia Commons*

This report was jointly prepared by the Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF). The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the official position of the ministries of foreign affairs of Austria, Italy or Switzerland, nor those of CSS or DCAF.

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## The OSCE Focus 2017 at a Glance

Held on 13–14 October at Villa Moynier, Geneva, the OSCE Focus 2017 conference was dedicated to the theme ‘Empowering the OSCE in Challenging Times’. Over 40 high-ranking participants from the OSCE community, including the newly elected Secretary General, engaged in focused, open and frank debates on the need for the OSCE to deal with a rapidly changing geopolitical and security environment and to address the organization’s institutional challenges. The key reflections and recommendations put forward are summarized in this report. The conference was organized by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) in close supportive collaboration with the ministries of foreign affairs of Austria, Italy and Switzerland, and the Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich.

### The Participants

The participants of the OSCE Focus 2017 were representatives of the OSCE participating States, including Austria, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Russia, Slovakia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States. In addition, senior officials of OSCE executive structures attended the conference. The conference was also attended by representatives of multilateral organizations, including the EU, NATO and UN, as well as members of the think-tank community, based in Belarus, Germany, Kazakhstan, Russia, Switzerland and the United States.

### The Programme

The conference was titled ‘Empowering the OSCE in Challenging Times’. The programme included seven topics, each of which was introduced by a moderator and debated by two panelists. Specifically, the topics were the Euro-Atlantic Security Dynamics; Dialogue on European Security; Dealing with Protracted Conflicts; the OSCE and its Mediterranean Partnership; the OSCE and South-East Europe; Revisiting the Roles and Responsibilities of Chairmanship, Secretariat and Institutions; Repositioning OSCE Field Operations and Updating the Concept of Field Presences.

### About the OSCE Focus Conference Series

Organized in Geneva annually since 2011 by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), the OSCE Focus Conference Series has established itself as an important forum for representatives of the OSCE Chairs, executive structures and participating States, as well as experts from the think-tank community, to review the role of the OSCE and discuss key themes for the organization in the coming year. Conducted under Chatham House Rules, the two-day retreat-style meetings provide an opportunity to critically reflect on the fundamentals of the OSCE, sound out new ideas and take a fresh look at ‘old’ problems. They also prove useful for ‘passing the baton’ to the next OSCE Chair.

# 1 The OSCE at a Critical Moment

*Twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the return of geopolitics, and the use of force and power politics have definitively marked the closure of the post-Cold-War era. Against this backdrop, the OSCE is faced with a rapidly changing security environment characterized by a multitude of key challenges, including stagnation in arms control, protracted conflicts, political turmoil in South-East Europe and sources of insecurity in the Mediterranean. It was with a view to meeting these key challenges that the OSCE Focus Conference 2017 took place. High-ranking participants (senior officials of OSCE executive structures, representatives of participating States, and experts) reflected on these external challenges and how ready OSCE institutions are to proactively deal with current and future conflicts and security challenges.*

The OSCE stands at a critical point, amid the crisis in European security and the increasing intensity of transnational threats. In 2014, the rule-based European order was shaken by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. A new security order is not yet clear, and the role of Russia in Europe remains unresolved. OSCE participating States have moved away from the commonly defined vision of a value-based security community reaching from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Although no OSCE participating State has yet openly challenged the organization's

normative acquis, the daily work in the value-based and consensus-oriented OSCE has become difficult and cumbersome. There is no consensus within the OSCE about when and how the common vision of undivided pan-European security in the 1990 Paris Charter curdled into today's antagonistic politicking between Russia and the West. An open and frank dialogue about the current crisis is needed within the OSCE.

Of course, Russia's new assertiveness does not pose the only current challenge for European security. Today, Europe and the world are struggling with a range of fundamental challenges. Strategic trends over the last few years have become less predictable, as evidenced by both disruptive single events (e.g. Donald Trump's election; Brexit) and long-term intrasocietal developments (e.g. instability in the Middle East and North Africa region and the related refugee and jihadist waves, populist nationalism, growing inequality and authoritarianism). The 2016 Brexit referendum led to a further weakening of the European Union (EU), due in particular to a growing EU scepticism that can be observed in other EU Member States as well. The economic crisis has led European societies increasingly to turn inwards and to display less interest in conflicts outside Europe. The crisis also exacerbated anxieties and fuelled



populist nationalism, including new forms of xenophobia, ethnic discrimination and anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic violence. To complicate matters, foreign powers increasingly fund and support populist parties in Europe that promote traditional values. Soft-power propaganda in the form of external economic engagement and foreign news channels further stoke anti-European sentiment.

Despite these numerous challenges to the OSCE, the Ukraine crisis and subsequent developments have also created opportunities for the OSCE. In contrast to the crisis-weakened EU, the OSCE has launched an unexpected yet notable comeback — despite, or precisely because of, the current turbulence in European security. Its traditional role as a dialogue forum between opposing camps, which was put to best use during the Cold War, has returned to prominence. Today, there is less talk about an OSCE crisis of identity than there

was prior to 2013. After a long absence, the OSCE has reappeared on the foreign policy radar and the political agenda in capitals. Since 2014, the number of foreign ministers attending OSCE Ministerial Council meetings has increased, and regular informal foreign minister meetings have enhanced the OSCE's visibility in the capitals. But while the OSCE has demonstrated its enduring power to convene, it is far from certain how sustainable its extraordinary revitalization will be in the coming years. While the OSCE has regained relevance since 2014, the organization is still far less focal for Washington, Moscow and other capitals than the CSCE/OSCE was between 1975 and 1999. Furthermore, no miracles can be expected from the OSCE, due to its relatively modest annual budget. In addition, political will is often lacking, preventing consensus and common decisions.

## 2

## Dealing with a Rapidly Evolving Security Environment

To meet the key challenges of today's rapidly evolving security environment, the OSCE needs new ways of thinking and acting. The emerging new paradigm, characterized by a 'quasi-return' of geopolitics, unpredictability governing strategic trends, and polarization within the organization and the societies of its participating States, reveals latent fault lines and challenges the modus of cooperation of the post-Cold-War era. Such fault lines are manifest in the stagnation in conventional arms control, a normative divide noticeable in contrasting interpretations of OSCE principles and divergent approaches to dealing with protracted conflicts.

However, these challenges can also create opportunities. The 2016 Hamburg Ministerial Council consensus decision to introduce the format of Structured Dialogue on the current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area marked a significant step in reinvigorating dialogue on conventional arms control and may serve as a vehicle to regain a shared understanding of European security. Additional opportunities spring from status-neutral and context-specific approaches to protracted conflicts, a recalibration of OSCE activities incorporating all three dimensions of security (politico-military, human, economic and environmental) and a focus on regional cooperation and integration when tackling thematic challenges, such as migration management or prevention of radicalization processes. Furthermore, with its long-established field presences, the OSCE is

uniquely placed to address the volatile political and security situation in some countries in South-East Europe. Similarly, the Mediterranean poses some of the most pressing security challenges to the OSCE, such as irregular migration and refugee flows, and radicalization. These transnational challenges give the OSCE opportunities to intensify its Mediterranean Partnership.

### 2.1 The Structured Dialogue

The dialogue on European security and the collapsing regime of conventional arms control was imbued with renewed optimism following the established consensus to launch a Structured Dialogue concomitant with the general restoration of the OSCE's convening power and subsequent importance as a forum for dialogue. These developments are critical in creating conditions conducive to constructive dialogue that encompasses full inclusion of capitals and the military dimension, is unconditional in addressing security issues, and increasingly goal oriented. Furthermore, the ongoing Structured Dialogue may allow for a discussion of divergent interpretations of OSCE principles without eroding the normative basis of the organization by questioning their validity.

- The OSCE can serve as an effective communication channel and dialogue forum to prevent military escalation and avoid misperceptions. The ongoing



discussions on threat perceptions and military force postures in the framework of the Structured Dialogue are a relative success story in a very difficult environment characterized by mutual mistrust. It poses a first real step towards the relaunch of a strategic dialogue between Russia and the West.

- In the current situation, it is vital to keep in mind that the OSCE is not merely an interest-based platform; the sharing of common principles and values is at the core of the organization. A conceivable step out of the current impasse towards a reaffirmation of the principles could be to uphold 'Helsinki 1975'. As no OSCE participating State has renounced the declarations of Helsinki, Paris or Astana, such a dialogue would not open the way to renegotiation of these principles. When initiating such a dialogue it is important to acknowledge that the OSCE principles are particularly open to different interpretations, which allows for future dialogue and the organization's adaptation to new challenges. At the same time, what the OSCE has achieved since 1975 should not be forgotten. These accomplishments are valuable, and their implementation, including of the most recent Astana Declaration (2010), should also be reviewed.
- Trust-building exercises, such as the Structured Dialogue, are important to avoid sleepwalking into war, because military incidents pose a real danger

of escalation. In this regard, the CSCE process can serve as a model of how dialogue works as a confidence-building measure and that a consensus-based platform for constructive dialogue can be the basis for the gradual establishment of a new *modus vivendi*. However, if space for dialogue is re-established, the OSCE will not play an exclusive role.

- With regard to conventional arms control, experts and practitioners do not expect real progress in the next few years due to the current political impasse. In the short term, the focus of conventional arms control efforts should thus be on the use of arms control instruments in protracted conflicts, introducing status-neutral elements where possible and adapting lessons learned from the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine, and to concentrate on measures to stabilize conflicts at subregional level. Moreover, many experts are convinced that there will be no new Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) any time soon, if ever. The OSCE should test ideas and lay the groundwork for future conventional arms control agreements. One way forward would be to analyse the potential of the various subtopics of conventional arms control and try to reach agreement on the issues where possible. Furthermore, a delinking of arms-related issues may allow for progress at different paces and levels that is dependent on respective political circumstances.



- Recommendations within the Final Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project may serve to guide programmatic measures to reconcile European security as a common project as well as to explore common solutions for perceived threats. As the very fibre that connects societies in the modern world and the principle driver of economic and social growth, information communication technologies (ICT) have added a complex new dimension to inter-State relations and embody a new source of security threats from cyberspace.

## 2.2 The Protracted Conflicts

Protracted conflicts consistently take place in politically charged environments with competing narratives, wherein the status quo is recurrently harnessed to serve narrow political needs. Thus, processes of normalization occur and prospects of finding solutions become less obvious, resulting in prolonged conflicts. The capacity to resolve conflicts within such a climate is dependent on the political will of the actors, as mediating parties can only hope to maintain dialogue and prevent further escalation. Often, the management of such conflicts, rather than attempts to resolve or even prevent them, becomes the standard procedure. Nonetheless, reinvigorated thinking aligned with the United Nations Sustaining Peace Agenda has shifted the focus of OSCE

peacebuilding towards all stages of the conflict cycle, with emphasis on the prevention of violent conflict. This shift allows the OSCE to address not only the symptoms but also the root causes of conflicts and hence to look beyond crisis management and the immediate resolution of conflicts. As a core activity of the OSCE, the goal of sustaining peace by way of a preventive agenda resonates with the general trend to reaffirm the *raison d'être* of the organization and, in particular, its guiding principles, against the background of the OSCE as a Chapter VIII organization of the Charter of the United Nations.

- Dealing with protracted conflicts is core OSCE business. The OSCE's priority must be unresolved territorial questions, to prevent further escalation and encourage pragmatic de-escalatory steps by participating States. Currently, there are no low-hanging fruit on this subject, despite some recent progress and a new dynamic in the international talk on Transnistria. Whether the moment for a non-military solution is ripe does not depend on the OSCE and third-party mediators but on the conflict parties. A political settlement needs to be less painful for all parties than the status quo.
- The conflict in Ukraine currently consumes a lot of attention and capacities. This concentration of focus carries the risk of conflict parties in other parts of the OSCE increasingly developing the sense of being





neglected. Boosting high-level engagement with protracted conflicts would be an important countermark. High-level involvement would also raise the price for defection from negotiations.

- The OSCE should also get Tracks 1.5 and 2 more involved. For example, societies in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are currently being prepared for war, not peace. The engagement of Tracks 1.5 and 2 would be an important step in the other direction. However, at times, the OSCE's focus on format leads to a course of action that loses sight of the people on the ground and the human side of the conflict is neglected in favour of the geopolitical. In Transnistria, for example, free movement along the Moldovan–Transnistrian border allows for social interactions that do not occur in Nagorno-Karabakh, where the new generation of young people is educated to view the other antagonistically. Thus, the OSCE needs to find new ways of initiating dialogue on Tracks 2 and 3 when Track 1 actors essentially prohibit activities on Tracks 2 and 3. The OSCE's strategic goal should be to move away from conflict management towards conflict resolution. In Nagorno-Karabakh, negotiations on peace plans have not taken place since the early 2000s. Status issues, for example, need to be readdressed. In the absence of talks on these issues, some participating States will come to the conclusion that only violence can induce change.
- The Minsk agreements and the SMM in Ukraine could give some inspiration for confidence and security-building measures (CSBMs) in other regions, especially the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. The same applies to the use of technology. When there is a window of opportunity, the OSCE should try to put these tools in place and enhance security. Status-neutral approaches based on the CSCE 1993 document Stabilizing Measures for Localized Crisis Situations could be applied to the protracted conflicts. This could include the use of existing OSCE documents as a large 'OSCE menu' of possible CSBMs to choose from, as measures tailored to the conditions of each protracted conflict as part of a concerted diplomatic effort. It is, however, a huge challenge to disarm parties that are currently arming in earnest.
- A discussion of historical narratives could establish more empathy and trust between parties. The aim of such a discussion would be to generate a more complete view of how the opponent has interpreted events rather than trying to impose a unified narrative. However, in some contexts (particularly the Armenian–Azeri conflict), such a discussion could also reinforce the deadlock and existing historical-narrative-based warfare.



Flags of the 57 OSCE participating States  
Photo: OSCE/Mikhail Evstafiev

- To increase the OSCE’s knowledge and insight on the individual situations, the analytical capacities of the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) need to be enhanced in respect of protracted conflicts to the extent that it is able to provide solution paths as well as to monitor the situation.
- OSCE peacebuilding activities have often failed to properly incorporate the gender dimension in protracted conflicts. Facilitation processes are male dominated, as most negotiators are men, leading to lost potential and unexplored policy options. There is a need for programmatic measures to increase the role of women that are soundly grounded within the tenet of local ownership.

### 2.3 The OSCE and South-East Europe

South-East Europe has repeatedly shown signs of crisis in recent months, with several countries in the region experiencing political turmoil. In part, these developments are fuelled by the increased activity of external actors coupled with resurfacing ghosts from the past. Further aggravating the already strained political realm is the surge of new challenges, such as the spread of jihadist ideologies, concomitant with an economic inertia that constrains improvement of the living conditions of large parts of the population. As international attention to the region has somewhat waned, the long-established field presences of the

OSCE, representing up to one third of the OSCE’s unified budget, make room for the organization to assume a more prominent role within the region. Accordingly, it is vital that the OSCE reflects on how it can act as a bridge-builder in the region and help to facilitate converging interests, while taking a strong regional (rather than country-by-country) approach to South-East Europe.

- The OSCE has to make use of its long experience and its field presences in South-East Europe to contribute to societal change, for example, in the areas of displaced persons, ethnic divisions, regional cooperation and reconciliation. The OSCE should clarify that it is not working for any other institution, but for the people of the region. The organization should also ensure that it is aware of political windows of opportunity to engage with governments and societies when the facts on the ground have changed, as is currently the case in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, for example.
- The OSCE has the potential to connect the region, especially through its field presences. A regional approach should help avoid duplication while expanding the organization’s expertise. This approach is already established in respect of projects, but the aim should be to take this approach further, despite various challenges. The focus



should be on a few strategic issues that are relevant to both the OSCE and the countries of the region. These issues should then be at the core of the organization's South-East Europe work in the long run.

- As the region faces new challenges, the OSCE should be prepared to engage with these new issues. However, it should focus on topics in which it already has expertise and not engage with every emerging subject. The strategic focuses mentioned in the previous paragraph could work as points of reference in this regard. Addressing new challenges should not mean abandoning the OSCE's long-standing focuses of engagement in the region. It is vital that the OSCE continues its work related to the legacy of the conflicts of the 1990s, such as ethnic issues still simmering beneath the surface.
- The OSCE has various early warning tools on the ground through its field presences. There is no need to enhance early warning tools; rather, there is a need for mechanisms that translate early warnings into early actions. The CiO should use early warning tools in creative ways to provide information and focus efforts on strengthening the organization's early action capabilities.
- Host States welcome the OSCE field presences in the region, which are comparatively large and familiar to the local population. This creates an

environment for more ambitious reform projects than in other OSCE regions. Thus, the field presences could also act as a test case of adaptation for other missions.

## 2.4 The Mediterranean Partnership

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The Mediterranean region is home to some of the most pressing security challenges of our day, including irregular migration and refugee flows, radicalization leading to violent extremism, human trafficking and other cross-border criminal activities. In facing these transnational challenges, opportunities arise for OSCE participating States and Mediterranean partners to revitalize the Mediterranean Partnership and enhance cooperation by focusing on known areas of mutual interest. Moreover, the composition of its membership provides ample reason to invest both political and diplomatic capital in the Mediterranean Partnership, as this could help to further increase the relevance of the OSCE as an organization.

Until very recently, there has been dissatisfaction with the Mediterranean Partnership on both sides, as Mediterranean partners have exuded a generalized frustration about their lack of voice and a low level of uptake of cooperation opportunities. As, under Italian leadership, the Mediterranean dimension is becoming more central to the OSCE's strategic agenda, it is crucial to take into account the social dynamics and

cultural context of the regional partners and construct a positive and shared agenda that promotes the spirit of joint ownership.

- The 2017 Italian Chairmanship of the OSCE Mediterranean Contact Group and Italy's OSCE Chairmanship in 2018 provide important opportunities to reinvigorate the OSCE's Mediterranean Partnership. The region's challenges are unlikely to be short lived. The earlier the OSCE understands how to engage with these challenges, the better.
- The organization has considerable convening power regarding the Mediterranean. The fact that Israel and various Arab States are partners of the OSCE should be kept in mind.
- The OSCE should focus on its strengths and employ them strategically. The organization has a unique added value in its cross-dimensional approach. Convening forums for cooperation that focus on topics of shared interest—in particular migration management, radicalization, and countering and preventing violent extremism (CVE/PVE)—could provide a means of raising interest on both sides.
- The OSCE has developed renowned expertise in areas related to irregular migration and refugees, including border management, police cooperation, protection of human rights and the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination. The OSCE should share its experience with Mediterranean Partner

countries and serve as a platform for the exchange of best practices.

- Integration is another migration-related topic that the OSCE could address. It should ascertain how existing OSCE special representatives or offices could engage on this issue. The establishment of a special representative or centres of excellence in the context of the Mediterranean could be explored. However, efficiency and political feasibility must be kept in mind when discussing such initiatives.
- Effectively meeting the objectives of the Mediterranean Partnership requires including as many Mediterranean countries as possible in cooperative arrangements. There is a need for the OSCE participating States to reinvest politically and diplomatically in the Mediterranean. Currently, projects are often perceived as being motivated and sponsored primarily by one of the OSCE participating States. To increase ownership of the Mediterranean dimension of the OSCE, it would make sense to establish the practice of bringing more than one OSCE participating State on board.
- There is an acute need for greater continuity and a long-term strategy for working with the OSCE's Mediterranean partners. Currently, the institutional setup is ill-equipped to maintain continuity, as incoming chairs usually lack resources and a further strategic outlook. This is likely to change under the 2018 Italian OSCE Chairmanship.



OSCE Conference Centre at the Hofburg, Vienna  
Photo: Flickr / Nlafferty

## 3

## Addressing the OSCE's Institutional Challenges

The unique institutional character of the OSCE has its advantages and drawbacks. On the one hand, it allows the organization to be flexible and creative in its interaction with States—the informal and unbureaucratic quality of its dialogue may serve as a barometer flagging security-issue domains where the pressure is currently rising. On the other hand, the organization's unclear position under international law, due to its lack of legal status, substantively affects its activities, particularly in the field. It lacks privileges and immunities, inviolability, exemption from taxation and other elements essential to operating smoothly as an international organization.

The never-ending debate on the OSCE's lack of legal status is exacerbated by structural constraints and deficiencies that add to the problems hanging over its institutional setup. Questions hang over the division of labour between the CiO and the Secretary General (SG), both of which need budgetary and human resources, and efficiency concerns with regard to operational decisions being led by consensus. The OSCE has tried to make the best of these disadvantages, as overcoming such institutional challenges remains as relevant today as it was a decade ago during the OSCE Ministerial Meeting, in Madrid. To limit the risk of lapsing into 'reform fatigue' after many ill-fated exercises, the task of revisiting the roles and responsibilities of OSCE institutions and bodies must be accompanied by a move away from the notion of zero nominal growth. In this regard, providing greater continuity among CiOs through multi-annual budget

cycles, increasing the strategic and agenda-setting capabilities of the SG, and undertaking programmatic work in OSCE field presences (combined with regional approaches) are all steps in the right direction.

### 3.1. The Chairmanship of the OSCE

The perennial issue surrounding the position of Chairmanship of the OSCE has been described in part as the outcome of an organization growing organically rather than logically. Currently, the role lacks continuity due to its one-year term, provokes dissatisfaction with the distribution of roles, and is plagued by a 'comparative discourse' that causes incoming CiOs to allocate resources to areas of their specific interest.

The current window of opportunity presented with the arrival of a new SG suggests that reform processes are now more possible than ever. Thus, the relationship between leadership and management, ownership and engagement, and the political and operational side of the organization, as well as between the short and the long term, all constitute key concerns to be addressed in terms of effectiveness, professionalism and integrity.

- As it is key for the work of the OSCE, CiOs should seek to strengthen the continuity of their efforts. Multi-year planning across multiple terms would increase the strategic approach of the OSCE; for example, three-yearly cooperation frames could



be envisaged. Enhanced cooperation within the Troika will facilitate joint work programmes and joint special representatives. To enhance continuity, committed chairing countries should be encouraged not to wait another 20 years to chair again. Furthermore, a change of the OSCE calendar from calendar year to school year would avoid having the summer break interrupt the term of a chairmanship at a strategically important time.

- Cooperation between the CiOs and the SG should become more synergetic and have a longer horizon. Furthermore, there will be new conflicts in the future, and incoming CiOs, in close cooperation with the SG, should be prepared to react to unexpected events and to employ the OSCE's toolbox in the best possible ways.
- CiOs have a role to play in furthering cooperation with other organizations. With regard to the Mediterranean, for example, there are multiple organizations with which cooperation could be explored and eventually enhanced.
- The OSCE's cross-dimensional approach remains a comparative strength. CiOs should keep in mind that all dimensions of the organization need to be engaged and that cross-dimensional work, specifically activities that enhance synergies, should be undertaken wherever appropriate.

- The visibility of the OSCE has improved in recent years. However, it remains a fact that the OSCE's work does not get the credit it deserves in the public arena. CiOs should regard their term as an opportunity to raise the profile of the OSCE's impact, especially in their home countries.

### 3.2 The OSCE Secretary General

The role of Secretary General (SG) has been described as a job like no other, requiring both the leadership qualities of a general and the humility to serve as a secretary. However, whereas the United Nations Secretary-General is a power in his or her own right and exerts great influence over the agenda, the SG of the OSCE has, since the organization's inception, struggled to garner the political and administrative clout needed to lead effectively. Despite this, the role of SG has changed markedly, not by design but by default, primarily following the swift reaction in eastern Ukraine.

This shift has placed the SG back on the political map, resulting in increased international visibility. Further enhancing of political and administrative dimensions of the SG role maintains the momentum gathered since 2014, and ensures greater continuity within the organization's agenda and heightened support in reform processes in the areas of the budget, personnel, ICT and cross-dimensional work.

- In recent years, experts and practitioners have repeatedly highlighted the importance of continuity to the work of the OSCE. The multi-year term of the SG plays a critical role in this regard. The organization would benefit from an extended SG term, especially if the SG is able to further the strategic approach of the organization and encourage and initiate multi-year projects. According to his or her mandate, the SG also has agenda-setting powers. It would be beneficial if the SG made more use of these powers to raise sensitive issues. This is especially true given that CiOs are inclined to follow their own country's political and strategic interests, rather than those of the organization. The SG also has a role to play in ensuring the OSCE's openness to tackling emerging topics of relevance and the OSCE's ability to make use of its toolbox in the face of unexpected challenges. The SG's own toolbox could be strengthened by adding strategic and proactive capacity and resources to the office.
- The time for reforms is now. In a matter of months the momentum for the new SG to introduce innovations will be gone.
- Close cooperation between the SG and the CiO is important for the functioning of the OSCE. Continued dialogue with other international organizations, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Council of Europe, EU, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and United Nations, will ensure the relevance of the OSCE.
- The OSCE needs formality, but there is also a need to use informal formats more often and more efficiently, including ambassadorial retreats and informal high-level meetings.
- To enhance the OSCE's rapid response capability, the SG should be given a contingency fund with which to launch fact-finding missions without prior authorization from the Permanent Council. Operational decisions should, in general, be allowed without consensus if an overarching consensual OSCE decision already exists.
- The SG should continue efforts with regard to the legal personality of the organization. Although a founding charter for the organization is not currently on the cards, bilateral efforts should continue to ensure the OSCE's recognition and legal security of its employees. Furthermore, the SG requires the capacity to move beyond an annual budget. Additional strengthening of the office of SG implies increasing the power of appointment of heads of missions and secretariat staff.





### 3.3 The OSCE Institutions

In the current politically charged environment, mistrust has grown, not only among participating States but also towards OSCE institutions, namely, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities. This mistrust is manifest in attempts to weaken the institutions, be it through restriction of their mandate, budget or appointment procedure, in turn casting doubt on their institutional autonomy. Particularly in times of divergent narratives and deep rifts and fractures in the of shared principles and values portfolio, maintaining and enforcing the autonomous functioning of OSCE institutions remains imperative, as does ensuring that the activities of OSCE institutions remain coherent and focused.

- To fulfil the mandates of the independent OSCE institutions, their budgetary and personnel resources as well as their visibility need to be strengthened.
- Early action is imperative, in respect of all OSCE's institutions (ODIHR, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media).

- The OSCE needs to enhance its institutional mediation capability. Furthermore, new and effective mechanisms within the OSCE's institutions should be developed to independently monitor the implementation of human-dimension commitments through thematic and country-based-monitoring expert reports.
- ODIHR's bilateral agreement with Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs to establish a legal basis for ODIHR's operations in the country constitutes one practical approach to solving the issue of legal personality.

### 3.4 The OSCE Field Presences

As essential service providers in situations of crisis, transition or State-building, OSCE field presences have contributed to some of the OSCE's greatest achievements and constitute one of the organization's core strengths. An invention of the 1990s, of conflict response and post-conflict rehabilitation, their presence nowadays is often regarded by host countries as stigmatic. As such, field presences need to be adapted to changing circumstances to remain a relevant, welcome and valued support to their host countries.

Creatively engaging in forward-looking discussions on new approaches and alternative types of presences, concentrating efforts to enhance local ownership and increasing programmatic and thematically guided work all constitute steps in the right direction.

- The OSCE needs to be creative to maintain the advantages of its field presences in a less cooperative European security environment. There seems to be consensus among OSCE insiders and experts that the concept of OSCE field operations needs to be updated. Ideas for devising a new generation of field operations include small and flexible missions that could be deployed quickly and supported by experts from the OSCE's main institutions. Additional ideas include needs-oriented thematic activities and regional centres of excellence (based on the model of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek or the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe), roving special representatives, and small OSCE information offices across the OSCE region to better inform the public about OSCE activities.
- While the relationship between the CiO and SG should not be fundamentally altered, the line of command to heads of missions should be streamlined; the latter should report to the SG, who in turn reports to the CiO.
- OSCE field presences should try to better understand the emerging needs and priorities of their host States, lead the adaptation to these changes and thus more rapidly grasp the emerging opportunities and challenges facing host States. A rapid reaction tool to provide crisis management advice to States in need could be established. A review of the structure of field missions could allow them to better assess their operational environment and the objective needs of the Government.
- Good cooperation with the host country is the key to long-term success. The OSCE must take a more proactive role in engaging host States. It should also consider assessing policies jointly with States. This would give host countries greater ownership and is in the interest of both the mission and the host country. It is crucial to take into account local needs and sensitivities in the configuration of field presence mandates.
- Improved strategic communication by the OSCE should link the host State's expectations with the programmatic activities. An effective communication strategy should be developed including the CiO, Secretariat and the field operations, jointly with the host State. Ways to improve the attractiveness of OSCE field missions for employees should be explored.
- To remove the stigma of hosting an OSCE field presence, missions should also be established in participating Western States. For example, a thematic mission on refugees in the Mediterranean, a thematic mission on Roma and Sinti or an anti-radicalization network focused on young people could be established.

# Key Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the discussions at the OSCE Focus 2017 Conference:

- Respond to the strong need for a renewed dialogue among OSCE participating States on European security and the differing interpretations of core OSCE principles.
- With regard to protracted conflicts, push for renewed high-level political engagement. The OSCE would need to strengthen its capacity to work on the prevention of violent conflict instead of spending scarce resources on dealing with the aftermath of conflict and conflict resolution.
- In South-East Europe, leverage its comparative strengths in the region and, especially, use windows of opportunity to engage with the authorities, combined with the necessary regional approach and staying focused on the core mandate of the organization.
- Act on the strong case to enhance its current efforts to strengthen its cooperation with OSCE Partners for Cooperation, in particular in the Mediterranean, as well as with other international organizations, in particular the United Nations.
- Use its convening power to establish a network for the exchange of experiences with its Mediterranean partners and, eventually, beyond them.
- Seek to strengthen the continuity of the CiO through multi-annual planning.
- Use the Secretary General's mandate to its fullest extent to ensure the continuity of the OSCE's overall strategy and activities. In this context, it is necessary to strengthen the strategic capacity of the Secretariat to work proactively on current and future conflicts as well as new and re-emerging security challenges.
- Pursue reforms now, as the arrival of the new Secretary General creates a momentum to introduce innovations.
- Strengthen the budgetary and personnel resources of OSCE independent institutions.
- Engage with host countries proactively regarding their needs and changes to the mandates of OSCE field presences with a view to ensuring close, positive cooperation.

## About the Co-hosts

Austria holds the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2017. Learn more about Austria holding the Chair of the OSCE at <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/european-foreign-policy/security-policy/the-austrian-chairmanship-in-2017/> and about the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs at <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/>

Italy will hold the OSCE Chairmanship in 2018. Learn more about Italy holding the Chair of the OSCE at [http://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala\\_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2016/07/osce-presidenza-2018-all-italia.html](http://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2016/07/osce-presidenza-2018-all-italia.html) and about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy at <http://www.esteri.it/mae/en>

Switzerland held the Chairmanship of the OSCE most recently in 2014. Learn more about the Switzerland holding the Chair of the OSCE at <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/news/dossiers/alle-dossiers/osce-chairmanship-2014.html> and about the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland at <https://www.fdfa.admin.ch/eda/en/home.html>

The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) is an international centre of excellence whose mission is to assist partner States, and international actors supporting these States, to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. DCAF has a long-standing collaborative relationship with the OSCE. Learn more at <http://www.dcaf.ch/>

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich is a centre of competence on Swiss and international security policy, offering security expertise in research, teaching and consultancy. Founded in 1986, it combines research and policy consultancy and thus functions as a bridge between academia and practice. Learn more at <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/>



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