A contribution to the agenda for the Dutch Chairmanship of the OSCE: a recapitulation of findings of the Advisory Council on International Affairs

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The Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) is an advisory body for the Dutch government and parliament. In particular its reports address the policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence, the Minister for Development Co-operation and the State Secretary of Foreign Affairs. In mid-2001 the Dutch government asked the AIV to produce an advisory report on the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the light of the Dutch Chairmanship of the organisation in the year 2003. The following article is a recapitulation of the findings and recommendations of the AIV as presented to the Dutch government on 3rd May 2002. English and Russian translations of the report are available and can be obtained from the Secretariat of the Advisory Council on International Affairs. (E-mail: AIV@minbuza.nl or P.O. Box 20066, 2500 EB The Hague, the Netherlands).

1. Introduction
The evaporation of the East-West conflict has put an end to the need for the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the OSCE (or the CSCE, as it used to be called), to act as a meeting place for the two power blocs. It is no longer self-evident that the OSCE should be the principal platform for consultation and dialogue, particularly as there are plenty of other forums at which the former Eastern and Western allies can now meet. Given that the role of a meeting place between East and West was the main reason for the CSCE’s existence during the Cold War, it is hardly surprising that its successor, the OSCE, is now immersed in uncertainty as to its future role and responsibilities. The participating States have not managed to find suitable alternatives to fill the gap left at the OSCE by the ending of the East-West conflict.

2. Summary of findings
Despite the introduction of such catch-all terms as ‘comprehensive security’ and ‘co-operative security’, there is still a lack of cohesion in the wide range of disparate activities performed by the OSCE. Indeed, the terms in question are so all-encompassing that they have not helped to harmonise the security interests of the various participating States.

The reform and expansion of NATO and the European Union are casting an ever larger shadow before them. The OSCE is now dividing into two separate camps: on the one hand, there are the Member States of these two organisations and those countries that seem likely to join them in the near future; on the other hand,

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there are the other countries, for whom no such prospect beckons.

As US-Russian relations improve, as more countries join NATO and the European Union and as the two organisations become more actively involved in matters affecting European security, so the OSCE will gradually tend to lose its political significance.

The operation of the OSCE is based on the political will of the participating States to subject their international relations and their domestic policies to common, political agreements. These impose limitations on states’ political freedom, given that states are expected to observe certain agreed standards of behaviour, both vis-à-vis each other and in relation to their own citizens. Whilst the participating States do not always succeed in upholding these standards, they remain the benchmarks by which their conduct is judged. If participating States fail to meet the standards (as in Chechnya and the former Yugoslavia, and as in the case of the ‘frozen conflicts’), they may be called to account for their conduct in the OSCE. Nonetheless, the OSCE is not capable of enforcing a certain standard of behaviour. It is important to realise that this tradition of consultation that has gradually come into being during the years of the OSCE’s existence has helped to canalise political change, both in Europe as a whole and in individual countries, and has an inherent value for this reason.

3. Recommendations

3.1. Arms control and the role of the Forum for Security Co-operation
The AIV believes that the OSCE tends to lean too heavily on past successes in the arena of arms control. The AIV advises the Dutch Chairmanship to consider, and to discuss in the OSCE, which of the existing agreements on arms control should be prioritised. It is also absolutely vital that the Forum for Security Co-operation should keep in touch with the debates and consultations at the OSCE in general, and within the Permanent Council in particular. Precisely how this is done (i.e. whether the Forum does the groundwork for the Permanent Council or whether the two consultative bodies are fully merged) is of lesser importance than the fact that the OSCE’s security policy dimension continues in full force. If the Forum for Security Co-operation loses touch, it is at risk of becoming a political irrelevance.

3.2. OSCE; conflict prevention and the interplay with other international organisations
The AIV believes that the OSCE’s primary objective, as part of the Economic and Environmental Dimension (EED), should be to prevent and contain conflicts. The OSCE can seek to attain these goals by acting as a catalyst in conjunction with other international organisations that are active in the fields of economics and/or the environment. Thanks to their mandates, expertise and experience, such organisations may be in a better position than the OSCE to take effective, targeted action in this area. In this connection, the OSCE should operate basically as a platform for exchanging information on activities with other international organisations that are active in the fields of economics and the environment. The