



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Report to the 31st Ministerial Council
Officer-in-Charge/Secretary General Catherine Fearon
Valletta, 6 December 2024
(1480 words, approx. 9 min)

Deputy Prime Minister Borg, Mr Chair in Office,
Madam President of the Parliamentary Assembly,
Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,

Introduction

1. It is an honor to address this Ministerial Council. I would like to extend my profound gratitude to the Maltese Chair, which has worked tirelessly throughout the year to uphold and advance OSCE principles, including in the face of grave violations, and to ensure continued functionality of our Organization. I would also like to acknowledge the enormous contribution in this regard, of former Secretary General Helga Schmid, who fought incessantly to protect the staff and promote the OSCE institutionally.
2. With the fiftieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act fast approaching, this year we have found ourselves, yet again, in a situation where confrontation replaces conversation; where conflict replaces co-operation, and where relations between participating States have been severely eroded.
3. Despite- this backdrop the OSCE as a political community focused on comprehensive security in Europe, and founded on common values; as a platform for dialogue and a stabilizing force with reach from Vancouver to Vladivostok, has continued this year to deliver both politically and programmatically on the ground across, in and for, your 57 countries and your 1 billion citizens.
4. The OSCE has done this with an overall annual price tag of €138m, and 2,500 staff, over half of them in its field operations. It is not an expensive outfit. It is lean, and agile, able to craft bespoke responses to complex requests quickly. It has the expertise, experience, tools, and, importantly, relationships, to deliver on political-military, economic, environmental and human dimensions of security.

*) Corr.1 only due to change of distribution status, text remains unchanged

Tour de horizon

5. Allow me to share some of the highlights from our work in 2024. In **Eastern Europe**, we made significant strides through the Extra-Budgetary Support Programme for Ukraine, which helps Ukraine strengthen its institutional and social resilience. Thus, we help build capacity of over 25 Ministries and government agencies to address the acute short and long-term consequences of the war. This ranges from contributing to the National Humanitarian Demining Strategy, to enhancing investigative capacity for the national registry of persons, including children, missing because of the war, to supporting the continued war-related environmental monitoring.
6. In Moldova, we continued working towards a comprehensive and lasting political settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict. We worked on all aspects of security, including environmental and human security. This year, for example, we also facilitated the safe disposal of hazardous chemicals from Transdniestria.
7. In the **South Caucasus**, we remained actively engaged, supporting the Geneva International Discussions as co-chair, and as co-facilitators of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in Ergneti. Here, we directly and on a very practical level address the humanitarian consequences of past conflicts and contribute to reducing tensions, demonstrating our relevance in long-standing conflict situations.
8. We also followed closely the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process and stand ready to contribute upon the request of the sides.
9. In **Central Asia** this year we have continued to assist enhancing border security in Tajikistan. We have removed hazardous rocket fuel in Kyrgyzstan. We have supported Women's Resource Centres in Uzbekistan, enabling women to make full use of the rule of law in local communities, and provide them a pathway to economic activity. Moreover, our efforts to manage the impact of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan continue to bolster safety and security across the region through a special extra-budgetary funding mechanism of over 30 tailored projects.
10. Finally, in **South East Europe** we continued supporting the regional arms control Article IV of the Dayton Peace Agreement established to build transparency, co-operation and confidence, and a verification regime. Through mutual respect and co-operation, this agreement has been essential for peace and stability in South-Eastern Europe and serves as an excellent example of security co-operation.

11. The above work would not be possible without our staff both at the Secretariat, and in the field, and here I commend our thematic Directors, Heads of Field Operations, and their staff.
12. The OSCE is the only international actor with such an extensive field presence, local insight, and unparalleled trust of governments and communities at all levels.
13. It would be remiss of me, when noting our staff, not to reference the plight of Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov and Dmytro Shabanov, three OSCE officials who have been in detention in Donetsk and Luhansk since April 2022. We continued to work for their release this year. And the calls with their families are as distressing today as they were when they were first taken. It's time to bring them home. This New Year, I ask, I beg for this humanitarian mercy.

Regional Approaches

14. Part of what sets the OSCE's work apart is our ability to **foster regional approaches** to shared challenges.
15. The proliferation of illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons is a scourge that affects the whole OSCE region, and our SALW work increasingly assumes a regional approach. For example, this year saw 6 jurisdictions in South East Europe and all 5 Central Asia countries now supported by OSCE SALW work, as well as Ukraine and Moldova. In 2024, we also built the capacity of law enforcement agencies in South East Europe, Central Asia and Eastern Europe, and supported standardisation and interoperability.
16. The Regional Trial Monitoring Project on high-level corruption and organized crime in South East Europe – joined also by Serbia this year - has allowed us to address systemic challenges to eradicate pervasive corruption and deliver justice in the region.

Thematic

17. In terms of **transnational threats**, we continued supporting States to operationalize their Cyber Confidence-Building Measures, the creation of a point of contact network, which in 2024 has become an active community of experts that participating States regularly rely on, and a model for the UN and others.
18. In **countering human trafficking**, our simulation-based trainings – which took place in Vicenza this year with a focus on trafficking in human beings in

the Mediterranean, directly contributed to successful police operations, such as the Reykjavik anti-trafficking operation, which identified over 40 victims.

19. In 2024, we made significant progress in addressing both **climate change and critical economic challenges**, by fostering good governance and anti-corruption efforts. For example, our energy initiatives improved access to clean energy for over 1,000 people along the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border.

European Security Architecture

20. Though our web of interlocking arms control obligations and commitments has been weakened, the OSCE participating States in 2024 nonetheless conducted over 100 verification activities pursuant to the Vienna Document and Dayton Article IV. Military information exchange continued at a steady level, including through nearly 2000 messages over the OSCE Communications Network.

Women

21. As we mark the 16 days campaign of activism against violence against women, we are also observing 20 years since the OSCE agreed its Gender Action Plan. The OSCE has continued working with women as agents of change, who are actively shaping their communities, particularly those affected by conflict, advancing peace and collaboration across divides. A standout example is the OSCE Dialogue Academy for Young Women from Belgrade and Pristina, implemented by our Missions in Serbia and Kosovo.

22. If you engage and involve women in decision-making about peace, you will have a better and more durable peace, and the OSCE does its part.

Resources

23. In order to continue delivering meaningful and impactful work, the OSCE needs to be equipped with the resources it needs. In recent years, the Organization has faced escalating financial challenges, due to structurally inadequate resources. While we've managed thus far through temporary ad hoc solutions, we desperately need an approved Unified Budget at an adequate level - please be thinking in the region of a 25-27% increase on the 2021 figure for 2025 - to ensure operational continuity and mandate delivery at the level of your expectations. The time to invest in this Organization is now.

Conclusion

24. In conclusion, the presence in the room today of so many Ministers demonstrates that this Organization remains the essential platform of European security. We truly feel the increasing expectations that you place on us, and what more you might place on us in the not too distant future.
25. In closing, let me circle back to where I started.
26. The OSCE is a political community. Not of 27, not of 47, but of 57. The OSCE is a political community not of 300m, not of 700m but of 1 billion. The OSCE is a political community, a political platform for dialogue with a strong programmatic element and a fierce focus on comprehensive security and peace.
27. We manifest this through the principles and commitments made – by all 57 – in the Helsinki Final Act. Its Decalogue – 10 inextricably linked foundational principles – acts as both our touchstone and lodestar.
28. We have the tools. We have the mandates. We have the principles. With your political guidance, and your political will, we are at your disposal to do even more for comprehensive security in 2025. With those, let us be the stabilizing force in the world that we know we can be.

I thank you, Mr Chair.