

Slovenia is this year chairing the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which is often accused of double standards, putting too much emphasis on the human rights, lack of objectivity in election monitoring. Do we still need the OSCE? Are 55 participating States after 30 years still sharing the same values?

The Helsinki Process that laid the foundations for the OSCE as we know it today was a key element in ending the Cold War and making Europe safer and more united.

Today, the OSCE is standing by the principles on which it was founded. The process of creating Europe whole, free, and prosperous is not yet complete. The values to which countries subscribed to thirty years ago, remain the same. They are the bedrock of the Organization.

However, the new security situation in the world calls for reforms of the OSCE, as is the case in other international organizations. This issue has occupied Slovenia's Chairmanship for the best part of the year.

We took very seriously the criticism from some of the participating States about the work of the Organization. Slovenia began the OSCE Chairmanship well aware of the necessity for transparent operations and increased responsiveness of the Organization to the needs of the participating states and their citizens. To achieve that I outlined the Triple "R" Agenda of our Chairmanship already in January, with a purpose to Reform, Rebalance and Revitalise the Organization.

Participating States call for a reform of the Organization. What should be done to make the Organization stronger and more efficient?

I believe no organization should continue unchanged when the environment in which it is operating is changing. The OSCE is well known for its flexibility and its ability to regenerate.

At the beginning of this year I appointed a Panel of Eminent Persons to produce recommendations for the reform of the Organization. These proposals were examined by participating States at the High Level Consultations, which established a working group that will hopefully culminate in several decisions being put to the Ministerial Council. These are likely to focus on the internal structure of the OSCE, tightening up its rules and procedures and strengthening the role of the Secretary General, among other things. However this is still a matter for discussion and, as always, subject to a consensual decision by all of the OSCE States.

I am confident that the decisions will further improve the effectiveness of the OSCE, make it better able to face the challenges of the changed environment and allow participating States to feel even more strongly that this is their Organization.

Whether this will be the end of the reform process I very much doubt. I am certain that the question of OSCE reform will be still be occupying the next Chairmanship.

What is Organization's biggest asset and disadvantage?

What is special about the OSCE is its comprehensive approach to security. That means it not only deals with military and political matters, but it also covers human rights questions and economic and environmental affairs, recognising that all these have an important bearing on security.

Also, the OSCE works by consensus. This means no votes are taken and all countries, large or small, have an effective veto over decisions of which they disapprove. The disadvantage of consensus decision-making is that it can take a long time, or even prove impossible, to get 55 countries with widely differing interests and perspectives to agree. On the other hand when you get a decision, it is backed by 55 sovereign states and is politically binding for all of them.

The OSCE has a broad membership of 55 countries - the United States, Canada plus the whole of Europe and the whole of the former Soviet Union. It is the only major security organization to which the countries of both the Caucasus and Central Asia belong. The broad membership is undoubtedly an advantage. Threats to security are trans-national in nature and the OSCE makes a valuable contribution to confronting them across a broad geographical area that stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

What are the main achievements of the Organization in thirty years?

The most important successes of the OSCE/CSCE has been its contribution to ending the Cold War and facilitating a smooth transition into a new era of democracy and open borders. We should not forget that the first decades of the CSCE were marked by an atmosphere of deep hostility and mistrust, with two armed blocs confronting each other.

The Helsinki Summit of 1975 launched a process of cooperative security which remains valid and relevant today. It gave the original 35 participating States an opportunity for dialogue. Human rights - a long-standing taboo in East-West relations - became a legitimate subject of dialogue and were no longer the exclusive internal concern of any participating State. In the military security field, the CSCE helped to reduce tensions significantly by implementing confidence-building measures which enhanced military transparency.

There are many specific examples of which the OSCE can be proud. The OSCE has helped to end civil war in Tajikistan, constrained conflict in Ukraine, Macedonia and Georgia. It has played a major role in building stable democratic societies in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. In Albania, the OSCE helped to stabilize the country after the complete breakdown of law and order at the political system that followed the collapse of fraudulent pyramid investment schemes.

How does the OSCE co-operate with other international organizations - like EU, NATO, CoE? How much can they complement each others work?

The Slovenian Chairmanship set closer co-operation with international organizations as one of its priorities. We believe that no international organization can face the challenges of the modern security environment alone. Improved coherence between the OSCE and other international organizations is a long-standing objective. Since each organization has its own mandate, history and membership, I believe that OSCE should work together with regional and sub-regional organizations, and civil society, to make the most effective use of their respective strengths, prevent duplication and increase the synergy between them - at the headquarters level as well as in the field.

In 2005, special attention has been paid to streamlining the OSCE's relations with the Council of Europe, whose activities are very much complementary to the Organization's activities in the human dimension of security. To this end, we signed a joint statement highlighting the Declaration on Co-

operation, which aims to ensure that their combined expertise on human rights and rule-of-law issues is properly channeled and used effectively.

What kind of challenges has Slovenia been confronting this year?

The OSCE works on the basis of consensus. This means that all 55 participating States must agree to any new initiative or idea before it is implemented. Achieving consensus is quite often a challenge in itself. It takes a lot of patient dialogue and compromise.

It has been - and still is - an exciting year to be occupying the Chair of the OSCE.

As you probably know, at the beginning of our term, we had to secure agreement on the Organization's budget for this year and build a consensus over a new Secretary General. We also had to start the process of overcoming the current polarisation within the Organization and prevent new dividing lines from opening up.

In terms of specific regional issues there are many items on our agenda, ranging from consolidating the OSCE's work in South-Eastern Europe, to making progress in resolving frozen conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. We must not forget the developments that took place in Central Asia earlier this year, particularly in Kyrgyzstan.

What are main achievements of Slovenia's Chairmanship? What does it mean for Slovenia and its foreign policy? Are its opportunities broadening?

I think it is too early to talk about achievements before the meeting of the OSCE Ministerial council in Ljubljana on 5 and 6 December.

Nevertheless, I already indicated that we reached agreements on the issues of the OSCE's budget and the Secretary General. The process of "Reforming", "Rebalancing" and "Revitalising" the Organization, as outlined in our Triple "R" Agenda in January, has already progressed this year. Accordingly, we have witnessed the launch of a reform process, headed by the Panel of Eminent Persons, which is continuing in the run up to the Ministerial Council meeting.

Furthermore, the OSCE - as the only international organization on the spot - supported Kyrgyzstan closely during a turbulent period as its previous government fell after unsatisfactory parliamentary elections in March. By offering specific programmes to strengthen democracy, law enforcement and economic development, the OSCE tries to extend practical assistance to the Central Asian country.

I believe that by chairing the OSCE, Slovenia has shown its commitment to the promotion of human rights, democracy, rule of law, peace and stability in the world. Slovenia has stepped up to its responsibility in confronting with challenges to security in the OSCE area and the international community as a whole. This is undoubtedly opening new possibilities for Slovenia's foreign policy and is an excellent preparation for the EU presidency in 2008.

I am confident that the Slovenian Chairmanship will end its year of office with a well-attended and useful meeting of Foreign Ministers in Ljubljana in December. We have much to discuss, but while I am certain that the processes of OSCE reform and of resolving frozen conflicts will still be preoccupying the next Chairmanship, there is no reason to suppose that we shall not take meaningful and concrete decisions that move all these issues forward.

It seems that international presence in the Balkans is no longer needed. What is the future role of the OSCE in the part of Europe?

The OSCE has a large investment to take care of in South-Eastern Europe - its largest field missions are there. It would be a wonderful occasion to advocate the downsizing of OSCE's presence in this part of Europe. All of us look forward to the day we could put the field missions out of work - the sooner, the better. Unfortunately, we must be realistic and acknowledge that there is still plenty of unfinished business.

The OSCE should take advantage of its regional network of field missions and promote solutions to issues with regional significance. It should also concentrate on its strengths and target its activities and resources where they can have the highest impact. I am thinking in particular of issues such as refugee return, protection of national minorities, capacity-building – particularly the judiciary and police – as well as elections.

Future of Kosovo? What are your expectations in this regard?

The OSCE is a key player in Kosovo and supports the lead role of the United Nations in the province. It is clear to me that the OSCE and the EU should be involved in finding agreements for the future of Kosovo.

The time has come for negotiations on the future status of Kosovo to begin. It is important that all communities are invited and included in the negotiations. Dialogue must take place on all levels - not only within the political forces in Kosovo, but also between Belgrade and Pristina.

Three key principles - red lights - should be taken into consideration while negotiating on the future of the region: no partition of Kosovo, no association of Kosovo with Albanian or neighboring territories inhabited by ethnic Albanians; and no return to the pre-1999 status. Kosovo Serbs have to identify with Pristina as the capital of their homeland. Serbian religious, cultural and historic sites must also be protected.

During my recent visit to Belgrade and Pristina I called on the authorities to be ready for compromise in the imminent negotiations on the future status of Kosovo. A compromise solution we are all looking for should contribute to the stability of the region.

The OSCE with its people on the ground will continue to play an important role in Kosovo, in protecting human and minority rights, capacity-building – particularly the judiciary and police – as well as in the area of elections.

The talks on the future status of Kosovo are just one of a series of positive developments in the region. The European Union's decisions to start accession talks with Croatia and negotiations on a Stabilization and Association Agreement with Serbia and Montenegro are clear signs of the region's steady progress.