Sub-regionalism and the OSCE: An artificial relationship?

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Introduction
In the recent past the OSCE has focused on two occasions on sub-regional cooperation. The first occasion was the OSCE seminar on 'Regional Security and Co-operation' on 4 June 1997 in Vienna and the second was the OSCE seminar 'Subregional Cooperation — An Instrument for Modern Security Building' in Stockholm in October 1998. On both occasions the seminars were well attended by representatives of sub-regional organisations. An aim of the seminars was to explore the contribution that sub-regional cooperation could make to security and the way the OSCE could relate to them and vice versa. Whereas at the first seminar the general attitude towards sub-regionalism was only positive, and the abundance and variety of forms of sub-regionalism were welcomed, the tone of the second seminar was somewhat more critical. The reverse sides of abundance and variety, in particular the dangers of overlap and fragmentation of effort, were also mentioned. ¹

In this article I will explore the second, more critical approach, by asking how much sub-regionalism really contributes to security and whether the OSCE's focus on sub-regional organisations is logical from that point of view. In the first paragraph I will give a brief overview of sub-regional organisations and describe their main characteristics. In the fourth paragraph I will go into the question of their contribution to security in Europe. In the final paragraph I will concentrate on the self-imposed role of the OSCE vis-à-vis these subregional organisations. In the final paragraph I will argue in favour of a reorientation of sub-regional organisations.

Sub-regionalism: what is it?
Although within the OSCE sub-regionalism is much discussed, no attempt has been made to reach a commonly accepted definition. It is generally recognized, however, that sub-regionalism refers to a certain level of cooperation between states, the adjective 'sub' meaning that this type of cooperation concerns only a small number of states within the wider European context. This wider regional context is embodied by the OSCE, which is itself considered a regional organisation under chapter VIII of the UN Charter. Sub-regionalism, contrary to

¹ Informal comment by the Dutch delegation to the seminar. In the official report from the conference these critical notes are not reflected, however. Report from the International Conference 'Subregional Cooperation — An instrument for modern security building', Stockholm, 13-14 October 1998; Rapporteurs: Dr. Renata Dwan and Dr. Monika Wohlfeld.
the concept of regional organisations under the UN Charter, does not have any meaning under international law. Most conference participants preferred to speak of sub-regionalism or sub-regional cooperation instead of sub-regional organisations, the reason for this being that they wanted to take into account the variety of forms of cooperation that exists. In some cases sub-regional cooperation is institutionalised, in others it is not. In this article the concepts of sub-regionalism, sub-regional cooperation and sub-regional organisations are interchangeable. Another aspect of sub-regionalism is that it involves more than two states. Thus the bilateral cooperation between e.g. Russia and Belarus does not fall into this category.

The debate on sub-regionalism focuses on developments within Central and Eastern Europe because this is the area where sub-regionalism has recently spread most rapidly. Since the demise of the communist ideology and the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union new forms of cooperation between smaller groups of states have developed. These forms of sub-regional cooperation did not explicitly emerge to fill a security gap. Most states in Central and Eastern Europe have looked at the OSCE and NATO to fulfil their security demands after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Other motivations for the creation of forms of sub-regional cooperation, such as the need for economic cooperation, the attempt to form a negotiating block vis-à-vis the European Union and NATO or the wish to address specific transborder problems, were central to the development of sub-regionalism. The objectives of most sub-regional organisations were highly functional. Sub-regionalism fulfilled a general need for political and economic cooperation with neighbouring states which had until then been suppressed by the strait-jacket of an authoritarian, centralised communist system.

A brief review of sub-regionalism in Central and Eastern Europe draws attention to at least ten such initiatives. The first cooperation framework to emerge was the Visegrad cooperation, which was subsequently transformed into the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA). Its objectives are purely economic: the establishment of a free trade zone in 2001 and the gradual abolishment of non-tariff barriers to trade. The Central European Initiative (CEI) now involves sixteen countries but is hardly institutionalized. It offers a framework for political dialogue and for the formulation of transnational programmes, e.g. in the area of infrastructure. Within the CEI smaller dialogues take place, for example between Hungary, Austria and Slovakia, and between Hungary, Italy and Slovenia. Like CEFTA, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is exclusively focused on economic cooperation. A development bank was established in the framework of the BSEC to promote the economic cooperation. A type of cooperation which is directly related to the security concerns of the states involved, is the multinational force created in the Balkans in May 1998.

In the northern part of Europe two other sub-regional organisations have