COLUMNS

Take the wake-up call

Wilhelm Höynck

To work successfully in the interest of the organisation any OSCE Secretary General must take great care to appear as the OSCE participating states' 'obedient servant'. But sometimes he has to speak up. Secretary General Jan Kubis did this on 21 March 2002. He reminded the Permanent Council that the prevailing budgetary uncertainty continued to have a negative effect on the ability of missions and institutions to fulfil their mandates; and he added that the motivation of the staff and their perception of their continuing service to the OSCE had suffered considerably as a result of the lack of an approved budget for 2002. These are moderate words in a situation that has an increasingly concrete, negative impact on OSCE activities.

Is this just another one of the unending series of crises through which the CSCE and the OSCE have matured since, by now almost thirty years ago, the Multilateral Preparatory Talks began in November 1972 at Tallinn in Helsinki — including forgotten administrative crises like the one, which Nils Eliasson as Director of the CSCE Secretariat in Prague had to face, when for some time there was no cash to pay the salaries of CSCE staff? And has one not seen other examples when necessary and urgent OSCE draft budgetary decisions — or decisions within other international organisations — were taken hostage to 'facilitate' decisions on other issues, in particular decisions on the scale of distribution?

All these 'déjà vu' arguments, however, do not recommend that one should simply wait for a solution. A very bad precedent is thereby created, because since the CSCE has had a regular budget there has been no occasion where more than three months after the start of the fiscal year no budget has been agreed upon. And this has certainly never been the case since the OSCE has engaged in its actual broad programme of operative activities from the Representative on Freedom of the Media to the cost-intensive big Missions in the Balkans.

Particularly worrying is the indirect message being given in the actual budget crisis. The inability of OSCE states to take the long overdue decision on this year's budget is a further signal of increasing OSCE fatigue. And there are more such signals: Following the bad example of other international organisations the OSCE has begun to neutralise operative capacities by paper production. For several years

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there has been no Ministerial Council, no Summit without imposing on the Secretary General and/or the Chairman in Office another report, produced and circulated at great cost — and immediately put to lasting rest in the archives. Similarly, the discussion on 'internal reform' continues in Vienna from one year to the next absorbing a considerable amount of goodwill and capacity without reaching the level of political attention that would be necessary to solve the underlying problems or to put them aside, at least for some time.

Behind the actual budget crisis and spreading OSCE fatigue a broader question again appears. What is the future of the OSCE in a quickly developing network of international organisations? The key element in the answer is the following: There is no other international organisation in the OSCE area where in particular the US, the Russians and the EU meet on a level playing field. Yes, EU and NATO membership will be rapidly increasing. Both organisations are doing a great deal to avoid that this process will lead to new divisions. But should strengthening the OSCE as the level playing field for all OSCE states not be a particularly important element in any 'no new divisions strategy'? Furthermore, is there any other international organisation in the Euro-Atlantic area that can provide the OSCE’s broadly-based mandates and broad support, both of which are essential for successful crisis prevention through OSCE Missions, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and other OSCE institutions?

Many fine words are addressed to the OSCE in different Brussels headquarters and elsewhere. But will it be possible to overcome OSCE fatigue at a time when — apart from the yearly changing CoE — there is hardly any OSCE country fully and visibly committed to the OSCE’s specific capabilities for co-operative European security? Realistically, there is perhaps only one possible new OSCE driving force, i.e. the European Union. Of course, for very good reasons the EU has many other priorities. It would hardly be fair to put yet another burden more or less exclusively on Javier Solana's shoulders, as he is doing such an admirable job as the first High Representative for the EU’s Common and Security Policy. But what about EU member states? Could there amongst the fifteen, not be one or the other strategic OSCE promoter, which would encourage and resolutely support the EU Presidency, the High Representative and the Commission, when OSCE issues come up in Brussels or in Vienna? The consecutive OSCE chairmanships of two EU members, Portugal and the Netherlands, present a specific opportunity to give the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union the same high OSCE profile that the European Community developed and maintained for the OSCE over a full decade within the framework of European Political Co-operation?

Using the rapidly developing operative capabilities of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU within the framework of the OSCE could be a crucial contribution to comprehensive and credible co-operative security in the OSCE area. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the EU will soon take over the functions of the International Police Task Force from the UN. It certainly makes sense for the EU, after having invested so much energy into developing its structures for crisis