Drama in Kosovo

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1. OSCE Verification Mission in Kosovo
The Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) which may be seen as the major challenge for the OSCE in its entire history has encountered in stormy weather. Since the Belgrade regime declared the Head of this mission, Ambassador William Walker, as a *persona non grata* on 18 January and ordered him to leave the country (an order which Walker refused to obey), the fate of the KVM as a whole became highly dubious.

The history is known: after the US mediator Richard Holbrooke succeeded in brokering a last-minute deal with the Yugoslav President Milosevic in mid-October which provided, among other things, for the withdrawal of the main Yugoslav troops and armaments from the Kosovo region, the OSCE was asked to set up a mission to supervise the implementation of the agreement and to perform various other functions in the region. This mission would consist of 2,000 unarmed staff members. Although from various sides serious criticism was expressed as to the viability of this arrangement — unarmed monitors to supervise a deal in an extremely violent conflict — the OSCE took on this task and started to set up the mission. An enterprise which goes beyond everything the organization has performed so far. NATO troops were stationed in neighbouring Macedonia which could become active in case of the need to get the KVM monitors out of Kosovo.

Although the mission was built up at a quick pace, the 700 monitors which were already in place in January were not able to avoid a resurgence of the violence between the Yugoslav authorities and the Albanian fighters which operate under the name of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Terrorist attacks from both sides undermined the fragile peace process so much that by mid-January massive military operations had again started. This renewed the need for NATO to reconsider its position: it threatened Milosevic with the use of violence if he should violate the deal, but it appears to be difficult to get all NATO members into one line in this conflict. Although terrible atrocities were committed, among others the 'execution' of about 45 Albanian inhabitants of the small Albanian village of Racak, concrete NATO action against the Serbian forces could not yet be taken. (Ambassador Walker's emotional statements concerning this atrocity actually resulted in his expulsion from Yugoslavia.)

At the time of writing this chronicle (20 January), it seems that the peace process has come to a standstill and that the purpose of maintaining the KVM in Kosovo has become highly doubtful, the more so since mission members
themselves seem to have become the targets of attack.

2. Ministerial Meeting in Oslo
On 2 and 3 December, the annual meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council took place in Oslo. This meeting marked the transfer of the rotating chairmanship of the OSCE from Poland to Norway. In 1999 this Scandinavian country will provide executive leadership to this organization.

It goes without saying that the Kosovo drama was high on the agenda. A special ‘Statement on Kosovo’ was adopted, but it did not contain much that was new. The main striking element of the statement was that it did not blame any party for the resumption of the violence in the region. This was the result of a serious clash between the Russian delegation and many other OSCE states. The Russians did not want to blame any side in the conflict (neither the Serbian nor the Albanian). This resulted in a watered down statement deploring the suffering in Kosovo while urging all sides in the conflict to stop fighting and resolve their differences by peaceful means. It was a compromise between the Russian and the Albanian delegations and it was clear that the Russians did not want to abandon their Serbian friends.

The developments at the Oslo Ministerial again showed Moscow’s outright support for Milosevic. Actually, the Russian delegation openly pleaded for the re-entry of Yugoslavia into the OSCE. Since 1992, Yugoslavia has been suspended from the OSCE ranks and is, therefore, unable to participate at the OSCE meetings which deal with the problems of former Yugoslavia.

The Ministerial devoted, as usual, much attention to the developments around the various conflicts in the OSCE area and adopted various briefer statements on these issues, calling upon parties to reach compromise resolutions.

The Foreign Ministers also took note of new developments in the OSCE, such as the setting up of police operations by the OSCE: ‘We recognize that the OSCE police operations are now an integral part of the Organization’s efforts in early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. International police operations can provide an important contribution to building a society based on the rule of law that can consolidate democracy and enhance respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The participating States will enhance the capacity of the OSCE with regard to police operations. To this end, close co-operation with the international organizations having relevant experience in conducting police operations, and in the first instance the United Nations, will be established.’

At the same meeting, Jordania was welcomed as a new Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation, a position it shares with states such as Israel, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco.

It was also decided that Austria would take over de chairmanship of the OSCE in the year 2000.

The Ministerial also endorsed the expansion of the institutional presence of the OSCE in the region. This year new OSCE liaison offices will be opened in