On the (continuing, residual) relevance of the CFE regime

Pál Dunay

Introduction
Certain news always hits the front page of newspapers. European conventional arms control has seldom figured in this category since the end of the Cold War. It does not mean that it is irrelevant. It means that it has become a regular part of political relations that does function properly. As it is not very visible to the public beyond a narrow circle of experts and has been functioning without any particular reverberations there was little political attention devoted to it. Beyond the objective difficulties in contemplating the importance of the CFE regime for European security there is a methodological problem. Scholarly work on the CFE process has lately been produced by half a dozen analysts in Europe. They have always seen the contribution of arms control generally and CFE specifically as part of European security. The opponents of CFE have been ignorant of the topic lately. Consequently, it is impossible to strike a balance on the basis of public analysis.

It is not possible to comment upon the relevance and importance of the CFE process, without asking a much broader question. Is military force a relevant contributing factor in European security? The answer to this question will largely determine whether CFE, as a conventional arms limitation agreement, should be regarded as making a relevant contribution to European security. Since the end of the East-West conflict the European security posture has changed so that military factors have appeared less prominent. The security problems of Europe could be divided into two parts: 1. There are so-called new security problems. It would be better to refer to them as non-traditional security problems in the sense that they cannot be identified with inter state violence. They range from terrorist threats to organized criminality, trafficking of human beings as well as banned objects and substances, through massive, illegal population movements. They often originate in the area of CFE Treaty’s application as well as just outside and in this sense

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2 The reason why this article does not address the CFE Treaty (of 1990) and speaks about the CFE process is the following. The process entails the CFE Treaty of 1990, the agreement achieved at the first review conference of the treaty that modified the so-called flank rule of the Treaty in 1996, the Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe signed at the Istanbul OSCE summit in November 1999 and the Final Act of the Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe adopted at the same time. Formally, the concluding document of the second review conference of the CFE Treaty of 2001 also belongs here.
they can be regarded as problems of European security. In their case, however, military means are either inapplicable or have marginal effects when tackling them. Consequently, an arms control arrangement limiting large items of conventional armaments leaves these security problems unaffected. 2. There are traditional security problems, classical inter state violence that originates in other regions. In this case the question is whether Europe intends to contribute to resolving such violence whether it wants to use military means in the process. The former non-traditional security problems do not require the use of those means that have been affected by the CFE process. The latter would. There has not been a single case, however, when Europe could not make a relevant contribution to extra-European conflict resolution as it did not have the military hardware limited by the rules of CFE. One can conclude that to address new and emerging threats European countries that traditionally placed self-defence at the top of their security agenda have to adapt to the new situation. Those countries, which intended to retain the focus on defence had to go out of area in order to provide some legitimacy for their forces. The conclusion could thus be drawn that the rules of the CFE Treaty are largely irrelevant in current European politics.

A closer look would highlight, however, that the above assessment has been based upon a gross simplification. It is correct insofar as there is no common threat addressed to a large group of European countries by another group of European states which are affected by the CFE process. This does not mean, however, that the CFE process is currently irrelevant or would make no contribution whatsoever to European security in the future. It is necessary to analyse the relevance and significance of the Treaty in its evolution before any predictions can be made for the future.

**The historical evolution of the CFE process**
The CFE process has proved to be a highly adaptable and flexible instrument of European security. It went through several evolutionary phases and has served some useful purposes.

*From the Cold War to the Post-Cold War Era*
Conventional arms control was not a successful part of the history of arms control between 1969, when NATO raised the issue for the first time, and 1987 when the so-called mandate talks started between members of the Atlantic Alliance and those of the Warsaw Treaty that led directly to CFE talks in 1989-90. This was due to the fact that priority was given to limiting nuclear arsenals as the most destructive weapons. Furthermore, arms control during the Cold War was dominated by the first two nuclear powers of the world. Not to mention that the Soviet Union, which attributed so much importance to its convenient superiority in conventional weapons, was reluctant to give up arms. It required a change of attitude in Soviet politico-military thinking that made conventional arms control acceptable. The concept of totally destructive conventional war made an attempt to prove that a conventional war in Europe could cause as much