

## 'Max van der Stoel: Preventing conflict and building peace: a challenge for the CSCE' from the NATO Review

**Caption:** In an article published in August 1994 in the NATO Review, Max van der Stoel, CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, reviews the challenges faced by the organisation with a view to the Budapest Summit, to be held at the end of the year.

**Source:** NATO Review. August 1994, n° 4; Vol. 42. Brussels: NATO.

**Copyright:** NATO / OTAN

**URL:**

[http://www.cvce.eu/obj/max\\_van\\_der\\_stoel\\_preventing\\_conflict\\_and\\_building\\_peace\\_a\\_challenge\\_for\\_the\\_csce\\_from\\_the\\_nato\\_review-en-617cc58f-4dc0-46e9-bc7a-18735db3ee21.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/max_van_der_stoel_preventing_conflict_and_building_peace_a_challenge_for_the_csce_from_the_nato_review-en-617cc58f-4dc0-46e9-bc7a-18735db3ee21.html)

**Publication date:** 18/09/2012

## Preventing conflict and building peace: a challenge for the CSCE

**Max van der Stoep** <sup>(1)</sup>, CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) is in a crucial phase of its existence. The old international environment which had given birth to the Helsinki process has been supplanted by quite different challenges and threats. The CSCE has tried to adapt itself to the new circumstances but has not yet completed this process. However, the period of institutional transition which began in 1990 cannot be prolonged too long or the CSCE will find itself decisively behind the times.

In view of this, the Budapest Review Conference and Summit later this year gain additional importance. Budapest could be where the CSCE comes of age, transforming itself into the three-fold community it should be: namely, a community of values, a community of purpose and a community of responsibility.

### **The CSCE as a community of values**

Ever since the great and moving changes in Central and Eastern Europe, the CSCE has been regarded as a community of values, and rightly so. The CSCE is the embodiment of what the states of the Euro-Atlantic community have defined as their common political-ethical philosophy and their common standards of behaviour.

The CSCE and its 53 participating states are engaged in building the peace for generations to come and thus in preventing future conflicts. Importantly, the CSCE's comprehensive concept of security relates peace, security and prosperity directly to the observance of human rights and democratic freedoms and the existence of a market economy.

The recognition that human beings should be central to the ambitions and policies of the participating states finds its reflection in the CSCE's central focus on the human dimension. I would like to underline two fundamental principles without which the human dimension would be deprived of its significance and thus the CSCE as a community of values robbed of its heart.

First, the commitments and responsibilities undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the CSCE apply equally and in their entirety to each and all of the participating states. The human dimension is indivisible; there can be no zones of lesser humanity. Second, human dimension commitments are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating states and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the state concerned. The negative argument of non-interference in internal affairs with regard to the human dimension is not valid; it never has been.

Closely linked to the human dimension, the economic and environmental dimensions of the CSCE have gained substantially in importance. The participating states have recognized that the principles of the free market, environmentally sustainable economic growth and prosperity go hand-in-hand with individual freedom and political pluralism. Key issues of the transition process to democratic market economics are now a standard subject for discussion in the framework of the CSCE's Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) when meeting as the Economic Forum. <sup>(2)</sup> Equally, the CSCE states have recognized that preservation of the environment is a shared interest and responsibility of all nations.

Over the years, the CSCE states have established an impressive body of norms of state behaviour, some having the character of more general guidelines and others more precisely prescribing what states ought to do and not do. Not many new standards are called for. Everybody seems to agree that if the existing CSCE commitments were fully and faithfully implemented, Europe would be a much safer place to live in than it is now. Promoting the implementation of CSCE commitments should therefore be one of the main concerns of the Budapest Review Conference. The best way to do this is to have a full and thorough implementation debate as prescribed in the Helsinki Document of 1992.

### **The CSCE as a community of purpose**

In addition to and building upon the concept of the CSCE as a community of values, we should also look upon the Helsinki process as a community of purpose. There is a need for the CSCE to clearly define its role in the evolving European security architecture, by building on its comparative advantages and by taking into account what other international bodies are better placed to do. This will give enhanced focus to the multi-dimensional activities in which the CSCE engages. It will concentrate the limited resources and capabilities of the CSCE on the areas where it is able to make the greatest impact. And it will make our publics better understand what the Helsinki process is all about.

I would submit that the Helsinki process should concentrate on what it is best placed to do, and that is conflict prevention in a broad sense. By that I mean not only the immediate prevention of violent conflict but also the process of long-term peace-building.

First of all, building the peace involves establishing and developing a viable democracy and its institutions, structuring the protection and promotion of human rights and the respect for persons belonging to minorities, and eliminating all forms of discrimination. Violations of human dimension commitments lead to tensions, to societal conflicts and distrust. At times, they may have cross-border consequences, such as involuntary migration. Especially if large groups such as minorities are affected, the stability of states or even a region may be at risk. In the particular case of minorities, there may be kin-states which feel they should act as defenders of the minority living on the other side of the border. This behaviour in turn, may cause concern on the part of the neighbouring state.

Experience shows that it is authoritarian states, not democracies, which are often prone to aggressive policies. Conversely, states which fully respect the CSCE commitments to democracy and human rights contribute to peace and stability. A democratic framework as described in the CSCE documents provides the vital basis for the prevention of human dimension violations or, when they occur, for their redress. Furthermore, such states are more likely to look for peaceful, constructive relations with neighbouring states.

As a second component, building the peace also requires the peaceful transition from a rigid command economy to a flexible and humane market-oriented system which increases prosperity while paying due regard to social justice. At present, quite a number of CSCE states are engaged in this process which is also the subject of discussion in the framework of the CSCE's Economic Forum.

Attention to problems accompanying the transition process is important. In some countries, economic developments have taken such a turn that production is rapidly decreasing, large shortages are occurring and the general population is becoming more and more impoverished. This makes it more likely that social tensions arise, and people may become more open to authoritarian and even xenophobic influences. Some people will be looking for a scapegoat, and a minority is a likely candidate for that role. Other so-called Second Basket issues - in the fields of economics, science, technology and the environment - may be relevant to security as well. Perhaps Budapest could have a fundamental look at the role of the Second Basket in the CSCE's comprehensive approach to security.

In the past few years, we have witnessed the CSCE play an increasing role in the prevention of conflict. CSCE preventive diplomacy and its comprehensive approach have been shown to be of essential value for peace and stability in Europe. This experience also shows that most conflict, including ethnic conflict I would stress, is not an unavoidable natural disaster but can indeed be prevented if the necessary efforts are made.

In so doing, we need to ensure that efforts are concerted and coordinated in order to maximize the effectiveness of our involvement in a concrete situation and avoid any duplication of efforts or resources. Concurrent activities should reinforce each other. Conversely, disagreements over competencies, the inadequate flow of information, and openly diverging assessments of situations may render these efforts less effective and send the wrong message to the state concerned.

The CSCE should also deal with conflict prevention through peace-building in post-conflict situations. Even if violence has come to an end, very often the underlying causes which led to the conflict have not been removed. In situations where the threshold between non-violence and violence has been crossed before, renewed sharp tensions and armed clashes are not unlikely. The immediate prevention of a renewed outbreak of hostilities will of course have to be fully integrated in a more general strategy of peace-building which is required in post-conflict societies. In this context let me mention the ombudsmen project in Bosnia which is a first CSCE step in post-conflict peace-building. In Bosnia, the CSCE is committed to supporting and monitoring the ombudsmen and the request for CSCE assistance is contained in the Bosnian Constitution. The Constitution foresees an ombudsman and deputies representing all ethnic groups of the Federation and having authority to receive grievances and resolve them, superseding legislative and executive authority.

### **The CSCE as a community of responsibility**

If the CSCE is to succeed as a community of values and a community of purpose, it should also be regarded as a community of responsibility. Undeniably, the leaders of individual states themselves are primarily responsible for implementing CSCE commitments and building the peace in their countries. At the same time, the international community has its moral and political duty, too.

In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs* <sup>(3)</sup>, Czech President Vaclav Havel made some very relevant comments in this regard. Referring to the responsibilities of the West, he wrote: "I do not think at all that the main role of the democratic West is to solve all the problems of the "post-communist world". Our countries ... must deal with their own immense problems themselves. The ... West, however, should not look on as though it were a mere visitor at a zoo or the audience at a horror movie, on edge to know how it will turn out. It should perceive these processes at the very least as something that intrinsically concerns it, and that somehow decides its own fate, that demands its own active involvement and challenges it to make sacrifices in the interests of a bearable future for us all."

In my view, these are words which ought not only to inspire our thinking, but also, I would say, our actions. The participating states must be prepared to give timely, effective and concrete political and material support. One should of course not underestimate the burden of such a task. Considerable investments are sometimes needed. However, they are well worth making as they will yield significant returns in humanitarian, economic and political terms.

At the heart of the exercise of our common responsibility lies what is sometimes called the cooperative implementation of CSCE commitments. The so-called Programme of Coordinated Support to Recently Admitted Participating States provides a useful framework for such cooperative implementation. As CSCE High Commissioner, I would also emphasize the cooperative and non-coercive nature of my own involvement. Durable solutions are only possible if there is a sufficient measure of consent from the parties directly involved.

It is in light of this crucial aspect of cooperation that we should look upon the process of increasing CSCE intrusiveness in the affairs of participating states. This is particularly evident in the human dimension, starting with the discussions on implementation, through the adoption and application of the Vienna and Moscow Mechanisms (concerning unusual military activities and human dimension issues, respectively) to the establishment of on-the-spot missions to participating states.

It is highly important that all states recognize the essential cooperative nature of CSCE monitoring. States should not be hesitant to ask assistance or to offer it. They should not be afraid that initiating a mechanism might be seen as an unfriendly or even hostile act. This is where the CSCE is far ahead of the rest of the world: the domestic domain of the individual state is an integral part of the public CSCE domain. It would be good if Budapest were to underline the fundamental principle of cooperation in implementation.

### **Short-term conflict prevention: the response of states**

Investing in building the peace and preventing conflict in Europe requires a long-term perspective. However, these long-term aspects cannot be separated from short-term conflict prevention. Efforts at laying the groundwork for a real democracy are in vain if in the meantime tensions escalate into bloody civil war or international conflict. Short-term conflict prevention aims at the prevention or containment of an immediate development towards escalation. This preventive action may also involve heading off or immediately correcting flagrant violations of human rights commitments which may very well cause an escalation of tensions.

An essential precondition for timely and effective conflict prevention would seem to be that the participating states keep an eye open for developments with a view to anticipating future problems so that they can act quickly, and not just concentrate on already existing crises.

However, I cannot escape the impression that individual states or the CSCE community as a whole are rather slow in their reactions. I do not for one moment doubt that in the Foreign Ministries the necessary information is available and that competent analysts know how to assess it. But do their reports and analyses get the necessary attention at the decision-making levels in a timely fashion? It is my impression that this is not always the case. Equally, I am not sure that collective participation of all states in the CSCE is the best way to come to effective decisions with sufficient quickness. Perhaps we should look at ways to speed up the process of decision-making without, I should stress, undermining the political support which is needed to ensure the effective implementation of decisions.

#### **Short-term conflict prevention: the CSCE High Commissioner <sup>(4)</sup>**

The CSCE disposes of a range of tools which are important to short-term conflict prevention. They have recently been described in this journal in an authoritative way by the CSCE Secretary-General, Dr. Wilhelm Höynck. <sup>(5)</sup> If in the following I concentrate on the CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, it is because I know that particular instrument best and not because I underestimate the importance of others.

As High Commissioner, I have a two-fold mission: <sup>(6)</sup> first, to try to contain and de-escalate tensions concerning minority issues, and second, to alert the CSCE whenever such tensions threaten to develop to such a level that I would not be able to contain them with the means at my disposal.

The situations in which I am at present directly involved are the following:

- Latvia and Estonia, with regard to the Russians living there;
- Slovakia (the Hungarian minority) and Hungary (the Slovak minority);
- Romania, in particular concerning the Hungarian minority;
- the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and its Albanian population;
- Albania, with regard to the Greek population in the south of the country;
- Ukraine, in particular the situation on the Crimea;
- and finally, the inter-ethnic relations in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

At the request of the CSCE states, I have also made a special CSCE-wide study of the situation of the Romany people, or Gypsies as they are commonly called.

These situations require long-term attention and do not dissolve after a first visit by the High Commissioner. Therefore, the continuing political and operational support on the part of the participating states in the execution of my mandate is of the greatest importance.

The High Commissioner has not been defined as an instrument of the human dimension or as an ombudsman for minorities. Nevertheless, I would note that all situations with which I have had to deal contain many human dimension aspects. In my recommendations, I have thus far concentrated especially on the need for a continual dialogue between the government and minorities and on the establishment of institutions to guarantee such a structural dialogue.

My mandate allows me to operate with the essential amount of independence which is embedded in the High Commissioner's final accountability to the CSCE as a whole. I feel that this accountability is at the same time essential to the effectiveness and credibility of the High Commissioner, because it can be translated into political support. Whenever the High Commissioner presents his reports and recommendations to the Committee of Senior Officials, it becomes clear whether there is sufficient and continued support for the High Commissioner's ongoing activities and whether states are willing to give their own follow-up where needed.

### **Better placed for the future**

Building the peace and preventing conflict are essential to the future of our continent. I do not think that Europe can afford more of the bloody conflicts that now devastate some of her regions. If we do not invest enough energy in preventing conflicts before they erupt, we will be presented with a much larger bill in the near future.

In the final analysis, it is the CSCE community as a whole which determines the success of all CSCE efforts at building peace and preventing conflict. If the participating states continue to provide the CSCE, its organs and officials, with their political and operational support, if they are prepared to look ahead and give attention to what is in the future as well as to what is happening now, and if they are willing to tackle the challenges that confront Europe, then we will be much better placed to prevent more conflicts from breaking out.

(1) Mr. van der Stoep is also Minister of State and former Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

(2) The CSO meets on a regular basis between the meetings of the CSCE Council and is responsible for overview, management and coordination, acting as the Council's agent in decision-making. The CSO convenes as the Economic Forum to give political stimulus to and suggest practical efforts for development of free market systems and economic cooperation.

(3) "A Call for Sacrifice. The Co-Responsibility of the West", *Foreign Affairs*, No.2, March/April 1994, pp.2-7.

(4) The mandate of the High Commissioner is contained in Chapter II, Helsinki Decisions, of the Document of the Helsinki Follow-Up Meeting (HFUM), *The Challenges of Change*, which was adopted on 10 July 1992 by the CSCE Summit in Helsinki. It is published in Arie Bloed (ed.) *The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Analysis and Basic Documents, 1972-1993* (Dordrecht- Boston-London 1993).

(5) Dr. Wilhelm Höynck, "CSCE works to develop its conflict prevention potential", *NATO Review*, No. 2, April 1994, pp. 16-22

(6) For a detailed analysis of the mandate see Rob Zaagman, "The CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities: An Analysis of the Mandate and the Institutional Context", in Arie Bloed (ed.), *The Challenges of Change: The CSCE after the Helsinki Follow-up Meeting, 1992* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers 1994).