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THE OSCE’S ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION: Enhancing relevance and impact

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Executive summary

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is an intergovernmental organization established to promote security and cooperation among its 57 participating States. In this paper the author argues that the Organization’s 2nd Dimension – covering economic and environmental affairs – is not fully utilized as it is poorly defined and lacks a conceptual framework. The author presents a simple framework based on the two concepts inherent in the Organization’s name: security and co-operation. The framework has proven useful in the OSCE Office in Tajikistan since 2012. This paper shows how these general directions can be further conceptualized and successfully translated into specific programmatic activities implemented in an OSCE field office environment.
Defining the OSCE’s economic and environmental dimension

The objective of this paper is to suggest how the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) can enhance its relevance and impact through its 2nd dimension of security encompassing economic and environmental affairs.

It has been said that the OSCE’s 2nd Dimension is the least defined of OSCE’s three dimensions. The 1st Dimension – Political-Military Affairs – is readily understood as dealing with transnational threats, border management, police reform and numerous other challenges pertaining to national defence and law enforcement. No one questions the Dimension’s relevance to the OSCE’s core mandate. The 3rd Dimension, the Human Dimension, is also well defined with its emphasis on democratization, human rights and the rule of law. The existence of a specialized structure dedicated to 3rd Dimension issues – the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Warsaw, further helps to streamline standards and practices in the 3rd Dimension.

Despite continued efforts to boost its significance and impact, the 2nd Dimension has never attained the political leverage or conceptual coherence of the other two dimensions. This is not because such a development is not wanted. Several OSCE participating States, in particular among those hosting an OSCE field mission, would welcome a much stronger emphasis on economic and environmental affairs.

In many OSCE participating States economic reform and a renewed emphasis on the environment rank high on the national policy agenda. These countries realize that such aspirations can be fulfilled only through international co-operation. The challenge is that the OSCE has not yet managed to fully develop a concept – or framework – for its 2nd dimension of security.

The failure to define the OSCE’s purpose in the 2nd dimension of security is aggravated by the fluid nature of the Organization, with many of its staff – both in the Secretariat and in the field missions – being seconded by participating States on fixed-term contracts, typically for a few years.  

The constant staff rotation means that new heads of mission and new economic and environmental officers often apply their own ideas and rely on their personal experience when they deploy to an OSCE duty station. Apart from past and current activities, there is very little guidance or established standards for what constitute relevant and effective OSCE 2nd Dimension activities, in particular in the national contexts in which OSCE’s field offices work. The result is that the Organization loses traction and influence and ends up being less relevant than it could be if it reached its full potential. The problem is not confined to the technicalities of programme management. To the extent that this shortcoming affects the Organization’s authority, relevance and impact it becomes a strategic concern with political implications.

The present paper seeks to contribute to this discussion and offers suggestions as to how the present imperfections can be alleviated.

1 No individual may serve for more than ten years in the Organization (OSCE Staff Regulations and Staff Rules: Regulation 3.11 (b). Vienna, September 2003, updated: 10 October 2013 [DOC.SEC/3/03]).

2 The OSCE’s field offices have national mandates, confining their activities to the host country. On the other hand, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities in the Secretariat has a multilateral mandate, typically involving two or more OSCE participating States in joint events and activities. The focus in this paper is primarily on the OSCE’s field offices.

3 OSCE Ministerial Declarations adopted in Maastricht (OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, 2003) and in Madrid (Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security, 2007) offer general policy directions. This paper shows how these general directions can be further conceptualized and successfully translated into specific programmatic activities implemented in an OSCE field office environment.
Critique of the policy options – shortcomings of current approach

The lack of a conceptual framework for programmatic activity in OSCE’s 2nd Dimension gives rise to the following problems:

- Erratic and short-term planning of economic and environmental project activities in OSCE field missions weakens the overall impact of the Organization and makes the OSCE a less relevant partner for international agencies and for the host government.
- The OSCE’s image and profile are blurred, and the Organization’s purpose and added value come under question.
- New mission heads and new economic and environmental officers being deployed to OSCE field presences do not know how to effectively translate OSCE’s concept of comprehensive security into 2nd dimension project activities. Too often a business development, a community development or similar approaches are applied, something the OSCE is ill-equipped for, other agencies do far better and which yield limited political impact.
- Disparate expectations, confusion and frustration arise between various structures and actors within the Organization. Participating States, the Office of the Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities in the OSCE Secretariat, the individual OSCE field office and the host country do not necessarily share a common view of the OSCE’s role in the 2nd Dimension.

4 The OSCE’s limited financial resources, the one-year budget cycle, the Organization’s procurement rules and its recruitment policies do not make the OSCE an appropriate vehicle for expensive and complex multi-year development programmes.

5 During the annual Programme Budget Performance Review for 2011 and 2012, several participating States put forward such criticism of the Economic and Environmental Programme of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, claiming that the programme did not adhere fully to the OSCE’s security mandate. The criticism ceased in 2013, once the principles espoused in this paper began taking effect.
Recommendations

To address these shortcomings, a simple model was developed and implemented in the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, starting in 2012 and further refined during 2013 and 2014. The model was based on several different OSCE field operations’ experience in implementing 2nd dimension activities since 2003.

In Tajikistan, the model helped achieve a more focused Economic and Environmental Programme. As a result, participating States’ repeated criticism that the Office’s Economic and Environmental programme did not fully conform to OSCE’s security mandate ceased.

The model takes as its starting point the very name of the Organization: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The key words are security and co-operation (the OSCE being an international organization, co-operation refers in practice to international co-operation). As of today, all economic and environmental activities in the OSCE Office in Tajikistan are vetted by project managers and by the head of department to make sure they adhere to these two concepts.

Below, two illustrations demonstrate how economic and environmental activities implemented in the OSCE Office in Tajikistan relate to the two concepts security and international co-operation.

Figure 1. Addressing security in OSCE’s 2nd Dimension.

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6 With its six international and seven national staff members (as of 2013), the Economic and Environmental Department in the OSCE Office in Tajikistan is the largest 2nd dimension structure in any OSCE field presence, second only to the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities in the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna.

Security is here defined in its classical sense, meaning the maintenance of a participating State’s territorial integrity and constitutional order. According to the model, activities in the 2nd Dimension should promote security in this classical sense of the word. Here it is useful to introduce a related concept: good governance. In the model, good governance is treated as an integral part of security. The reason is that corruption and poor governance erode democratic institutions, undermine the rule of law and can easily challenge the powers of elected national and local authorities.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan implements a wide range of security-related activities in the 2nd dimension. These activities can be further divided into two categories, both pertaining directly to security:

- **Focusing on a geographic area with security challenges:** Assistance to the four Tajik-Afghan cross-border markets and to the Ishkoshim Free Economic Zone in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) target a part of the country that in July 2012 experienced serious armed clashes between insurgents and the central government. Similarly, the private-public investment dialogue in the Rasht Valley (supported by an auxiliary small hydropower promotion programme under the auspices of the OSCE), are examples of the Office’s involvement in an area that between 1992 and 2011 saw repeated fighting between rebels and government forces. Furthermore, all the Office’s cross-border trade facilitation activities between Tajikistan and Afghanistan – a neighbouring country ravaged by war during the last thirty years – can be placed under this label.

- **Fighting corruption and strengthening good governance:** The OSCE’s mandate to fight money-laundering and corruption is traditionally vested in the 2nd dimension. However, good governance is a cross-cutting topic very close to both the political-military and the human dimension of security. To promote good governance as an integral part of the Office’s security mandate, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan co-operates with government bodies and with civil society to prevent corruption and to address corruption-related crimes. The emphasis is on capacity-building, policy formulation support and international exchange of best practices.

Figure 2. Addressing international co-operation in OSCE’s 2nd Dimension.
In the model *international co-operation* is defined in its most basic sense, referring to co-operation between participating States with respect to economic and environmental affairs.

In the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the signatory states gave considerable prominence to co-operation between themselves ‘in the field of economics, of science and technology and of the environment’.8

Figure 2 illustrates the OSCE Office in Tajikistan’s 2nd Dimension activities fostering international co-operation. Some of the activities fall naturally into both the ‘security’ and the ‘international co-operation’ category, signalling a very strong link between programme activities and the OSCE’s core strengths. As a field presence with a national mandate, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan promotes international co-operation by supporting host country capacities to engage in bilateral and multilateral processes related to economic and environmental affairs.

The Office facilitates bilateral trade between Tajikistan and Afghanistan through local cross-border trade markets and through Tajikistan’s two free economic zones situated right on the national border with Afghanistan. Tajikistan’s adoption of international environmental conventions and their implementation is supported. Further, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan was instrumental in the final stages of Tajikistan’s successful World Trade Organization (WTO) accession negotiations, leading to full WTO membership in March 2013. The Office assists Tajikistan’s Customs Service in implementing good governance, thereby making foreign trade and international travel more effective. Tajikistan’s bilateral dialogue with Afghanistan on the environment and on water resources management (focusing on the Pyanj border river) are further examples of OSCE-facilitated international co-operation in the 2nd dimension. Finally, in addition to its own activities in Tajikistan, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan takes part in and contributes to activities implemented by the OSCE Secretariat (i.e. by the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities), bringing together representatives from different OSCE participating States. By definition, all such regional or OSCE-wide events in the 2nd dimension strengthen international co-operation by facilitating dialogue and the exchange of best practices between countries.

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8 On 1 August 1975, The Helsinki Final Act was unanimously adopted by the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), the forerunner of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In the deliberations preceding the Helsinki Final Act, and in the Final Act document itself, economic and environmental topics made up the so-called second basket of issues, later referred to as the second dimension of security, thus giving the economic and environmental section of the OSCE its name.
Conclusions

As Figures 1 ("Security") and 2 ("International Co-operation") above demonstrate, even a simple conceptual framework can go a long way towards guiding OSCE executive structures in enhancing the relevance and political impact of their 2nd dimension activities. Simultaneously, it becomes easier to explain, to justify and to highlight OSCE’s contributions towards security in the 2nd dimension to internal and external audiences alike.

The conceptual framework has proven its worth in a field mission context. It is simple to understand and to apply. Hence, the 'Tajikistan model' represents a significant step towards defining relevant activities in the OSCE’s 2nd dimension and thereby towards enhancing the Organization’s overall impact in the field and through its Secretariat.

There is no reason to believe that the examples presented in this paper represent the model in its ultimate form. However, once a conceptual framework has been introduced, further field experience and analysis will allow the model to be further developed and improved.

Sources

- **OSCE Staff Regulations and Staff Rules:**  
  Regulation 3.11 (b), September 2003, updated: 10 October 2013 [DOC.SEC/3/03].

- **Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security.**  
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- **The Helsinki Final Act.**  
  Adopted by the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in Helsinki, Finland, on 1 August 1975.
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