Potential conflicts in the border regions of the OSCE

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The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe is one of the major players in European security. Its role was praised during the Cold War, high expectations were placed upon it during and shortly after the collapse of the Communist bloc and then it seems to have been forgotten, its role underestimated and its potential not used even in those regions which are covered by its membership, let alone elsewhere. I will try to introduce ideas as to how the unique OSCE experience could be used in other areas, adjacent to the OSCE area, in the light of potential and real conflicts on Europe’s borders. It is not difficult to point to several conflicts in the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan. It will not be difficult either to show that other areas, which seem to be relatively stable, also have some conflict potential, but the most difficult task is to show how the OSCE experience could be used in these cases.

The OSCE region — in order to be concise, I will call it Europe — lies adjacent to several regions, which are overburdened with conflicts, either potential or real. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq clearly show the situation in the Middle East, but Israel and the Palestinians is also a problem. China is a refreshing spot of stability, but a closer look will reveal serious problems there, too. I want to start with an analysis, as to why these regions have been and most probably will continue to be conflict areas. Why our capability to help is limited, how limited it is, why we fail to stabilize these regions and I will make a modest proposal as to how we could be less ambitious, but more successful.

The development of societies shows a striking similarity. Democracy, as we know it in the ‘West’, is a product of hundreds of years of progress, not linear, but full of setbacks and failures. Many do not make it to the stage where democracy can unfold. Democracies also demonstrate very different forms, depending to a large extent on history, local culture or civilization and many other factors.

The 21st century has created a unique situation. Totally different societies on totally different levels of development live together. This, in itself, would not yet be so unique, although the differences between their levels of progress are certainly much larger than ever before. But the uniqueness of the situation lies in the fact that globalisation has made the world so interdependent and so transparent that the ‘usual’ pattern, that up to a certain phase of development nations and societies basically live according to their internal rules and structures and only at a certain stage do they become increasingly connected to the outside world, does not apply: almost independently of the phase of development; current societies are in, they are to a very large extent interdependent with other civilisations and economies; they

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are exposed to a very great measure of transparency, which their state of
development would not create by itself and, consequently, the outside influence
upon them is so significant that they are unable to make progress along organic
lines of development.

Europe has progressed towards democracy since the early years of the Holy
Roman Empire and has made its way through numerous wars of religion, culture,
ethnicity, etc. The last phase of development started with the Treaty of Westphalia
(1648) and the French Revolution (1789), which laid the foundations, on the one
hand, for the international order that we have now known for hundreds of years,
and for the nation-state as well as civilization based on the Judaeo-Christian
culture, i.e. the individual human rights and fundamental freedoms, on the other.

Our democracies are based on the belief that all people are born equal, that
they enjoy a set of fundamental human rights upon their birth and states can only
limit these rights in as far as is necessary to organize the lives of these societies.
The role of the state is viewed as a 'necessary evil', although there is, of course, a
significant difference between the more state-oriented centralized concept (like the
French) and the more decentralized concepts (like the American). The most
important assumption, however, is shared by everybody and that is the theory that
the individual is the rational aspect of society, the individual's life is the most
important value and states and institutions must serve individuals in their desire to
achieve that end.

These fundamental rights create, within our societies, the foundations of our
states and institutions, the rule of law, the separation of the legislature, the
executive and the judiciary, etc. We believe that these rights are global, each and
every individual must be given the opportunity to enjoy these rights and these rights
form the foundations of our societies and states.

The truth is much more complicated, however. While, in principle,
philosophically this is certainly true, we have to recognize that the majority of the
population of the world does not share these values. Most other cultures do not
recognize the supremacy of the individual, but base their society on communities
and the inherent rights belong to those communities or to the leaders of the
communities. Individuals do not have individual rights or, if they do, they do so in a
very limited manner in most non-Judaeo-Christian cultures. Accordingly, the
democracy based on individual human rights is alien to their understanding of
societies as well as all the derivatives of this philosophy, the rule of law, the
separation of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, etc.

The situation is made more complicated by the fact that today premodern,
modern and postmodern societies coexist on the Earth. These societies, being on a
totally different level of development, live according to different rules. Promodern
societies have fundamentally different conflict-management and conflict-resolution
instruments than modern, or even more so, post-modern societies. While in
postmodern societies negotiation and compromise is the foundation of conflict
management, premodern societies solve their conflicts by the use of sheer force.

Conflicts in those early societies belong to the very nature of development.
This is how we ourselves developed into a nation and a nation-state. This