The human dimension of the OSCE: More words than deeds?¹

*Arie Bloed*

For many years the OSCE process and the protection of human rights were indivisible, so much so in fact that the two were sometimes regarded as synonymous. The function of the Final Act of Helsinki as a symbol of freedom was undeniably of major importance for the oppressed peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. The importance of what has now come to be known as the human dimension of the OSCE has certainly not diminished in the post-Cold War era, but in practice it can be seen to be of a different order. Security issues are now, understandably, at the top of the agenda. The human dimension has clearly acquired a lower priority in the overall context of OSCE activities. In the last couple of years, efforts have been made to integrate the human dimension more effectively into the political and security dimension of the OSCE. Quite rightly, because it has become perfectly clear to everyone that security problems often originate in violations of human rights, particularly when the problems have an ethnic background.

Let us first examine what has been achieved in the last two decades and then draw some conclusions about possible improvements in the near future.

Although the human dimension of the OSCE is often regarded as a success story, this is not entirely correct. But let us first examine the pluses. A definite plus, albeit one that is hard to measure, is the considerable impact of the human dimension on the domestic policies of the former socialist countries. The thesis that the ‘old’ CSCE played a definite, even an important role, in bringing about the revolutionary changes in 1989 and thereafter is hardly challenged.

**Human dimension norms**

It is also beyond doubt that one of the greatest accomplishments of the OSCE in this field was the gradual establishment of an impressive body of norms and principles. These related not only to human rights in the strict sense but also to democratization, the rule of law and the protection of national minorities. Moreover, the achievements of the OSCE have had a major impact on the content of the normative documents adopted by other international organizations. The theme of the protection of national minorities is perhaps the best example of this as reflected in particular in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons

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belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities² and in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe, adopted at the end of 1994.³ An essential characteristic of all OSCE standards is that they apply without exception to all participating states. This is sometimes referred to as the 'universality principle'. It has also been expressly agreed that all such matters are 'of international concern' and are therefore no longer regarded as being exclusively internal affairs.

**Comprehensive security concept**

Another important feature of the OSCE human dimension is the close link with security matters, which are at the top of the OSCE agenda. For this purpose the organization has developed the concept of 'comprehensive security', which indicates the link not only with the security dimension but also with economic issues. This is a unique concept, which sets the OSCE apart from other international organizations. Recently we have seen attempts to take it further than fine but vague words and to translate these ideas into the operational practice of the OSCE. The establishment of the post of High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) is a good example of this: although the office of HCNM has been established as a conflict-prevention instrument, the close link with the human dimension is obvious.

Nonetheless, the 'operationalization' of the concept of comprehensive security is still in its infancy. While this is true of the human dimension in relation to the OSCE security tasks, it applies much more so to the integration of the economic dimension in the overall functioning of the OSCE. In fact, the Second Basket is something of a loose appendage, and it is mainly due to the pressure of the Americans and Eastern Europeans that this 'OSCE department' was not wound up completely. This is rather odd, given the importance of the economic dimension from the perspective of security. We can see, therefore, that there are no fully crystallized ideas, let alone a consensus, on how the concept of comprehensive security should be 'operationalized' within the OSCE.

**Implementation problems**

The OSCE has undoubtedly performed impressively in creating standards, but the picture is rather different when it comes to their implementation. Although the OSCE has developed a very interesting but rather complicated set of supervisory procedures, little use is now made of them in practice. The lack of political will among the participating states is certainly the main explanation, but the complex character of a number of the procedures has also been a minor factor. The diplomats within the OSCE have been so active in devising splendid procedures and mechanisms that there are now few people who understand fully how they

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². Adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1992.
³. To date (1 September 1995) only Romania has ratified this agreement. It requires the ratification of 12 states for its entry into force.

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