Russia, the OSCE and European Security Architecture

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Introduction
Although one might expect Russia’s foreign policy interests to have changed dramatically over the decades since the Helsinki process was first broached, some aspects have remained remarkably constant. Soviet proposals for a European security conference or treaty had begun with Foreign Minister Molotov in 1954. The common thread continues through Gorbachev’s Common European Home, and to the proposed ‘Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the Twenty-First Century’ that Russia succeeded in inserting into the OSCE work plan approved at the 1994 Budapest Summit. Russia has looked to influence the security arrangements and alliances among its European neighbours through the CSCE. Likewise, the West continues to use the organization as a check on Russian behaviour, as it did with the Soviet Union. Interestingly, however, and particularly in recent years, Russian activity at the CSCE has failed to live up to its rhetoric; and Russia is seldom a player in a positive or innovative sense. Rather, it focuses more on damage limitation or retaining room for manoeuvre in areas of direct concern.

This state of affairs has increased the ability of the OSCE to be active in the states of the former Soviet Union. These activities, summarized below, have broken new ground in conflict-prevention techniques and OSCE assistance, or monitoring, of internal democratic development. However, the same lack of governmental attention which allows the OSCE to be active has also limited its effectiveness, and has important implications for the organization’s prospects.

Projects either to make the OSCE the centre of European security, or to scrap it in favour of NATO or direct bilateral contacts, ignore both the leverage and limitations that the OSCE presents for Russia. Reviewing the already familiar history of Russia in the CSCE from the perspective of Russian goals may, then, provide useful insights for the future.

Russia and the Soviet Union
Soviet goals for the CSCE were quite pragmatic: Western acceptance of the division of Europe, and specifically of Germany, and development of freer economic, trade and aid linkages. Less concrete goals also drove Soviet

1. This article is based on a paper that was presented at a conference of the International Studies Association in Chicago, February 1995.
proposals: drawing Europe closer to Russia and farther from the United States, and some nostalgia for the 19th-century Concert of Europe and Russia’s decisive voice in European architecture.

As Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev’s reform doctrines of glasnost and perestroika extended to international affairs in the mid-1980s, the conferences of the CSCE and pressure from dissidents in the East and NGOs in the West provided both a pressure point for further reforms and concessions and an excuse for doling them out releases of prisoners, mechanisms mandating responses to human rights queries. Most important, it provided the USSR with a stage to display its ‘new thinking’ and validate its continuing superpower status. Ironically, as the importance of ideology was declining within the Soviet Union and Soviet foreign policy as a whole, the CSCE framework became crucial for Soviet demonstrations of the validity and utility of these new concepts.3

Gorbachev’s mid-1980s calls for ‘a common European home’ seemed tailor-made for the CSCE. However, the concept was not specifically connected to the CSCE at first. By the end of 1989, however, when the Vienna Follow-Up Meeting had given way to a raft of smaller negotiations including bloc-to-bloc talks on conventional arms control, Gorbachev’s quest for new Soviet legitimacy abroad through a European security summit seemed to have found a natural home in the CSCE. Western administrations, particularly that of the United States, had continued to be hesitant about Gorbachev and to hold the idea at bay.

After the late-1989 series of revolutions in Warsaw Pact countries, the Europeans made a move toward Gorbachev’s conception. In January 1990, the French, German and Italian foreign ministers appeared in Vienna to call for a 1990 summit of CSCE states. The hoped-for signature of a treaty on conventional forces in Europe, which had been under negotiation since 1989, was to mark the emergence of a new era, with a new quality of cooperation among European powers. The United States reacted with concern, but the Soviets were delighted.

The resulting Charter of Paris for a New Europe, signed by the CSCE states in Paris in November 1990, along with the landmark Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), foresaw a Euro-Atlantic space where armed forces were limited and their movements monitored; where relations would be ‘founded on respect and cooperation’ and a ‘new quality’ of security relations would recognize that ‘the security of every participating state is inseparably linked to that of all the others’. To this end, regular consulting bodies, at levels from ambassadors to heads of state, were created within the

3. For example, the Soviet initiative during the Vienna Follow-Up Meeting (1986-1989) to host a human rights conference, eventually the 1991 Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension; Korey, pp. 253-288, see note 1.

Helsinki Monitor 1995 no. 2