

The Significance of the OSCE Fifteen Years Ago and Today[©]

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There are few who recall or realise how critically important Slovenia's links with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and its predecessor, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) have been. This not only relates to the fact that Slovenia was invited to this extensive multilateral conference/organisation soon after gaining independence. Slovenia was admitted as an observer in Prague on 31 January 1992, and became a full member in Helsinki on 26 March of the same year, a few days before it was formally recognised by the United States. At that time, I was a member of the first Slovene democratic government and this was a vital recognition for our further development. Neither does this relate only to Slovenia using two important CSCE meetings held in New York in September 1990 and in Paris in November 1990 in its bid for international recognition. I managed to smuggle myself into the conference in September, officially as a member of the Austrian Delegation (headed by Alois Mock), while I was invited with the Yugoslav delegation, headed by Borisav Jović, in November. I gave a press conference in Paris, during which I distributed an important document to CSCE ministers, the Memorandum on the Yugoslav Crisis and the Intentions of the Republic of Slovenia. In Belgrade this act was labelled a great scandal. I participated in the CSCE as a representative of three different countries on three different occasions, which must be a unique achievement of sorts!

At the beginning, in 1990 and 1991, prior to announcing its independence, Slovenia endeavoured to reach agreement with Belgrade and with the other Yugoslav republics. Immediately after the war of independence (and before the war in other parts of Yugoslavia reached its tragic peak) I did propose within the Demos Party that Yugoslavia be organised as a kind of "mini-CSCE". I suggested that a "Conference on Security and Cooperation of Yugoslav Republics" be set up, consisting of independent Slovenia, Croatia and the "central Yugoslavia".

At that time, the CSCE was indeed closely linked with revolutionary and reformist movements in Central and Eastern Europe. I recall one of the first Demos "conspiracy" meetings in some tavern in the hills. I was very impressed by a presentation Franc Zagožen made at this meeting. His deliberations ran along the following lines: "Europe is starting to transform under the auspices of the CSCE. We must immediately establish contacts with the CSCE, since the door to freedom will not be open long".

The CSCE was perhaps revolutionary against its will. When signing the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, Brezhnev and Tito certainly did not envisage that they would soon be replaced on the stage of history by the proponents of "Glasnost and Perestroyka", Polish *Solidarity*, the Czech *Charter 77* and the Slovene *Nova Revija*. But the CSCE was undoubtedly one of the forces behind European integration, the tearing of the Iron Curtain and the destruction of the Berlin Wall. If there had been no CSCE, there might not now be the new democratic countries, and there would probably have been no extensive EU and NATO enlargements in 2004.

The CSCE and later the OSCE was, perhaps, a victim of its own success. Prior to NATO enlargement, it was seen by some as an alternative to NATO, a milder form of security

integration. Maybe the West was more aware than the East of its explosive power in the domain of the "third basket", in the area of human rights, democracy and elections. The strongest responses and criticism were indeed evoked by those CSCE/OSCE actions that were linked with election observations and the scorecards with positive and negative marks for achievement in individual elections. In some places, the OSCE meets a downright allergic reaction, as it "interferes" with well established political practices and disturbs groups in power.

Elsewhere, the OSCE is considered a "waiting room" or even a "training room," a halfway house to NATO or the European Union. In this, the OSCE is similar to the Council of Europe, which we once perceived as an end in itself, but which then – when we started dealing with the EU – became somewhat neglected. Yet, we must be cautious and realistic: Some OSCE members will never become members of either NATO or the EU. The OSCE has a membership of 55 countries, representing a mass of one billion people as well as a great political potential for the future. It has managed to resolve some tough technical and organisational problems this year (scales of contribution, budget, Secretary General), which places it among the better run international organisations. If we note that we have achieved what could be achieved in bringing the East and the West closer together, then our next step will also bring the realisation that there are other challenges on the agenda of European humanity that can, perhaps, best be solved within the OSCE. What I have in mind is the so-called *dialogue among cultures and civilisations*, needed by all – Jews, Christians and Muslims. This is an important matter for Slovenia, since it is not so far from centres of Muslim culture and from that part of the East that, not without a reason, is known to some as the Near East.

The OSCE shares some features and difficulties with the European Union or the European community. We are linked in a paradoxical manner, since our connection derives from diversity, and our cohesive material is provided by difference. Differences are not known as the most reliable of cohesive material; but we have grown used to living with its assistance during the long years of experience and temptations provoked by authoritarian and dictator regimes. There are two "schools" coexisting within the OSCE: idealism – promoting human rights, democracy and self-determination, and realism – prioritising balance, stability and state sovereignty. This contradiction, too, is a reality of the present world, which we must confront. Within this confrontation, we might find a definition of terrorism and rules allowing for the resolution of minority or ethnic hardships beyond the national borders.

Slovenia is currently experiencing the OSCE against a backdrop of criticism about traffic jams and expenses incurred by the ministerial conference; in this way, we have safely distanced ourselves from the OSCE's main preoccupations. What is more important, however, is that the OSCE Chairmanship (which representatives of the Slovene state have performed free-of-charge, in the spirit of Slovenia's humanitarian tradition) serves as a proof of Slovenia's maturity as a state. We have proved in the OSCE (and probably also elsewhere) that we do not only care for our own interests, but for others as well. This year we thus concerned ourselves (relatively successfully) within the OSCE with Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and particularly with Kosovo. We have taken a seat at the main table of global politics. We would have been missed, had it remained empty. Slovenia has become indispensable.

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