

Reimagining the OSCE for a New Generation

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Introduction

Almost 50 years after its

deeper understanding of its inner workings, allowing us to supplement interview data with real-time observations. This on-site engagement facilitated a more holistic and contextual analysis, which contributed significantly to the depth and accuracy of our findings and subsequent recommendations.

Synthesis & Recommendations

After conducting interviews and analyzing the existing literature, we applied our generational lens to synthesize our findings into a set of well-informed and practical recommendations for a reimagined OSCE. This process involved iterative refinement, ensuring that the proposed reforms were realistic, contextually relevant, and aligned with both the organization’s overarching goals and our generational lens.

By employing this methodology, we accomplished a thorough examination of the OSCE from varied perspectives while providing a robust foundation for our recommendations.

The Generational Lens

This paper and the recommendations presented are relevant in that they are colored by what we refer to as our “generational lens.” As members of our generation, we have a unique perspective on the wor

unparalleled speed. Our capacity to seek out and consume information extends across a diverse spectrum of mediums, encompassing tangible sources like books and documentaries, alongside virtual platforms such as social media, newsletters, and podcasts.

Consequently, we utilize information to make both monumental choices, such as electing a national leader, and mundane decisions, such as where to have dinner. Moreover, we recognize the role that we can play in contributing to the creation and dissemination of new knowledge—be it through videos posted on social media or responses to questions on an online forum.

These shifting trends have made our generation more sensitive to the information we consume and the sources from which they originate. While comment sections and TikTok videos have shaped the way we have been able to access news headlines, they have proliferated misinformation and false narratives. Studies have found that our media-literate generation is more skeptical about the content we consume and share than other generations and is more likely to be aware of the source of our information.^{1, 2}

Our generation refuses to be passive observers of the world around us and, instead, chooses to

negotiate and cooperate.¹⁵ The conference met regularly to discuss and form new commitments until the adoption of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe in 1990, which marked a new era for European security. The post-Cold War era prompted the CSCE to formalize the institution and enhance operations, culminating in the change to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) at the 1994 Budapest Summit.¹⁶

The Helsinki Final Act

The 1975 Helsinki Final Act established three dimensions, or areas of focus, for the CSCE. The first aimed at reducing tension and

participating State to the adoption of the decision in question.”²⁵ Full consensus remains the requirement for decisions; however, under extreme circumstances there are exceptions. Specifically, the 1991 Moscow Mechanism, built upon the 1989 Vienna Mechanism,²⁶ can be employed in “cases of clear, gross and uncorrected violations of OSCE commitments” and requires “consensus minus one,” as opposed to a unanimous vote.²⁷

Historically, the OSCE’s focus on dialogue and the requirement for consensus established the Organization’s reputation as a key forum for transparency, co-operation, and confidence-building. In the context of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, the OSCE provides the forum that allows states in the EU and NATO to engage with states and regions that could be considered “vulnerable to Russian influence.”²⁸

The Existential Crisis

Since the organization's transition from the CSCE to OSCE, the OSCE has faced significant criticism and hurdles in its mission to uphold the Helsinki Principles as an organization. Even prior to the signing of the Charter of Paris in 1990, the international community raised concerns about the OSCE's role in peacekeeping and peacemaking operations, its relationship with NATO and the EU, and its future as an international organization.^{31,32} The fundamental problems with the OSCE have only become clearer since then, as made evident by the Permanent Council, which has become a platform for grandstanding and empty dialogue.

Additionally, the consensus rule has been subject to heavy criticism since the beginning of the OSCE and this criticism has only grown as the relationship between NATO and Russia and its allies has deteriorated.³³ However, actions to amend the consensus policy have been met with heavy pushback by both Russia and its allies, as well as by smaller countries that rely upon consensus to maintain their power. Various mechanisms have been created over the years to bypass consensus-based decisions, such as the Moscow Mechanism.³⁴ The organization has also attempted to use the "consensus minus one" method to suspend a member that the other nations agreed had violated the OSCE's founding principles. For example, when the organization was known as the CSCE, it suspended Yugoslavia due to its human rights violations. Former Yugoslav states would not rejoin the OSCE until some eight years later.³⁵ The CSCE's statement asserted that "appropriate action may be taken by the Council or the Committee of Senior Officials, if necessary, in the absence of the consent of the State concerned, in cases of clear, gross and uncorrected violations of relevant CSCE commitments."³⁶ However, this avenue of bypassing consensus to suspend a member state that no longer upholds the OSCE's values has not been pursued by the OSCE since, even in the presence of Russia's gross human rights violations during its illegal war of aggression against Ukraine.

One such instance where the "consensus minus one" rule could have been applied was during Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008. The OSCE was unable to organize an agreement between the two states, despite its supposed position as a mediating organization, because the participating states could not reach consensus about the OSCE's role. Furthermore—and perhaps most importantly—the organization was unable to maintain its field mission in Georgia due to Russian vetoes.³⁷ The OSCE's inadequate response to member-on-member aggression would reemerge as a recurring theme after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The consensus issue carries over to other aspects of the OSCE, as well—in particular, the budget. OSCE participating states have only agreed upon a Unified Budget in time for the new year seven times since 2002.³⁸ Any state that has an objection to a line of the budget can reject it, making budgetary agreements extraordinarily difficult. The OSCE frequently works on month-to-month

Until December 2023, aside from not having a Unified Budget, the OSCE lacked a Chairpersonship for 2024 due to Russia's and Belarus' opposition to Estonia's bid. In response to the deadlock, Austria offered to step in as the Chair for 2024 if a consensus could not be reached

1.2 The OSCE should incorporate influencers into their social media campaigns to help increase the OSCE's online presence.

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To facilitate active engagement, the OSCE needs to act to help the public engage with the Organization's daily and weekly tasks, including important meetings such as those of the Permanent Council.

An updated social media strategy and an expanded public outreach plan will increase public engagement, resulting in a more powerful, reputable, transparent, and influential OSCE. Ultimately, our generation will inherit the OSCE. The OSCE needs to transform to meet the growing communication needs of a globally connected world.

2. Carve Out Environmental Security as a Fourth Security Dimension of the OSCE

Our generation in America considers the environment to be the most important global issue, as of 2021.⁵⁷ Across the globe this has manifested in high rates of climate anxiety among young people and backlash against inadequate governmental responses.⁵⁸ Drastic and destructive climate events, such as the heatwaves in Europe, the floods in Somalia, and the hurricanes in the Caribbean, have been burned into our memory, which has led to increased environmental activism. In 2023, 32% of our generation claimed to have personally taken action to address climate change. [(su)1(ch)1(as t)-1(h)1cf

2.4 The OSCE should take advantage of the existing security and organization structures to institute a strengthened focus on environmental protection and security.

We acknowledge the value of utilizing existing resources and institutional memory to enhance environmental security. However, our generation is focused on reimagining the current infrastructure to create effective change. The OSCE has considered the importance of the link between environment and security since the organization's inception. The threat of environmental degradation and climate change to security has only increased since then. The 2021 ministerial decision affirming the importance of co-operation "to address the challenges caused by climate change" emphasizes the political will within the organization to increase environmental protection and security.⁶⁴ For this reason, we propose reimagining current security structures of the OSCE to meet the increasing global environmental challenges we face today.

2.5 The OSCE should include environmental protection and security in the mandates of all ongoing and future missions.⁶⁵

Our generation is pragmatic and focused on practical solutions to the many challenges we face today. Missions are an important and effective part of the OSCE's field work. Some participating states have used extra-budgetary funding to pursue programs

Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina works closely with the region's Aarhus Centres.⁷⁰ However, current work within missions is often limited in scope. The Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina mostly focuses on waste and pollution management, with no mention of climate risk or other environmental challenges.⁷¹ Given the increasing environmental challenges, especially climate change, which will disproportionately impact our generation, increasing the scope of the existing environmental action in mission is important.

2.7 The OSCE should strengthen the emphasis on environmental security and protection in the mandates of other OSCE bodies.

Additionally, the Estonia Mechanism would only be an available option if the Chair-in-Office has not yet been selected within one year of assuming office. Chairs are often selected years before their Chairpersonship and use the year prior to prepare for effective leadership on their first day in office. If a Chair is not selected at least a year in advance, they will not be able to adequately equip themselves to lead the OSCE and complete a seamless transition when replacing the existing leadership.

Furthermore, by applying a time constraint to the Estonia Mechanism, the one or two countries holding up the selection process for the Chair face a deadline for co-operation. If they do not pursue an adequate compromise prior to a year out from the Chairpersonship, they will be shut out of the selection process altogether. This reality will de-incentivize countries from using the Chair-in-Office selection process as a political battleground.

4. Diversify OSCE Funding Sources Through Private Sector Donations

Our generation understands the utility and pragmatism of pooling the resources from the private sector in the service of the public sector. Particularly today, we cannot divorce globalization and commercial interconnectivity from traditional, political interconnectivity. As we reimagine the OSCE, we must consider the OSCE as part of this ecosystem of globalization and interconnectedness that thrives on a symbiotic relationship between private and public institutions. As a participant in this ecosystem the OSCE must modernize its funding sources beyond public funds.

Today, the OSCE runs on a budget of approximately \$150 million (140 million euros), which pays salaries for 400 Secretariat employees, 200 other institutional staff, and about 2,100 field operators, as well as other expenses.⁷⁷ While the OSCE does engage in joint projects with corporate partners, such as Thomas Reuters, they do not accept private monetary donations, which limits their resources and, therefore, their impact potential.^{78,79}

4.1 The OSCE should allow supplementary private funding.

To implement Recommendation 4.1, the OSCE should look to other international bodies, such as the United Nations (UN) as an example for the constructive use and vetting of private funds. The UN uses private funding for the UN Trust Funds, such as the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), which accept calls for “proposals that advance the application of human security to accelerate the SDGs and realize priorities in Our Common Agenda, the new Agenda for Peace and other global agendas,”⁸⁰ which are endorsed by governments and developed in consultation with the DCO Regional Director and Resident Coordinators for the area of operation. Other private

sector funding goes to specific UN organs, such as UNESCO and World Health Organization (WHO).⁸¹

4.2 The OSCE should emulate WHO's public sector guidelines when building their own portfolio of donors and contributors

WHO published *Guidelines on Working with the Private Sector to Achieve Health Outcomes* which lays out some fundamental principles for working with private companies.⁸² First of all, there should be transparency and active conversations around potential conflicts of interest, as well as a legal assessment of conflicts of interest, to avoid compromised integrity situations. The partnership should meet the objective of improving whichever issue the international organization hopes to mitigate. The optics, “integrity of the company” and financial health should also be considered when evaluating partners, and only direct partnerships, not organized by a third party, are advisable.⁸³

over policy, we seek to reimagine the OSCE as a reliable pillar of European security, rather than a

The U.S. proposal also tackled the issue of a consensus vote each year to renew line items from the previous budget, as well as approve new measures. We agree with the U.S. that introducing a roll-over clause for existing budget items increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the OSCE's budgetary process. Because countries already consented to these line-items in previous years, it is inefficient to revisit them yearly. Unless there is a recession or a diversion of resources due to an invasion or economic unrest, most countries' economic situations and priorities do not drastically shift from year to year. And most of these programs are going to be renewed for the next budgetary cycle anyway. The only budget items potentially requiring a consensus vote are new expenditures and sunsets of old programs. Otherwise, countries should continue funding an inflation-adjusted rate based on their pledged amount. This allows for more continuity and security in the budget so that member states can focus more on policy and less on payment.

6. Reform the Permanent Council to Stimulate Dialogue and Cooperation

Our generation values global connectivity. While we understand the importance of formal communication and signaling, we are also intimately aware that informal communication is key to breaking down barriers and finding compromise. Just as personal arguments become murky and difficult to resolve when a degree of separation exists between the communicators, such as communicating via text or instant messaging, delegations will not be able to resolve international crises just by reading pre-approved statements to stakeholders at the Permanent Council meetings. Ambassadors and their staff must foster interpersonal dialogue and move beyond grandstanding to meaningful conversation which occurs organically in more informal settings.

PC meetings are undoubtedly a meaningful venue for participating states to reaffirm their respective positions to fellow delegates and other relevant audiences, as well as engage in discussion. However, the PC meetings, as they stand, suffer from inefficiency and rigidity. When individual delegations unilaterally delivered their statements, we observed much grandstanding, redundancy, and a lack of productive dialogue. We believe participating delegates' time would be

6.2 The Chairin-Office should institute 20-minute breaks between topics on the agenda where participating states are encouraged to engage in informal dialogue and find common ground.

Delegations could use the time saved by joint statements to participate in other coalition-building activities. Particularly, when reimagining the PC, we envision a permanent body where nations not only signal their positions, but also engage in active and productive dialogue.

No one expects countries to find compromises for these complex issues during 20-minute breaks between topics on the PC agenda. However, we believe that these unmoderated breaks would allow countries to begin conversations that they could continue outside of the PC; sometimes gathering

We designed each recommendation to align with values that are closely held by our generation. First, we hope to harness the power of social media, by expanding the OSCE's social engagement, releasing more information in different languages to the general public, and streaming PC sessions. This would touch on our generation's desire for strong and open communication and interaction with massive information coming from across the globe. Second, we aim to expand the OSCE's work on the environment by establishing a fourth dimension focused on environmental security

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