



BULLETIN OF THE INSTITUTE FOR WESTERN AFFAIRS

■ The priorities of the German OSCE Chairmanship in 2016

Kamil Szubart

As of the beginning of this year, the Federal Republic of Germany assumed its yearly Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) with the motto of “renewing dialogue, rebuilding trust, restoring security”. This is the country’s second chairmanship since the establishment of the rotational system within the framework of the CSCE process in 1991. The German Chairmanship will receive *de iure* support from the so called OSCE Troika made up of Serbia, which held the Chairmanship in 2015, and Austria, which is preparing to assume it in 2017. Head of the German Diplomatic Corps Frank-Walter Steinmeier will preside over key meetings in the Permanent Council of the OSCE and play host to the 23rd Ministerial Council of the OSCE scheduled to take place in Hamburg on December 8-9, 2016.

At a special meeting of the Permanent Council of the OSCE held in Vienna on January 14, 2016, Minister Steinmeier presented Berlin’s detailed precepts and priorities, as first heralded during the July 2, 2015 meeting of the Permanent Council of the OSCE. The Germans intend to focus on the OSCE’s three key dimensions which are political and military, human and economic.

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The political and military dimension focuses on the frozen conflict in Donbass and the increased activity of the Russian Federation along the eastern flank of NATO. According to the German diplomacy, the annexation of Crimea and the breakout of fighting in Donbass constitute the most severe security crisis since the collapse of the bipolar system. Therefore, Berlin’s strategic objective will be to prevent renewed fighting between the parties to the conflict and continue talks in the Normandy format

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with the involvement of France, Russia, Ukraine and Germany. Germany advocates putting into life the still unimplemented Minsk agreement of February 12, 2015 which is interpreted differently by Kiev and Moscow. Still awaiting its implementation is, e.g. Art. 2 of the Minsk Agreement on pulling back heavy weaponry (above 100 mm) at least 25 km away from the demarcation line established between the parties. Despite Germany's best efforts throughout last year, which were consistently in support of all measures aimed at implementing Art. 2, hostilities continue along the entire length of the front line between the Ukrainian forces and the separatists/Russian soldiers. The parties predominantly use firearms and mortars and sporadically on the BM-21 Grad (124 mm) and BM-27 Uragan (220 mm) missile launchers. All this despite the fact that as recently as November 6, 2015, at a meeting of foreign affairs ministers in the Normandy format in Berlin, the parties reaffirmed their commitment to carry out the Minsk Agreement, including the withdrawal of heavy equipment by the end of December 2015.¹

Regular exchange of fire in Donbass is not without influence on the efficiency of OSCE missions and specifically its Special Monitoring Mission and its Observation Mission at the Gukovo and Donetsk crossings on the Russian border. Both missions are aimed at monitoring the observance of the ceasefire, the pullout of heavy equipment (Art. 3 of the Minsk Agreement) and the exchange of prisoners of war (Art. 6). What makes both missions very difficult to accomplish are the risks faced by observers. Furthermore, the mandate of members of the Observation Mission at the Gukovo and Donetsk crossings on the border with Russia does not allow them to exercise monitoring along the entire length of the Russian/Ukrainian border which can in fact be seen as Russia's internal frontier. Despite obstacles on both sides, Berlin will continue to support the OSCE mission in Ukraine all the while increasing its financial and human contributions. Germany is also afraid of the withdrawal of the mandate for one of the missions or the withholding of consent to its renewal by Russia. The most serious fears with this respect are associated with the Observation Mission on the Gukovo and Donetsk border crossings, which allows the international community to access at least rudimentary information on the developments in the region. Should the present mandate expire (on April 30, 2016), access to any news other than those presented by Moscow or intelligence assets will be rendered impossible.

This would repeat the scenario applied by Moscow in two other observations missions: the OSCE mission in South Ossetia and the United Nations mission in Abkhazia (UNOMOG) in 2009. At the time, Moscow minimized the involvement of the international community in resolving the conflict thereby demonstrating its dominance in the post-Soviet area in keeping with its concept of the near abroad and the exclusive sphere of influence.

The priority status of the Ukrainian conflict and talks with Moscow has been shown by the appointment of Gernot Erler (*SPD*) as Special Federal Representative in the OSCE. Gernot Erler was a close associate of Minister Steinmeier between 2005 and 2009; he has served as Secretary of State in the Foreign Affairs Ministry in charge

¹ The need to implement the Minsk Accords was reaffirmed during a meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers of the states of the Normandy format during the 52nd Munich Security Conference on February 12-14, 2016.

of Germany's eastern policy and, since January 2014, as Federal Coordinator for Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Partnership. For Germany, dialogue with Russia within the framework of the OSCE was a perfect distraction from the multilateral diplomacy of NATO member states towards Russia, which is critical due to the suspended cooperation between the NATO Council and Russia.

Although the Ukrainian conflict remains a priority, Germany is determined to continue extending its political support and contributions (through 55 experts) to all of OSCE's other observation missions, the most prominent of which are those having to do with Transnistria, South Caucasus and Nagorno Karabakh. As for the latter dispute, Germany has postulated the establishment, within the OSCE, of effective mechanisms for the notification of ceasefire violations by conflict parties, although no specific solution has been proposed. From Berlin's perspective, the key factor for the effectiveness of observation missions and control mechanisms is the regularity of member state contributions to the OSCE budget which is set to amount to €141.1 million this year. As the second largest OSCE contributor after the United States (Germany's total contribution account for 11% of OSCE's budget), Germany will seek to increase the fiscal discipline of the member states. This will help to, among others, reduce the financing of OSCE missions with non-budget funds and minimize contributions by external partners.

Germany views the further development of confidence and security-building measures (CSBMs) and conventional arms control as two of the top priorities of its Chairmanship. This is of particular significance in view of the developments on NATO's eastern flank resulting from Russia's activities and Russia's notification of its complete withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) on March 10, 2015. This confirmed *de iure* President Vladimir Putin's decree of July 13, 2007 on the suspension of Russia's involvement in the CFE regime which, following its approval by the Duma in November 2007, took effect on December 12, 2007.

A number of priorities were adopted to boost the effectiveness of the CSBMs. These were the Vienna Mechanism/Vienna Document on Confidence and Security Building Measures - a two-stage consultation and cooperation mechanism envisioned in cases of extraordinary military activity; the Treaty on Open Skies of March 24, 1992 designed to ensure transparency by means of aerial surveillance over the military activities undertaken by state parties, and the OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons. According to Germany, all regional agreements and mechanisms established within the framework of the OSCE require further consistent implementation by the state parties and immediate adaptation to meet current challenges. To that end, a series of seminars and working meetings will be held dedicated to exchanging views and opinions among OSCE member state experts. The first such meeting, devoted to the future of confidence and security building procedures within the Vienna Mechanism (OSCE High-Level Military Doctrine Seminar) and its possible modification, will be held in Vienna on February 16-17, 2016.

Well aware of the obsolete nature of the CFE regime, Germany has set out on initiating a debate on an agenda for a new treaty. Its adoption would require unanimity by all OSCE members. This is a highly ambitious project considering the long-standing deadlock on arms control on the Old Continent caused by the confrontation

policy pursued by the Russian Federation. Another challenge will be to set up an effective verification and control mechanism in view of Russia's persistent breaches of the flank limits laid down in the CFE Treaty between 1999 and 2007. Paradoxically, despite Moscow's violations of the CFE flank limits, and the subsequent withdrawal from upholding the CFE regime, ever since 2007, Russia has been the most active OSCE member country, having requested the greatest number of inspections of its own military facilities under the Vienna Document. This was Moscow's way to compensate for the lack of information that resulted from its decision to suspend the performance of the CFE regime.

In addition to the strictly military threats, Germany sees threats of a new kind associated with rapid technological advances in the virtual world and the so called "information war" applied effectively by Russia during the Georgian and Ukrainian conflicts. Similarly as in the case of the CSBMs and conventional threats, the German Chairmanship decided to hold a series of expert meetings. The first meeting in the series, held on January 20, 2016 in Berlin and attended by 150 experts from 40 OSCE member states, was entirely dedicated to cybersecurity.

As a compliment to the political and military dimension of the OSCE, emphasis will also be placed on the key threats faced by the majority of OSCE countries such as Islamic terrorism, the Syrian conflict and uncontrolled migrations in the Middle East and Europe. Of pivotal importance with this respect may be dialogue between Turkey and the region's six countries associated in the OSCE Mediterranean Initiative/Mediterranean Partnership for Cooperation, i.e. Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Israel. To this aim, regular multilateral meetings will be held, initiated by Minister Steinmeier during the OSCE Mediterranean Conference of October 20, 2015 in Jordan's capital of Amman. Non-military threats and, principally, the migration crisis and Islamic terrorism, also topped the agenda during the first working meeting of the OSCE Security Committee on January 18, 2016.

Within the OSCE, Germany will additionally seek backing for the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and its peace plan approved by the UN Security Council in December 2015. Germany is in favor of having all states of the region engage in a dialogue, with a particularly eminent role to be played by Iran and Saudi Arabia. To further that goal, German diplomacy will persist in its effort to have the ISSG bolstered by OSCE member states and the countries of the region. This endeavor will thus resonate perfectly with the diplomatic offensive in the Persian Gulf launched in September 2015 by Minister Steinmeier (who visited Iran and Saudi Arabia on two occasions: in October 16-20, 2015 and in February 2-4, 2016). Furthermore, two conferences on migration and terrorist threats to OSCE member states will be held at Germany's initiative in the late 2016. The priority treatment of the Middle East and especially emphasis on cooperation with Ankara, is evidenced by the choice of Germany's OSCE ambassador within the framework of Germany's Permanent Representation in OSCE. On July 29, 2015, Germany's ambassador at OSCE Rüdiger Lüdeking was replaced by Eberhard Pohl, who formerly served as the country's ambassador to Turkey.

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Germany will also engage in restoring OSCE values and principles within the system of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which forms the core of the human dimension of the OSCE. Minister Steinmeier has repeatedly underlined in the Final Act of the CSCE the significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as their role in today's world. This is particularly crucial in the context of the OSCE member states in Central Asia that are governed by authoritarian regimes. Germany additionally intended to focus on discrimination on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation and ethnic origin (Romas and Sinti) and anti-Semitism, which is essential in view of Germany's history and the special relationship between the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel. Thus, the German Chairmanship will place particular emphasis on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 on the impact of armed conflicts on the situation of women, as well as on the work of Andrew Baker, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combatting Anti-Semitism. Berlin will also join other autonomous OSCE institutions in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. These include OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, and OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, as underlined by G. Erler during his presentation of German Chairmanship priorities in the Council of Europe on February 3, 2016 in Strasbourg.

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The economic dimension of the OSCE will consist primarily in combatting corruption and illegal practices in OSCE member states, especially in the post-Soviet area and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Berlin will use the OSCE as a forum for promoting environmental protection, easing restrictions on cross-border cooperation, including labor migration, as well as the openness of the labor market, transportation and infrastructure, which in view of the practices of protecting the EU's internal markets exercised by some OSCE members appears to be a mere political declaration that is not backed up by real-life efforts. Much greater prospects for success can be expected in tightening collaboration among the member states for combatting transnational criminal organizations involved in drug and people trafficking as well as procuring. Berlin will focus in particular on drug trafficking, including the smuggling of heroin from Afghanistan to Germany via the Balkan and southern routes across the Mediterranean Sea and through Italy and Austria. The two parts of Europe with the highest consumption of heroine are North Rhine-Westphalia and the neighboring country of the Netherlands. The trafficking and distribution of the drug are conducted by criminal organizations from the Balkans (Albania and Kosovo) as well as Kurdish organized crime groups operating in Germany.

Without a doubt, Berlin will leverage economic factors to strengthen the human dimension in relations with the Russian Federation. Moscow's growing demand for new technologies and the global plunge of crude oil prices offer an opportunity to enhance human right protection instruments in Russia as part of the concept of "Trade for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms".

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The German OSCE Chairmanship coincides with one of the most severe security crises seen on the Old Continent since the breakdown of the bipolar system. Despite Berlin's repeated assurances of the key role played by the OSCE in the European security architecture, the organization has been overshadowed by NATO and the EU ever since its institutionalization at the CSCE summit in Budapest in December 1994. Ever since that time, it has focused predominantly on the non-military aspects of security. German Chairmanship's success in accomplishing these objectives will depend largely on Moscow's approach. Germany's priority will be to maintain dialogue on the Donbass conflict. Should Kiev resume its broad-based counterterrorist operations, it can count on an immediate military response from Moscow, which will consequently reduce prospects for any dialogue, including that on the OSCE forum.

Germany's prospects for succeeding are much more limited with respect to its ambitious plan to spark a debate on a new treaty to replace the CFE regime. One of the main stumbling blocks may be the ongoing confrontational course pursued by Moscow as well as the efforts by NATO's eastern flank countries to boost the permanent presence of the Allied Forces in their region. Thus, Germany is much more likely to succeed in trying to maintain dialogue within the framework of the Vienna Mechanism/Vienna Document. Such dialogue is crucial in view of the increased military activities (exercises, maneuvers) by both the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and by NATO forces in Eastern Europe.

The multilateral dialogue platform offered by the OSCE should be recognized as key to supporting the ISSG and its peace plan for Syria and to combatting criminal organizations trafficking refugees from Turkey to the EU. Here too the factors of key significance will be the response by Moscow, OSCE members in the region (Turkey and the Balkans) and the states of the Mediterranean Initiative/Mediterranean Partnership.

The statements expressed herein reflect solely the opinions of its author.

Kamil Szubart - Assistant at the Institute for Western Affairs, his research interests include international security in trans-Atlantic relations and Germany's foreign policy and security.