Yugoslavia returns to the international community

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1. Yugoslavia returns to the OSCE

Although the OSCE community is usually confronted with serious (and often deteriorating) human rights problems in several of its participating states, there are also moments of celebration. One of the most striking of these moments was undoubtedly the ousting of the Yugoslav strong man Slobodan Milosevic at the beginning of October. Although he had made every effort to retain power in fraudulent elections, he could not resist the very strong pressure from the people and was forced to step down. In this ‘velvet revolution’, Vojislav Kostunica, the undoubted winner of the elections, became President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Although Serbia-Montenegro still faces huge problems to overcome the years of tyranny, corruption, economic mismanagement, a devastated infrastructure, isolation and even war, the disappearance of Milosevic was enthusiastically welcomed in the (Western) world. It opened the doors for the impoverished Yugoslavia to re-enter the international community.

One of the concrete results of the change in power, that directly affected the OSCE, was the release of certain prisoners. Under the Milosevic regime two British police trainers, working as OSCE mission members at the Kosovo Police Service School, had been arrested close to the Montenegrin border on their way back to Pristina. They were kept in custody under evidently false pretexts and protests by the OSCE had not had any effect. A few days after Kostunica came to power both men and two Canadian companions were released. A clear sign that the arrest warrants were totally groundless.

The doors to the OSCE were also opened as well for the FRY. Although Yugoslavia is still formally a participating OSCE state, its membership has been suspended since 1992. That suspension was the result of the atrocities committed in the war against Bosnia-Herzegovina and was the only example of a ‘sanction’ by the OSCE in its history: it was the only case in which the OSCE has taken a decision against the will of one of its members on the basis of the so-called consensus-minus-one rule. Shortly after the inauguration of President Kostunica, on 17 October the OSCE Chairman-in-Office sent a very friendly letter to the new Yugoslav leader containing an invitation to join the OSCE. It was made clear, however, that the FRY could not simply return to the OSCE as the successor state of the former Yugoslavia, but that it had to apply to join the OSCE in the same way as the other successor states of the former Yugoslavia.
had done.

The letter also made clear that the application would not simply be a formality: ‘Opinions expressed by OSCE participating States all show a readiness to move in the direction of having the FRY as participating State within the OSCE’ (italics added). Nevertheless, the Chairman-in-Office expressed the hope that Yugoslavia could join the OSCE on the occasion of the next OSCE Ministerial meeting, scheduled for 27 November 2000. As this date falls after the writing of this text, we have to wait and see how things will develop. All in all, it seems that the period of the ‘empty’ Yugoslav seat in the OSCE is coming to an end: since the SFRY was suspended in 1992, it maintained its seat with the name-plate ‘Yugoslavia’ at all official OSCE meetings. A seat, however, which since that time remained empty.

The (re-)entry of the FRY is not without problems. Voices have been raised that any admittance to the OSCE should be bound by certain strings, such as the re-admittance of OSCE missions to Sandjak and Vojvodina, regions in the FRY with major minority populations. These missions were forced to leave Yugoslavia after the country was suspended from the OSCE ranks in 1992. Another problem is connected to the status of the FRY as the successor of the former SFRY or as one of the successor states on the same footing as the other former Yugoslav republics. The letter from the Chairman-in-Office makes it clear that only the latter option is acceptable to the OSCE participating States.

2. The silver jubilee of the CSCE/OSCE
On 1 August this year, it was precisely 25 years ago that the Final Act of Helsinki was signed by the heads of state or government of 35 states from Europe, Canada and the United States. Although in several countries commemorative meetings were organized to celebrate this event, remarkably enough a high-level meeting did not take place. The Austrian Chairmanship only organized a ceremonial Permanent Council meeting in Vienna. The fact that Austria at the time was still subject to EU sanctions because of the inclusion of a far right-wing party in the government undoubtedly played a role in this low-key celebration.

During the quarter of a century of the C/OSCE's existence, the organization has undergone enormous changes. What started as a diplomatic process without any permanent institutional structures, became a well-developed international organization with major tasks in the security field. Its main tasks are in the field of conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. The organization now has several thousand staff members in various missions. The largest OSCE field missions are deployed in Kosovo, Bosnia and Croatia.

3. Russian troop withdrawal from Moldova?
In November last year, it was decided at the Istanbul OSCE Summit that the Russian troops and armaments in Transdniestria, the breakaway Republic in Moldova, would be completely and unconditionally withdrawn before the end