

## ‘From Vancouver to Vladivostok — and beyond?’ from the Helsinki Monitor

**Caption:** In 2000, Walter Kemp, Editor of the quarterly publication Helsinki Monitor, calls for clearer and more coherent criteria for membership of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

**Source:** Helsinki Monitor. Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC). [ON-LINE]. [The Hague]: [10.11.2005]. Available on <http://www.nhc.nl/hm/2000/vol4/column.2000.4.pdf>.

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**Publication date:** 19/09/2012

## Column

### From Vancouver to Vladivostok — and beyond?

It has always been difficult to explain what the ‘E’ in OSCE stands for. Of course it is ‘Europe’, but where does Europe begin and end? Why are some States in the Organization and others not? Is it geographical? Are the Caucasus and Central Asia part of Europe? Perhaps, but then what about North Africa? The Straits of Gibraltar are narrower than the English Channel and Tunis is closer to Vienna than Helsinki. And what about Canada and the United States? It is all a matter of history, so goes the argument. Countries in the OSCE are those with a long history of engagement in Europe with direct interests in European security. One should note the subtle distinction that the OSCE is the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe rather than of Europe. It is therefore an organization looking at European security issues rather than being a European security organization.

But then where does one draw the line in terms of participation? What is the argument against including States neighbouring Europe that have an interest in European security? Perhaps they do not share OSCE principles and values. But are those values equally shared by OSCE States? And anyway, is the OSCE’s human dimension not based on universal rights?

Is the criterion perhaps the agreement to adhere to OSCE commitments? One should recall, for example, the conditions set for the participation of the former Yugoslav and Soviet Republics in the CSCE in the early 1990s. But how is it decided which States are given this option and which are not? I am not advocating an expansion of the OSCE. It is already one of the largest regional organizations and has enough on its plate. However, I am suggesting that more clarity is needed in deciding what it is that binds OSCE participating States together.

By deduction, we should be able to be clearer about the distinction between the OSCE and its Partners. What criteria are applied to possible Partners for Co-operation? Presumably, there must be some sort of linkage between the State(s) concerned and the OSCE area. The Mediterranean case is clear enough. But which Mediterranean States? Is it self-selecting, can anyone join? Can a prospective partner be turned down, and if so, on what basis?

Why is there a difference between the level of participation by the Mediterranean partners and other Partners for co-operation? More confusing still, why is there a difference between Japan’s access to OSCE activities and the more limited role of other Partners, such as Korea and now probably Thailand?

Do not get me wrong. I am not discouraging the spread of contacts between the OSCE and interested States. We should be flattered that they wish to learn from the OSCE experience and apply it to their own regions. But in the interest of fostering good relations and sharing experiences with other regions, should we concentrate on improving links with individual States or with regional organizations like the ASEAN regional forum, the Organization of American States and the Organization for African Unity? The path to the OSCE’s door may become even more well-trodden in the near future. Do we want a Euro-centric mini-United Nations? What criteria, if any, should decide Partnership? Do we want different levels of Partnership status? Let us be co-operative, but let us be coherent.

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Editor**

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