The OSCE and Thailand. The most recent Partner for Co-operation and the implications for future partnerships

Elizabeth Abela

'We will seek to strengthen further our co-operation with our Asian partners in meeting challenges of common interest', Charter for European Security, 1999 Istanbul Summit.

Introduction

Thailand initiated preliminary consultations with the OSCE Secretariat in September 1999, at a time when it was chairing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its security body, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). High-level consultations with the objective of becoming a Partner for Co-operation followed. Just over a year later, on 9 November 2000, Thailand was welcomed as a Partner for Co-operation, upon a decision adopted by the OSCE Permanent Council, thereby making it the third OSCE Partner State in Asia, after Japan and Korea. Further, in mid-June 2002, the OSCE co-organized the first OSCE-Thailand Conference in Bangkok on the Human Dimension of Security, which re-affirmed the importance of inter-regional co-operation in an increasingly globalized world.

This article focuses on the OSCE and Thailand and reviews, in general, the OSCE and its Partners for Co-operation (as opposed to the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation). In chronicling the events relating to Thailand’s application for partnership and participation in OSCE activities, the article seeks to evaluate the reasons why countries such as Thailand have requested Partnership with the OSCE, and the benefits deriving from such relations.

Thailand’s becoming a Partner for Co-operation revealed a growing interest in the status of a partnership with the OSCE. This gave rise to a discussion within the OSCE on how to deal with future applications for partnership. An effort is made to explain the underlying objectives of a partnership, besides considering the possibility of applications from potential future Partners and the future of partnerships in general.

In brief: The OSCE, its Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation and Partners for Co-operation in Asia

The OSCE does not usually invite countries to become Partners, but when a country

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1 Elizabeth Abela is Senior External Co-operation Officer in the Office of the OSCE Secretary General, and is responsible for contacts with Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation and regional organizations outside the OSCE area. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the OSCE and its participating States.

2 Thailand’s Chairmanship ran from July 1999 to June 2000.
formally expresses its interest in seeking a Partnership, a process of consultation and negotiation is set in motion. This approach is in line with the consensus-building process of the Organization which requires unanimity among the 55 participating States for all decisions adopted by its negotiating bodies. Therefore, though the OSCE is not yet a legal entity, the decisions adopted by the Organization enjoy remarkable political clout as they are backed by all the 55 States seated around the OSCE’s.

Countries that have become OSCE Partners have done so upon their own formal initiative and request. In a way, this has become the established practice. Becoming an OSCE Partner for Co-operation depends on a formal decision by the Permanent Council. The formal application for Partnership, usually by way of a written request, is sent to the Chairman-in-Office who undertakes consultations on the subject and circulates the letter among all the OSCE participating States.

Potential Partners have customarily approached both the OSCE Secretariat (due to institutional memory and expertise) and the Chairman-in-Office (responsible for orchestrating the decision-making process at the political level). Frequently, potential Partners also directly embark upon consultations with participating States when seeking partnership status.

A basic premise of all partnerships is that the OSCE can provide a model of comprehensive and co-operative security which is a source of inspiration for other countries and regions. Each of the partnerships with Mediterranean and Asian States have their own specific features as they differ in history, origin and purpose. However, a common thread runs through all of them: the belief that nations are dependent on one another for their security. For both the OSCE and its Partners, strengthening the dialogue even further offers distinct mutual advantages, including the opportunity to draw on each other’s experiences in promoting a comprehensive concept of security. Maintaining such relations in general is of major significance as it has led to an exchange of views and support. Further, partnerships are interactive, providing the possibility for mutual understanding of each side’s security concerns and priorities.

In recognizing the interdependence of the security of the OSCE and that of the Partners for Co-operation, from the outset, the OSCE has fostered and deepened relations with partners in other regions. The ongoing dialogue between the OSCE and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation (currently Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia) goes back to the beginning of the Helsinki process. The fact that some OSCE participating States border the Mediterranean region, and that the countries of the Mediterranean region share historical, cultural, economic and political ties with the OSCE region, makes it clear that there is a Mediterranean dimension to European security. In the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, participating States included a chapter on 'Questions relating to security and co-operation in the Mediterranean' and stated their conviction that 'security in Europe (...) is closely linked with security in the Mediterranean as a whole, and that accordingly the

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3 This was also the case with the OSCE’s Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation.
4 See PC Decision No. 378 welcoming Thailand as a Partner for Co-operation.

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