

REPORT

Call for Action - Helsinki + 50 Meeting

“Future Challenges for the OSCE”

31 May 2023, 14:00-16:00, via Zoom

“*The Call for Action - Helsinki +50 Meeting: Future Challenges for the OSCE*” brought together OSCE PA members and experts to discuss the current challenges facing the OSCE, including the 2024 Chairmanship, the renewal of appointments of key officials, and the budget. At the “*Informal Call for Action -Helsinki + 50*” meeting held in Vienna on 22 February 2023, it was noted that the war in Ukraine severely impacted many OSCE processes and operations and that OSCE PA members could raise these issues with their respective parliaments. The “*Future Challenges for the OSCE*” meeting specifically focused on the lack of clear vision in the OSCE and the importance of raising OSCE visibility within parliaments to tackle current challenges facing OSCE.

Speakers and Panellists

Ms. Margareta Cederfelt, OSCE PA President

Mr. Roberto Montella, OSCE PA Secretary General

Mr. Matteo Mecacci, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Ms. Allison Hart, Senior Advisor/Chief of Staff to the OSCE Secretary General

Mr. Doug Wake, Independent expert, former US diplomat, and senior OSCE official

In her opening remarks, **President Cederfelt** reminded participants of the origins of the “*Call for Action-Helsinki +50 Initiative*”, specifically its launch in 2020 in light of the lack of consensus and the leadership vacuum on the governmental side of the OSCE. Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine has further exacerbated underlying problems with the process and operations of the OSCE, such as the absence of an incoming Chair for 2024 and an agreed-upon budget. She highlighted that in times of political polarization, organizations like OSCE, which are tasked with dialogue, are often blamed for ineffectiveness. President Cederfelt emphasized that the current challenges of the OSCE are collateral damage from the war in Ukraine and that while mutual trust and respect, two of the core underlying principles of the OSCE, do not exist in the current moment, OSCE is still a vital organization that can have a substantial impact on the security structure of the region. She also encouraged a discussion on decision-making procedures.

OSCE PA SG Montella, in his opening remarks, emphasised that the OSCE costs 132 million Euros to its 57 members and provides a high-level of delivery for the OSCE region. SG Montella highlighted that to let the organization continue its vital work, it needs to separate the two issues of organizational survival and the continuance of dialogue. For its survival, the organization needs a budget and appointments of key officials. The issue of continued dialogue is complicated; however, there is no use in destroying the OSCE over the lack of dialogue, as it has worked as a tool for regional security in the past.

In his introduction of the panellists, the moderator, Amb. Zannier highlighted that the main overarching issue facing the OSCE is a lack of agreement on a shared vision of the OSCE.

Mr. Matteo Mecacci, ODIHR Director, presented three reflections to inform the conversation. Director Mecacci's first reflection related to the budget. He explained how the lack of budget constraints ODIHR's work, specifically in election observation. He commented that despite all efforts, ODIHR will soon run out of money for election observation and must ask states for additional funding. Secondly, Director Mecacci highlighted the impact of the lack of appointment of the future Chair on ODIHR's work as without a Chairperson human dimension meetings and supplementary meetings cannot continue. Director Mecacci ended on a more positive note, reflecting on the relevance of ODIHR's work despite the current challenges. He highlighted that ODIHR is still the leading human rights organization in the OSCE region and ODIHR's work in Ukraine, monitoring the status of human rights during the ongoing war. Director Mecacci asserted that preserving the human dimension is the best and most effective contribution to promoting peace and security.

Ms. Allison Hart, Senior Advisor/Chief of Staff to the OSCE Secretary General, explained the implications of the lack of decision-making on the OSCE and its work. She focused on the impact of the lack of budgetary consensus and possible absence of leadership. First, she explained that the OSCE is working on monthly allotments that are based on the budget of 2021, which had many years of zero nominal growth. This means that the OSCE is working on a budget baseline that does not meet its needs, and the monthly allotments pose severe issues to the OSCE because even if the amount is known, the money cannot be spent until it is received, which creates inefficiency within the organization. While this creates problems with the organization's functioning, it also affects morale. Ms. Hart emphasized that everything OSCE does is "for the people" and that while the OSCE staff is an incredibly committed group of individuals, without leadership and a budget many individuals question their ability to continue to work for the organization. Finally, she emphasized the broad reach of the OSCE, and that the organization does work that no other organization does. Finally, she reminded attendees that security will continue to be an issue for Europe, and therefore the challenges facing the OSCE are worth solving.

Mr. Doug Wake, former US diplomat and senior OSCE official, focused his statement on the "four Ps" of the OSCE which are the platform, program, principles, and people of the OSCE. He noted that while the platform for dialogue might be more difficult to use currently, it will be useful in the future. Furthermore, the continuing program activities and field operations are relevant and important for the OSCE region. Mr. Wake also underscored that while the principles of the OSCE do overlap with other international organizations, and they have been violated by many states recently, these principles are something special that must be preserved. Like other panellists, he

highlighted the people that work for the organization and the OSCE's work that benefits people. At the end of his remarks, Mr. Wake emphasized the inexpensive nature of the OSCE, calculating that the OSCE only costs ten cents for every person in the OSCE region.

Amb. Zannier commented that the strength of the OSCE is that it is seen as being more inclusive and neutral than other international organizations and, therefore, can operate in divisive and complex environments. In light of the war in Ukraine, and specifically, the aftermath of the war, the European security landscape will be fundamentally altered. Amb. Zannier suggested that OSCE would provide an excellent platform to work on rebuilding after the war. SG Montella furthermore emphasized that the issues within the governmental side of the OSCE should not hamper the organization's other work.

During the open debate, participants stressed that the OSCE is best suited for collective and inclusive security in Europe and again highlighted the potential use of the OSCE to rebuild European Security Architecture after the war in Ukraine. Participants mentioned that the organization's inclusivity is a unique strength to help restore security, trust and dialogue. No other organization can bring together opposing states like the OSCE. Participants also mentioned that other global issues, such as global warming, do not respect state boundaries and, therefore, must be solved on the regional level in an organization that promotes dialogue.

While support for the OSCE and belief in its ability to provide security for the region underscored every participant's comment, it was also pointed out that one of the ways to solve the challenges the OSCE is facing is to increase visibility within parliaments. Some mentioned that the actions of the OSCE are not visible enough to their governments and asked for tools to help them advocate for the OSCE to their foreign ministers.

In concluding, all panellists emphasized the importance of increasing the visibility of the OSCE in parliaments. They highlighted the importance of the work of the OSCE across all three dimensions of security, including the OSCE's election observation activities.