

‘The Istanbul Summit — A moderate success’ from the Helsinki Monitor

Caption: In an article published in 2000 in the quarterly publication Helsinki Monitor, Hans van Santen, Head of the Security and Defence Policy Division at the Netherlands Foreign Ministry, summarises the main benefits of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Summit, held in Istanbul on 18 and 19 November 1999.

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The Istanbul Summit — A moderate success

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The Istanbul Summit which convened on 18 and 19 November at Istanbul in Turkey, succeeded in producing three major documents: the Charter for European Security, the Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and the Istanbul Summit Declaration. Also, the Vienna document 1999 on the negotiations on confidence and security building measures was adopted, which was an amended version of the 1994 Vienna CSBM document.

Whereas some tend to take these three achievements of the Istanbul Summit for granted, in fact it should be emphasized that during the weeks before the Summit many doubted whether there would be any result at all. As the Chairman of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Eide, stated in an interview: 'Will there be a Charter or any outcome at all? What would we achieve?' The conflict in Chechnya cast a deep shadow over the Summit and until the last moment it was unclear whether agreement could be reached on the Charter, the Declaration and even the signing of the adapted CFE Treaty. As such, the fact that the Heads of State and Government and Foreign Ministers from 54 of the participating states were able to agree on these three pillars of Istanbul represents an important achievement.

The Charter for European Security lists a number of challenges to OSCE participating states, such as armed conflicts, international terrorism, organized crime, and economic and environmental degradation. Its importance lies in the reaffirmation of the commitment of all OSCE states to adhere to all previous documents. The implementation of OSCE commitments is a matter of immediate and legitimate concern to all participating states. Further, human rights, including those of national minorities, form an essential part of the Charter. Any policy of ethnic cleansing or mass expulsion is rejected. All states reaffirm the importance of independent media and the free flow of information.

Also a number of new, concrete steps have been taken: the adoption of a platform for cooperative security, to strengthen cooperation between the OSCE and other international organisations on the basis of equality, the decision to further develop OSCE's role in peacekeeping operations, the decision to create rapid expert assistance and cooperation teams (REACT), and, closely connected thereto, to expand the OSCE's ability to carry out police-related activities.

The platform for cooperative security is more than just a promise by the OSCE to work together with other international organisations, and not against them. It forms evidence of the fact that the activities of the major organisations are indeed closely related, and are becoming even more so. For instance, it is expected that OSCE and the Council of Europe will cooperate more closely in the future, the strengths of each organisation complementing those of the other. Given the multi-faceted character of problems in many states, a partnership is developing between OSCE and the other international organisations, hopefully leading to increased synergies.

For the immediate future, the development of the OSCE's capability to rapidly respond to requests from participating states for civilian and police expertise will be high on the agenda. The OSCE has been evolving over the last few years to become a much more operational organisation, having 19 missions in the field, comprising a total of over 3,000 international and local staff. The OSCE currently has missions in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Skopje in Macedonia, Moldova and Tajikistan, as well as assistance groups to Chechnya, a presence in Albania, an advisory and monitoring group in Belarus, and a project coordinator for the Ukraine. Some 85 percent of its budget goes to field operations. As became clear in the build up of the Kosovo Verification Mission, finding the right people for the job and getting them as quickly as possible to the trouble spots, proved to be time consuming and sometimes difficult. Shortening the response period is essential for ensuring that the OSCE can play its role in addressing problems before they become crises and to deploy quickly the civilian component of a peacekeeping operation when needed. REACT is meant precisely to overcome the bureaucratic delays we are facing at the moment and to increase the capability to respond quickly. The decision to establish an operation centre at the OSCE secretariat in Vienna to facilitate effective preparation and planning for field

operations will also contribute to this.

Interestingly, this development towards improving the ability of OSCE to react quickly runs parallel to the discussion within the EU on the improvement of non- military crisis management. Both processes aim at a speedier response in the pre- conflict and post-conflict phase.

The OSCE Summit Declaration provides an analysis of the OSCE activities in many OSCE participating states. In its introduction it is rightly remembered that at the last summit in Lisbon the first large-scale OSCE mission was recently established. In the three intervening years the number and size of the OSCE field missions have been dramatically increased. By far the largest is the OSCE Kosovo mission, numbering at the time of the Istanbul Summit over 1,400 people. In Kosovo the OSCE plays a leading role in promoting and protecting human rights, and establishing respect for the rule of law. The most difficult paragraph on which to reach consensus in the Declaration proved to be the one on Chechnya. In the paragraph on Chechnya, the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation is acknowledged, and terrorism is condemned in all its forms. The need to respect OSCE norms is stressed as well as the importance to alleviate the hardships for the civilian population. All OSCE participating states agree that finding a political solution to the problems of Chechnya will be essential and that the OSCE could contribute to achieving this goal. The present mandate of the OSCE Assistance Group in Chechnya (but at the moment unable to operate in the region itself) is reaffirmed. The agreement of the Russian Federation to a visit by the Chairman-in-Office is welcomed. Crucial in this paragraph is the statement of the willingness of the Russian Federation to facilitate these steps, which will contribute to creating conditions for stability, security, and economic prosperity. During the weeks following the Summit, however, the Russian Federation has been very reluctant to permit the OSCE to play an intermediary role. The only achievement so far, and hopefully the first step in a much more ambitious project, has been the expansion of the mandate of the OSCE mission in Georgia to observe and report on the movement across the border between Georgia and the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation.

The agreement on the CFE Treaty adaptation adjusted this treaty to the post-Cold War realities and will reduce conventional armaments in Europe to a further ten percent. After three years of negotiating the treaty on conventional forces in Europe (CFE) signed in 1990 was adapted to reflect the new situation. The original CFE treaty established a balance of forces between the member states of NATO and those of the Warsaw Pact. The five categories of 'treaty limited items' are main battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, artillery, combat aircraft and combat helicopters. Apart from the very substantial destruction of over 50,000 items of military equipment, the treaty resulted in a unprecedented verification regime and an exchange of information process. In the adapted version the original block-to-block approach, with collective ceilings for the two groups of states, has been abandoned and national ceilings have been adopted. A further decrease in the number of military equipment is envisaged, resulting in a further dismantlement of over 11,000 items of equipment. The implementation of the adapted CFE treaty will commence as soon as the treaty has been ratified. The NATO member states stated in their communiqué at the North Atlantic Council of 15 December 1999 that they expect the Russian Federation to comply with CFE limits in the region as soon as possible. Entry into force of the adapted treaty can only be envisaged in the context of compliance by all state parties to the treaty. It is on this basis, it is stated, that the NATO states will work towards bringing the adapted treaty into force.

The OSCE's role has changed substantially in the 1990s. It has become more involved in monitoring elections, promoting media freedom, setting standards and providing expertise on minority rights (mainly through the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities) and helping in conflict prevention and crisis management in the field. Indeed, many believe that this focus on the pre-conflict phase as well as the post-conflict phase constitutes the real added value of this organisation. As such the Istanbul Summit has made important steps to adapt the organisation to its more operational role. Generally by keeping a low profile, the OSCE has been quite successful in many areas. However, it has also become increasingly clear that it cannot be expected that an organisation of 54 participating states, acting by consensus, can be the panacea to all major problems facing the OSCE area. Regrettably the OSCE has not so far played a substantial role in the Chechnya conflict, though given its character the OSCE would seem to be the best equipped organisation to make a substantial contribution there. In short: the two-day meeting achieved what it could achieve under

the circumstances — no more but also no less.

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