New forms and support structures for OSCE field operations

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Multifunctional civilian field operations represent a key asset and the most significant comparative advantage of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Currently, the organization runs 18 field operations. Six further missions have so far completed their mandate or have been closed due to a lack of consensus on extending their mandates.² More than 80 per cent of the OSCE’s budget is spent on its field activities; at least the same share of the organization’s staff members — that is, about 3,370 — work in the field.³ In order to establish a field operation, the OSCE’s Permanent Council has to reach consensus on the adoption of a mandate and a budget. As a rule, mandates last for six or twelve months before they have to be extended by consensus once again. On the basis of the mandate, a memorandum of understanding has to be concluded with the host state.⁴

The functioning and effectiveness of OSCE field operations depends on the ability and collective will of participating States to engage in multilateral cooperation. Therefore, the specific issue of the future development of the organization’s field activities is an excellent indicator of the co-operation potential of the OSCE and its participating States in general. Multilateralism is not experiencing a Golden Age today. During the last few years, unilateral approaches have prevailed in foreign relations. Obvious examples include the United States’ unilateral decision-making in many policy areas, Russia’s heedlessness of international opinion in its actions towards not only post-Soviet

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² For an overview of OSCE long-term missions and other field activities see missions survey: http://www.osce.org/publications/survey/.

³ For the OSCE budget (185.7 million euros in 2003) see: http://www.osce.org/general/budget/index.php3. The OSCE budget does not contain the salaries for the around 1,000 seconded staff members who are paid by the seconding states. For seconded staff, the OSCE pays so-called Boarding and Lodging Allowances which differ from country to country.

⁴ In the case of the OSCE Mission to Kosovo, no Memorandum of Understanding was concluded with the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on whose territory the mission operates. Instead, the topics normally covered by a MoU were regulated in agreements with UNMIK which, according to UN Security Council Resolution 1244, exercises all authority on the territory of Kosovo.
countries, and the frequently ponderous decision-making process of the EU caucus in the OSCE. At the level of OSCE field operations, Western countries showed in 2001 how easy it is to call off a multilateral operation when they closed the missions to Estonia and Latvia by simply refusing to extend their mandates. Not surprisingly, Russia repeated this exercise a year later in the case of the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya. While both events are a reminder that all OSCE field operations are built on the vulnerable basis of consensual decision-making, they can hardly be compared given the fundamentally different degree to which they violate OSCE commitments and the resulting need for further monitoring.

The term ‘field operations’ is a general designation for a wide range of activities which vary greatly in size, the level of escalation\(^5\) of the situation in which they are carried out and the degree of intrusiveness, that is, the extent of their real or perceived interference in the domestic affairs of the host state. After a brief overview of the development of OSCE field operations, we will deal with the current criticisms raised by some participating States concerning OSCE field activities and the way they are run. Taking these criticisms as a starting point, we will then reconsider which types of support structures are adequate for OSCE field operations.

The development of OSCE field operations

OSCE field operations cover a broad spectrum of activities ranging from the on-site work of OSCE institutions (FOM, HCNM, ODIHR) via election monitoring, special representatives' activities and cross-border mediation efforts to OSCE-supported activities that are not explicitly run under the OSCE umbrella but enhance its network of relations and the dissemination of OSCE values. Classical OSCE field missions bear a number of common designations such as centres, offices, presences or missions. A first generation of OSCE field operations was deployed between 1992 and 1995, mostly in response to imminent crises and conflict situations. The first two were the OSCE Missions of Long Duration in Kosovo, Sandjak and Vojvodina and the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, both mandated on 14 August 1992 and deployed in September of that year. At the time of their deployment, these missions were established to work in a crisis environment. Since 2001, the Mission to Skopje has developed into a large second-generation mission (see below) that deals with a broad range of post-conflict rehabilitation tasks. Examples of missions deployed during open conflict situations include the OSCE Mission to Georgia (December 1992)\(^6\), which

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5 For a classification of the level of escalation we follow Lund’s approach who distinguishes between stable peace, unstable peace, crisis and war as rising (and falling) levels of escalation (Michael S. Lund, Preventing Violent Conflicts: A Strategy for Preventive Diplomacy, Washington, DC 1996, pp. 37-44).

6 Of course, the level of escalation and the overall shape of a conflict may change during a mission’s period of deployment. Today, the OSCE Mission to Georgia is a rather large operation of 72-84 international members (at the end of 2003) working in a frozen-conflict environment.