

Review Conference Vienna, 18 - 26 October 2010



[Home](#) | [Politico-military](#) | [Economic and environmental](#) | [OSCE structures and activities](#) | [Registration](#) | [Documents](#) | [OSCE Website](#)

Politico-military

Politico-military security: a dimension in transition

by Ulrich Kühn

The upcoming OSCE Summit in Astana will be a crucial turning point for the OSCE. It could mark a political breakthrough, provided that the participating States agree on meaningful mandates. This is especially true for the OSCE's first dimension. Now that the [Corfu Process](#) has kick-started the Herculean task of renewing the OSCE, it is incumbent to pursue goal-oriented negotiations.

Crisis prevention and conflict resolution have always been at the heart of the OSCE. However, in recent years, these tasks have mainly been dealt with at a technical level. The events in Kyrgyzstan have shown that this must change. Violent intra-state conflict in the OSCE area has not been consigned to the past, as some believed, and Kyrgyzstan is not the only country in Central Asia that shows signs of instability. Therefore, crisis prevention must be put back at the top of the OSCE's political agenda. As a first step, the police mission to Kyrgyzstan, upon which agreement has already been reached, needs to be deployed as soon as possible.

From Afghanistan, turmoil could easily spill over into Central Asia. The worst case scenario would be an amalgamation of the conflict potentials in Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries. This could lead to conflict on a scale equivalent to the Balkan Wars in the 1990s.

Thus, as a matter of high priority, the OSCE should concentrate on the programmatic buildup of reliable state structures in Central Asia and should consider building on the ad hoc workshops for Afghan/Tajik border guards already carried out by developing a more established training scheme.

Resolving the protracted conflicts in the OSCE area needs intensified efforts by all the participating States. The 2008 war between Georgia and Russia has shown that such conflicts can reignite, seemingly 'overnight'. In the case of Georgia, a resumption of the OSCE field presence on the principle of status-neutrality would be preferable. With regard to Nagorno-Karabakh, the level of tensions and the ongoing escalation have again reached a stage where the question needs to be agreed at the highest decision-making level - in this case the Astana Summit - with agreement on substantial steps.

Lots of proposals on modernizing the OSCE's field operations have been put forward within the framework of the Corfu Process. This is a welcome sign, yet further work lies ahead to adapt the Organization's former 'flagship' activities to changing realities. Above all, the political will of all participating States to apply existing instruments is still critical.

Transnational threats and challenges such as WMD proliferation, terrorism, illicit drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings, and all forms of organized crime pose serious risks to all OSCE participating States. It is high time that the OSCE left the declaratory level and elaborated relevant instruments. To overcome fragmentation at the operational level, a Department for Security-Building or a Human Security Cluster could be established.

Finally, the OSCE arms control and acquis in confidence- and security-building measures is in a vital period of transition. Countless food-for-thought papers proposing ways to update the Vienna Document reflect the existing will to engage in a substantive discussion. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe is not directly part of the OSCE agenda; however, its fate will have a profound impact on the OSCE as the key institution of co-operative security in Europe. The latest NATO framework for conventional arms control in Europe reasserts the three principles of reciprocal transparency, reciprocal limitations and restraint, and host nation consent. A 30+6 declaration on the elaboration of a new mandate for negotiations in 2011 would have a profoundly positive impact on the Summit. A suspension of the Russian 'suspension' would further push-start this development.

- Tue 19 Oct: Transnational threats and challenges
- Wed 20 Oct: Early warning, conflict prevention
- Thur 21 - Fri 22 Oct: Arms control and CSBMs
- Thur 21 Oct: Afghanistan and the OSCE's role
- Fri 22 Oct: Partners for Co-operation

To overcome the legacy of almost ten years of stagnation in the first dimension, substance needs to be added to the discussion. For the OSCE, Astana could become the game-changer. © OSCE 1995–2010

Ulrich Kühn is a Ph.D. candidate at the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg. The views expressed in this article are his own and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinion of the OSCE.
