
Each year the OSCE Yearbook is greeted by many scholars and others interested in (aspects of) the OSCE as a welcome addition to their, probably already large, library. Of course, as all will have a different field of interest, he or she will make his or her own choice among the 28 articles contained in the 2012 edition. The following is therefore no more than an impression, as a thorough review of all contributions would easily surpass the space available in this issue of ‘Security and Human Rights’. If some articles therefore receive only a brief mention, this certainly does not imply that they are less valuable or less interesting.

The introduction to the 2012 edition of the Yearbook this time includes not only a foreword by the Chairperson-in-Office, the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Audronius Ažubalis and a preface by the Editor-in-Chief Ursel Schlichting but also an obituary for Max van der Stoel by Wolfgang Zellner. The remaining part is divided into three main sections and six sub-sections, of which the lion’s share goes to the ODIHR with almost 230 pages. But the ODIHR celebrated its twentieth anniversary, and in any case it encompasses a large number of different issues.

The first part, however, is devoted to “The OSCE and European Security” and starts with a retrospective by the former Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut. In a highly readable way (were all articles such a pleasure to read!) he looks back not only on his six years in office but provides many personal views which make this article of great interest to all who are interested in the OSCE, its past, present and future. This sub-section further consists of an overview of Kazakhstan’s OSCE Chairmanship by Pál Dunay, which is both informative and analytical, and a contribution by Ian Cliff on the Corfu Process. “What Was It All About?” is its subtitle and indeed for many, perhaps the majority of the readers, who will not have followed this subject closely, this article will be useful. It will certainly be even more so for future readers, to whom the Corfu Process will no longer be a household word.

In the next sub-section (“The OSCE Participating States and Multilateral Commitments”) such incongruous issues as “The Abiding US Regional Engagement through the OSCE” by Ian Kelly, “The Presidential Election in Belarus in 2010” by Elena Kropatcheva and “Politics and Human Rights in Tajikistan” by Payam Foroughi are grouped together. As the titles more or less speak for themselves, we restrict ourselves here to just mentioning them if only for the sake of space, which does not in the least imply that they will not find many an interested reader. The same might be said of the articles in the next sub-section “Conflict Prevention and Dispute Settlement” which deal with respectively Kosovo (Claudio Formisano and Georgia Tasiopoulou), Moldova (Claus Neukirch), Armenia (Carel Hofstra), Nagorno-Karabakh (Hans-Joachim Schmidt) and Central Asia (Arne C. Seifert). The issues and areas will be familiar to all those who have followed the OSCE and its missions over the past years and they will probably stay on the agenda for many years to come – but of course in a Yearbook they deserve their place.
The sub-section “Comprehensive Security” consists of only one contribution, “Recent Developments in the Field of Arms Control and Confidence- and Security-Building Measures” and discusses not only what happened up to the 2010 OSCE Summit, but also the hardening impasse around the conventional armed forces in Europe.

Proceeding to the central part of the Yearbook – under the title “Focus on ODIHR: 20 Years of Democracy and Human Rights Support” – we find no less than 14 contributions, on a wide range of subjects. But of course that is exactly how ODIHR has grown in these twenty years.

The first deal with the ODIHR as a whole. The present First Deputy Director of ODIHR, Douglas Wake, provides a picture of the work ODIHR has done and is doing up to the present day, in a continuously changing situation, and considers some of the expected developments. Former ODIHR Director Christian Strohal looks more towards the future under the title “More Must Be Done” and after giving his views on the various activities and inter-action with other institutions, he describes the existing challenges and concludes that the Chairperson-in-Office has a special and important role to play in this respect. It is difficult not to agree with him, although it will be less easy to implement his valuable ideas. The third contribution, by Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer and Bernhard Knoll, describes the Human Dimension aspects of the Astana Summit, and in doing so provides a useful insight into the current situation.

Various aspects of the Human Dimension of the OSCE now follow this more general first part. Despite its hardly inviting title “Democracy as a System of Institutions and Practices: The Dynamic Legacies and Living Commitments of Key OSCE Documents”, the contribution by Grigorii V. Golosov proves to be highly interesting. The importance and impact of the Copenhagen and Moscow Documents for our understanding of democratic theory and practice are the main subject of this contribution. On reading it, one realizes that the importance and impact of what was formulated at the time regarding democratic principles like free and fair elections and political pluralism, probably has surpassed what those who drafted and adopted them could then foresee. This significance of the Copenhagen and Moscow Documents returns in the contribution by Jos Boonstra, Natalia Shapovalova and Richard Youngs, though its title “Reviving OSCE Democracy Support” already indicates that the implementation of the principles enshrined deserve revitalization. Here they come forward with some interesting suggestions. The Copenhagen and Moscow Documents figure also in the contribution by Nadezda Shvedova, “A Short Commentary on the OSCE’s Contributions to Gender Equality in Political and Public Life”, but this is mainly an analysis of the texts of these documents, which somewhat ignores the context in which they were adopted (and the Canadian delegate who so vigorously and successfully promoted their adoption in Moscow). The practical application of these ideas however receives a well-documented and forward-looking treatment by Andreea Vesa and Kristin van der Leest, “Towards a Strategic Approach in Applying Gender-Sensitive Indicators: Guidance for OSCE Programming”. The contribution by Andrzej Mirga, “Roma and Sinti: Status and Outlook”, also deserves special mention. Having been active in the promotion of Roma and Sinti rights from the very beginning