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## **REPORT**

**FOR THE GENERAL COMMITTEE ON  
POLITICAL AFFAIRS AND SECURITY**

# ***25 Years of Parliamentary Co-operation: Building Trust Through Dialogue***

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## **Introduction**

The OSCE, now in its fifth decade, continues to establish itself as the primary forum for transatlantic and Eurasian dialogue in the spheres of security and human rights, and in the economic and environmental dimension. As a community based on shared values and principles, the OSCE carries unparalleled moral authority in Europe and, therefore, the implementation of OSCE commitments is an essential element for peace, security and stability in the OSCE region.

However, there has been a palpable loss of trust between participating States in recent years and a corresponding decrease in political will, resulting in reduced willingness to compromise in key areas in order to move the OSCE's agenda forward. This culminated last year in the inability of the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Belgrade to reach consensus on a number of key issues. Since so many of our common challenges require real multilateral engagement, this gridlock and loss of trust has had a tangible and negative impact on our mutual security. Acknowledging this, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly should utilize its full capacity to tackle emerging threats in the spirit of rebuilding trust among participating States. The parliamentary dimension of the OSCE should work towards overcoming the lack of trust between OSCE participating States and towards being more vocal in expressing its position. Only by strengthening dialogue and political will can diplomatic efforts truly bring together belligerent parties in negotiating a peaceful settlement to conflicts and in working together towards addressing common threats.

This report will touch upon five main points in this regard: transnational terrorism, the crisis in and around Ukraine, protracted conflicts, women in armed conflict, and the link between security and democracy.

## **Transnational Terrorism**

Violent extremism is having a growing and palpable impact on security in the OSCE area, with far too many lives being cut short by terrorist tactics, including suicide bombings, mass shootings, kidnappings, and beheadings.

As governments work to effectively respond to the evolving terrorist threat, they should make full use of the OSCE and its anti-terrorism activities, which focus on improving the international legal framework against terrorism, strengthening travel document security, countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism, and countering the use of the internet for terrorist purposes. Likewise, the OSCE would do well to tailor its activities to the needs of participating States, while working to ensure that counter-terrorism is not used as a cover for targeting legitimate political opposition and suppressing the legal activities of nonviolent civil society groups.

Countering the terrorist threat is complicated by the refugee and migrant crisis now impacting nearly all OSCE countries, which has been precipitated by ongoing conflicts in Europe and

its surrounding neighborhood. Allegations of migration's links to terrorism have led to the politicization of the crisis and in some cases the scapegoating of desperate people who are fleeing war and repression. But while acknowledging the core humanitarian concerns of the crisis, it is important that we also recognize it as a fundamental security issue and work to improve the process of screening asylum seekers. In order to address the crisis's root causes, the OSCE and its participating States should focus on conflict resolution and prevention in countries of origin.

The nexus between human trafficking and illegal migration further undermines the security and stability of the OSCE region. Since human trafficking networks are known to have links to terrorist activities, the OSCE needs to develop new ways to move the partnership with the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation forward. The experience in border management, in addition to the existing mechanisms for information sharing between participating States and their joint effort in countering organized crime, places the OSCE in a unique position to tackle the issue of irregular migration and its possible links to terrorist activities. Participating States should acknowledge this issue as a shared responsibility by ensuring that they fully uphold OSCE commitments.

While taking actions on the national level to protect our citizens from the terrorist threat, we must not forget the root causes, which need to be addressed on the international level. A comprehensive, multi-layered strategy is needed, one that includes targeted efforts to address the grievances that terrorists exploit, including economic grievances.

Parliamentarians have a role to play in strengthening international legal frameworks against terrorism by working in their national parliaments to promote universal anti-terrorist conventions and protocols on a national level, and also working to ensure that national legislative initiatives targeting terrorist activities uphold key OSCE principles, including freedom of expression.

### **Russian Aggression Against Ukraine**

The OSCE's response to the crisis in and around Ukraine has demonstrated that its tool box is well-equipped for crisis management, with the Organization providing essential instruments for promoting de-escalation and dialogue. The Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in particular and the Observer Mission at two Russian checkpoints have had a crucial role in addressing the crisis by providing daily unbiased reports from the field.

However, we should also acknowledge and address a number of issues including a lack of resources, restrictions on the OSCE monitors' freedom of movement, and the challenges posed by the OSCE's lack of legal personality. Also, the fact that the conflict was not prevented at its early stages – despite all of the OSCE's preventive action mechanisms – highlights the need for the OSCE to continue to strengthen its political dialogue and to develop capabilities for early warning detection and reporting. The subsequent upsurge of violence in Eastern Ukraine is exacerbated by the provision of weapons and military equipment to the rebels by the Russian Federation. This further fuels the ongoing killing in the southeast and clearly shows the continuing aggression by Russia towards the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Therefore, recognizing that the achievement of a political solution to the crisis is a top priority for the international community, we must continue promoting good governance in Ukraine and building confidence based on the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

Regarding perhaps the most tragic incident of the Ukraine conflict, the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 on 17 July 2014, we must continue to press for greater transparency and urgency in the investigation, with a view towards ensuring justice and closure for the victims and their families. A declaration calling for an open, transparent and independent international investigation into the crash was approved by the Permanent Council with the consensus of all 57 participating States the day after the tragedy nearly two years ago, but to this date, the investigation has been hampered by a lack of openness and co-operation by some governments. This tragedy has been one of the main rifts of trust between participating States and, therefore, efforts for the resolution of this issue should be pursued.

Another major issue of controversy has been the Russian Federation's illegal annexation of Crimea. This act of aggression towards another OSCE participating State has breached the founding principles of the OSCE as enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, fundamentally undermining Ukraine's right to territorial integrity. The OSCE PA has been clear since the beginning that the Russian Federation's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 was illegal and illegitimate. Since that time, there has been a steady deterioration in human rights and a systematic attack on media freedom on the peninsula. While the issue of Crimea has been overshadowed in some ways by other priorities of the international community in Ukraine, including the alleviation of the conflict in the Donbas region, it is important to continue to point out that Ukraine's sovereignty over all of its territory – including Crimea – must be respected.

To prevent the Ukraine crisis from becoming another protracted conflict, the OSCE should work towards facilitating a constructive discourse that will bring all sides to the negotiating table and establish a long-term solution. The Parliamentary Assembly could strengthen its role in this effort by facilitating, *inter alia*, more in-depth and productive dialogue between parliamentarians.

### **Protracted Conflicts**

As outlined in the German OSCE Chairmanship's priorities for 2016, emphasis is being placed this year on crisis and conflict management, particularly regarding conflicts in Moldova and the South Caucasus. In concrete terms, the OSCE should strengthen its commitment towards solving the protracted conflicts in the region by means of its current negotiating formats and mechanisms.

Because participating States still use unilateral decision-making and violence for addressing differences, diplomatic negotiations are hindered from adequately addressing protracted conflicts. This was recently exemplified by the major violations that took place along the Line of Contact in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone on the side of Armenia and Azerbaijan, which represented the most serious escalation of this protracted conflict since 1994. The OSCE should utilize its full toolbox of conflict resolution mechanisms, including the Parliamentary Assembly and its capabilities and outreach, in order to stabilize the situation on the ground and exert more pressure for the facilitation of a peaceful negotiated solution of the conflict.

Furthermore, the Parliamentary Assembly should also strengthen its involvement in addressing the repercussions of the August 2008 conflict between the Russian Federation and the territory of Georgia. The issue of illegal resettlement of displaced persons to change the

demographic situation undermines trust between the negotiating parties and hampers the actual implementation of commitments. There should be more involvement on the parliamentary level for the implementation of the EU-brokered Six-Point Agreement of 12 August 2008. In concrete terms, the access to humanitarian aid in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia should be made available and provisions should be put in place guaranteeing its transit. Moreover, the OSCE PA should utilize its diplomatic power to draw the attention of the wider international community and ensure more transparency and accountability thereby reducing tensions on the ground. There needs to be stronger political will and more dedicated involvement on the side of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly so as to ensure dialogue and concrete action within the internationally recognized territory of Georgia. The fact that talks with the EU on visa liberalization for Georgian citizens is underway demonstrates the democratic development in the country. Moreover, the upcoming elections in Georgia on 8 October 2016 will serve to further strengthen the democratic development of Georgia.

The promotion of confidence-building measures, as well as the active work of the OSCE field presences, is vital. In particular, the OSCE should provide increased opportunities for civil society to participate and play a constructive role in a variety of fields, ranging from the promotion of democracy to social development. Specifically in protracted conflict zones, NGOs have produced many useful conflict management programmes, which can be synergistic with that of the OSCE. Civil society can offer valuable professional advice and information from the ground about activities in the area. The ability of NGOs to provide training and educational programs often enables them to bring together conflicting parties and facilitate dialogue.

### **Women in Armed Conflict**

Building long-term stability and security is an inclusive process that requires greater involvement of women in decision-making and conflict mediation. The OSCE's work with participating States to implement UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security is a positive example of the important role that this Organization can play to help ensure that women are involved in taking preventive measures and decision-making at all stages of conflict resolution. The 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality further sets out goals to prevent violence against women, advance their participation in political and public life, promote women's participation in conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict reconstruction.

In Moldova, the active participation of women in political affairs is a fundamental aspect of democracy, peace-building, and achieving sustainable development. The legal framework to advance women's participation in decision-making must continue to be reformed in the country, including by building capacity at national and sub-national levels to develop policies to advance women's rights and their participation in electoral processes. Another conflict area where women should have a more strengthened role is Ukraine. The knowledge, skills, and experience of Ukrainian women are vital to reaching a negotiated solution, and their full involvement is crucial to strengthening the implementation of OSCE commitments in their country during the current crisis.

At the Helsinki Annual Session last year, participating States were encouraged to take effective measures to provide comprehensive security guarantees and humanitarian relief to women in conflicts. The continuous development of an OSCE-wide action plan on women,

peace and security could be an important step in ending widespread conflict-related sexual violence, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

### **The Link Between Security and Democracy**

Parliamentarians have an important role to play in providing democratic oversight of the security sectors within participating States, as well as on the governmental side of the OSCE. As elected Members of Parliament are not restricted by the boundaries of official governmental policy, they can more freely address sensitive issues, including security sector reform. However, we must be honest and acknowledge that there is disproportionate influence wielded in some parliaments by well-financed special interests. Corruption is a major challenge to democracy and to the rule of law. We should seek accountability from those who have been implicated in recent corruption scandals and OSCE parliamentarians should provide necessary oversight to ensure compliance with international norms and best practices.

Therefore, in order to exercise checks and balances more effectively, a separate group of experts from different branches within the OSCE could complement our oversight role in the Organization. We can thereby strengthen the mechanisms of ensuring commitment to OSCE agreements. Not only would this type of co-operation enhance the quality of democratic oversight, it could help to also rebuild trust among participating States in the OSCE area.

### **Conclusion**

Healthy dialogue is crucial for strengthening broader co-operation in areas such as arms control, conflict resolution, security sector oversight, and military exchanges. The OSCE should therefore utilize its full capacity to tackle emerging threats by facilitating an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and co-operation. The consensus-based decision-making process of the OSCE, while in some respects a useful measure to ensure greater legitimacy for the Organization's decisions, can also be an obstacle to timely action. The relevance of the OSCE is enshrined in its principles, and if the Organization's mechanisms and tools are not advancing those principles, they should be addressed and reformed to ensure that the OSCE lives up to its mandate. This places the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in the unique position to rebuild mutual support between OSCE participating States through dialogue and discussion. Parliamentarians within the Assembly have a crucial role as representatives of their home countries and diplomats to both uphold OSCE commitments but also to work towards building trust between OSCE participating States.

We must also remember that the OSCE is an organization entirely dependent on the political will of its participating States. If these countries cannot agree on fundamental issues and continue to dispute competing narratives over how we have come to the current impasse, there is very little hope for moving forward the OSCE's agenda and building a common security community for the one billion people living from Vancouver to Vladivostok. It is up to all of us to bring the spirit of Helsinki back to our capitals and try to encourage the political will needed to reach compromises in key areas and reaffirm the principles on which the Organization was founded.