In: IFSH (ed.), OSCE Yearbook 2010, Baden-Baden 2011, pp. 197-202.

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The OSCE "Corfu Process" – A Preliminary View of the Security Dialogue on Early Warning, Conflict Prevention and Resolution, Crisis Management, and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation

A Brief Chronology of the OSCE's "Corfu Process"

The role of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the European security environment has been much debated since 2009, particularly within the framework of the so-called "Corfu Process" – named after an informal meeting of foreign ministers from OSCE participating States in the summer of 2009 on the Greek island of Corfu. Proposals for a renewed dialogue on the future of European security had originally been made by presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008. The formal foundations were laid at the 2008 OSCE Ministerial Council in Helsinki. This was the basis on which the Greek Chairmanship was able to initiate an extensive security dialogue structure in June 2009, which came to be known as the OSCE Corfu Process.

With the Ministerial Declaration on the OSCE Corfu Process, adopted at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Athens in early December 2009, the participating States agreed to continue their dialogue on current and future challenges for security in the OSCE area.[1] In Ministerial Council Decision No. 1/09, they also decided to discuss eight specific issues (known as the "Corfu ticks"), including the role of the OSCE in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation.[2]

Under the Kazakh Chairmanship, the Corfu Process has been carried on into its second year, with regular and informal meetings held in the first part of 2010. One of the first informal meetings at ambassadorial level discussed the role of the OSCE in early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation, with the expressed intention of strengthening the OSCE's capacities in this area. Participating States put forth a number of constructive proposals, all of which were discussed at the informal meetings arranged by the ambassadors selected to act as Corfu Co-

Note: The views and opinions reflected in this article represent those of the authors and not necessarily those of the OSCE.

1 Cf. Ministerial Declaration on the OSCE Corfu Process: Reconfirm-Review-Reinvigorate Security and Co-operation from Vancouver to Vladivostok, MC.DOC/1/09 of 2 December 2009, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Seventeenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 1 and 2 December 2009*, Athens, 2 December 2009, pp. 3-4.

2 Cf. Decision No. 1/09, Furthering the Corfu Process, MC.DEC/1/09 of 2 December 2009, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Seventeenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council*, cited above (Note 1), pp. 15-16, here: p. 15.

ordinators in the spring of 2010. Further discussions occurred in the autumn within the framework of the Review Conference, which was held prior to the December 2010 Summit in Astana.

Advancing "New" Ideas on Conflict Resolution

As noted above, the Corfu Process takes its name from the informal meeting of OSCE foreign ministers at Corfu that took place on 27-28 June 2009. Following this informal meeting of ministers, the Greek Chairmanship launched the "Vienna Informal Meetings at Ambassadors' Level". The decision to do so had been reached at Corfu, where the Greek Chairperson-in-Office had tasked the Greek Ambassador to the OSCE and Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council to initiate a process with the participating States and relevant experts that would focus on the priority threats to European security and engage in a focused and structured security dialogue.

One of the main topics of these Vienna informal meetings, which were held between September and November 2009, was "Conflict Resolution in the OSCE Area". This was discussed in the fifth session on 20 October 2009, to which the Chairmanship had invited two speakers – the Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre, Ambassador Herbert Salber, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebæk. Ambassador Salber's presentation focused primarily on the OSCE toolbox for conflict prevention, while Ambassador Vollebæk looked at national minority issues and European security. A few participating States had already put concrete ideas on paper prior to the meeting. Others followed suit in the months to come on the basis of what they had already delivered orally during these informal meetings.

The Greek Chairmanship produced a perception paper following the 20 October 2009 meeting, which succinctly captured the major ideas brought forward. It also succeeded in identifying the following common positions out of many different, and not always consensual, points of view on the part of the participating States: (1) Unresolved conflicts continue to pose a serious threat to the stability of the entire OSCE region, and protracted conflicts have an impact on subregional security as well as on the broader strategic level; (2) political will is essential to the acceptance of compromise solutions in negotiated settlements; (3) there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to the resolution of conflicts; however, universal principles as enshrined in the UN Charter and the CSCE Helsinki Final Act are applicable to all conflicts; (4) negotiated settlements are the only way forward in conflict resolution, even though they often entail a lengthy process; (5) the presence of citizens of a kin-state in the territory of another state should not be used as a justification for undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of that state; and (6) the OSCE continues to face a number of serious challenges to concrete and

effective conflict resolution in its area, including the following: the difficulty of moving from early warning to early action; the lack of collective will that might hinder decisive action in responding early to impending crisis situations; and the little-used OSCE tool box, whose instruments and mechanisms are often perceived to be too cumbersome to use or outdated given the current needs of participating States.[3]

The Chair's perception paper on conflict resolution in the OSCE area was not only an excellent summary of many of the common concerns that participating States voiced in their discussion of early-warning, conflict-prevention, and crisis-management issues, it was also instrumental in setting the intellectual and policy-relevant tone for the ensuing debates on those subjects. The recommendations proposed by the participating States stressed the need to assess, update, and strengthen the OSCE toolbox on early warning, conflict prevention, and crisis management, if possible by also considering more flexible mechanisms that would allow for more decisive action, especially at the onset of a crisis or conflict situation.

The 2009 Athens Ministerial Council – Strengthening the Corfu Process

The 17th OSCE Ministerial Council, held in Athens on 1-2 December 2009, was a turning point in the Corfu Process. It marked the moment it became the collective endeavour of all 56 participating States. It was also the second time that the process had received the endorsement of OSCE foreign ministers – the first being at Corfu. The Ministerial Council also strengthened the existing framework for collective security dialogue.

Two major decisions were also adopted in Athens that were particularly relevant to the continuation of the Corfu Process. The first was the Ministerial Declaration on the OSCE Corfu Process, adopted on 2 December 2009, which reaffirmed the adherence to the concept of comprehensive, co-operative, and indivisible security; compliance with OSCE norms, principles, and commitments in the three dimensions; and the determination to strengthen partnership and co-operation in the OSCE and to enhance the Organization's effectiveness. A commitment was also made to take forward the Corfu Process in Vienna at the level of the Permanent Representatives to the OSCE. The Declaration emphasized the importance of the Corfu Process, and the contribution it had already made to the revitalization of the OSCE's political dialogue on security and co-operation. In addition, it took note of proposals for an OSCE Summit in 2010.[4]

The second relevant Ministerial Council decision was Decision No. 1/09 on furthering the Corfu Process, which recognized the importance of

3 Cf. *Chairperson's Perception: Conflict Resolution in the OSCE Area*, CIO.GAL/156/09, 23 October 2009.

4 Cf. Ministerial Declaration on the OSCE Corfu Process, cited above (Note 1).

continuing the Corfu Process and underlined the "positive spirit" that the dialogue process had created, particularly evident on account of the many proposals that had been submitted by participating States. Decision No. 1/09 was crucial in that it outlined those issues that the next phase of the Corfu Process would be directed towards, including issues pertaining to (1) the implementation of all OSCE norms, principles, and commitments; (2) the role of the OSCE in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation; (3) the role of the arms control and confidence- and security-building regimes in building trust in the evolving security environment; (4) transnational and multi-dimensional threats and challenges facing the OSCE; (5) economic and environmental challenges; (6) human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as democracy and the rule of law; (7) enhancing the OSCE's effectiveness; and (8) the interaction with other organizations and institutions on the basis of the 1999 Platform for Co-operative Security.

These issue areas came to be known as the "eight ticks", as each of them was marked with a "tick" in the relevant documents. The Decision also called upon the 2010 OSCE Chairmanship to submit an interim report summarizing the various proposals presented by participating States within the framework of the Corfu Process. Furthermore, a decision was made to invite OSCE Partners for Co-operation as well as international, regional, and sub-regional organizations and institutions to the discussions, albeit on an ad hoc basis.[5]

The 2010 Kazakh Chairmanship – Carrying the Corfu Process Further Forward

The Kazakh Chairmanship continued the Corfu Process in 2010, first, with a concept paper on "European Security and Co-operation Dialogue – The OSCE Corfu Process in 2010", which was distributed on 13 January 2010, following this with an Ambassadorial Retreat from 12-13 February. To facilitate discussions, draft relevant papers and proposals, and contribute to the Interim Report, as mandated by Ministerial Council Decision No. 1, the Chairmanship appointed also the "Corfu Co-ordinators" – one for each of the "eight ticks".

On 23 February 2010, the first informal Corfu Process meeting at ambassadorial level took place. It was specifically devoted to questions concerning how to strengthen the OSCE's capacities in the field of early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation. In some cases, proposals were revised versions of earlier ones that had been distributed in the autumn of 2009; in others, they were based on

5 Cf. Decision No. 1/09, cited above (Note 2).

new food-for-thought papers initiated by one or two delegations, who were often joined by a number of other participating States. These proposals yielded an impressive number of ideas, including authorizing the Chairperson-in-Office to deploy small teams to assess, monitor, and report to the participating States as a measure for early action; strengthening the role of the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) in the systematic collection, collation, and analysis of early-warning signals; and enhancing the support of the Secretariat and the CPC for the mediation and good-office efforts of the Chairmanship.

In particular, the participating States chose an effective procedure or methodology to facilitate the Corfu Process further, as Ambassador Salber noted in his draft statement on "Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management in the OSCE Area", at the joint meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation and the Permanent Council on 10 March 2010. He underlined the importance of "taking formal positions on the basis of food-for-thought papers and written proposals, distributed officially through the OSCE Conference Services. This procedure ensures a common foundation for debate, and assists in taking account of those ideas and concrete suggestions that have been circulated so far".[6] He even proposed a separate Corfu Process reference numbering system, which would reflect more prominently that the submitted papers and materials are an integral part of the Corfu dialogue.

As to the Corfu Co-ordinators – the Hungarian Permanent Representative to the OSCE, Ambassador György Molnár, was appointed Corfu Co-ordinator on the OSCE's role in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation. Under his guidance, several informal discussion meetings were set up in the spring, mostly at expert level, to consider the concrete and often substantial proposals that participating States had been distributing, particularly around the time of the informal meeting at ambassadorial level on 23 February. The proposals were discussed under four distinct headings in four separate meetings chaired by Ambassador Molnár. The four headings were derived from the major elements common to all proposals: means of strengthening OSCE executive structures; in-depth discussions of OSCE mechanisms and procedures; moving from early warning to early action and strengthening the role of the Chairperson-in-Office; and enhancing the role of the Permanent Council. Most contentious was the proposal of "a prepositional consensus", which would allow the OSCE Chairmanship to deploy a small team over a relatively short period of time on the basis of existing mechanisms and procedures without the need to achieve consensus in the Permanent Council.

6 OSCE, Secretariat, Conflict Prevention Centre, *Draft Statement by Ambassador Herbert Salber, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, on "Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management in the OSCE Area" at the 42nd Joint Meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation and the Permanent Council*, Vienna, 10 March 2010, SEC.GAL/46/10, 8 March 2010.

On 20 May, the Kazakh Chairmanship also provided a more general account of the Corfu Process in a food-for-thought paper on aspects of Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security, emphasizing the importance of a Summit. Stressing that participating States would have the opportunity to "make a step towards the construction of an improved security framework", the Chairmanship used the concept of "security community" to refer to a framework of this kind. The realization of such a security community, the Chairmanship noted, would also entail that the OSCE's capacities to prevent crisis situations and resolve conflicts be strengthened.[7]

Concluding Thoughts

The OSCE informal ministerial meeting took place in Almaty on 16-17 July 2010, and a decision was passed on the 2010 Summit and Review Conference on 3 August 2010. The Corfu Interim Report, which summarizes proposals from the Corfu Process, served as the basis for further dialogue at the Almaty Meeting in July. Strengthening the OSCE's capabilities and its toolbox in all three dimensions with regard to early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation, remained among the core issues on the agenda for the autumn of 2010.

It is still too early to provide an assessment at this point in time as to which of the many concrete ideas put forward by the participating States in the area of conflict prevention and conflict resolution will further contribute to what is already an impressive toolbox of instruments, mechanisms, and procedures for preventing and responding to various crisis situations. As the Kazakh Chairmanship noted in its food-for-thought paper on a security community – the choice to move forward is with the participating States.

7 Cf. OSCE Chairmanship, Chairmanship's Food-for-Thought Paper, *General Aspects of Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security – From an area to a security community – Corfu Process*, CIO.GAL/76/10, 20 May 2010.