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The Istanbul Summit – Developing the Operational Capabilities of the OSCE

Newsletter: When you rejoined the OSCE last year as its Secretary General, did you have a number of specific ideas you wished to implement?

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I was coming back with several years of direct experience with the Organization, so of course I had several ideas and plans. But I also knew that I was coming back to a different Organization, even after just a one-year break. Clearly major activities, first and foremost the deployment and ultimately the necessary withdrawal of the Kosovo Verification Mission, had had a profound effect. Besides, at the time that I returned our preparations for the Istanbul Summit were very much affecting some of the thinking in the Organization and therefore some of the perspectives for the Organization.

Nevertheless, I came back here with a certain understanding of what I would like to do: first of all to strengthen the management of the Organization as such, and to improve the way that the Secretary General, as the chief administrative officer of the Organization, discharges his responsibilities. I was fully aware of certain problems from my previous stay, regarding some elements of management, including management of our field operations. These are not down to someone's ill will, but are definitely due to the fact that we are just trying to catch up with what is happening in the Organization. Developments have been so rapid and tasks coming before the Organization are sometimes so enormous, changing the whole environment that we often have to behave in a reactive way. Yet the situation has been gradually changing and recently, after the Istanbul Summit, with the necessary determination.

Were any developments already underway that helped you in implementing your plans?

Yes, certain changes had started before my arrival, for instance, regarding the budgetary process. We had moved into programme budgeting, beginning in 1998, but of course we have to develop this further. As I said it's also a question of management of our field operations and assistance to our field operations. We are a highly decentralized organization with major responsibility delegated to our field operations. But we still like to have a certain degree of control to ensure that OSCE activities in the field are being based on a clear political mandate and guidance from the decision-making bodies, and that OSCE rules and regulations are being implemented and respected throughout the OSCE itself. So this was probably my first task.

How would you list your other priorities?

The second task was how better to assist the Chairmanship in discharging its responsibilities and obligations, through the activities of the Secretariat, specifically those of myself and my colleagues in the Conflict Prevention Centre, those dealing with operations, budget, etc. It means I have had to

consider what is the character of the relations between the SG and Chairmanship and to try to bring forward certain recommendations or proposals in that regard. Again this is very much oriented towards our field operations. This is also the time of year when we look into the lessons learnt from our co-operation with last year's Chairmanship. We also have been in very close contact with the incoming Austrian Chairmanship team and we are now trying to set up certain patterns of co-operation, starting with how we could best support the political objectives of the Austrian Chairmanship.

Probably the third field, which I had as my priority, was to look into the way of interaction with other employees of the Organization, besides those in the CPC. It means first of all co-operation and information-sharing to the greatest extent possible, as well as encouraging sort of joint forward-looking thinking with other OSCE institutions and the Chairmanship, including then the Permanent Council and the participating States.

Then the fourth main field was to look into our co-operation with international organizations both inter- governmental and non-governmental and again, from that perspective how to enhance our impact and create more synergy, mainly in and through our field operations. As is well known, probably the best and the most developed comparative advantage the OSCE has are our field operations. Here we do co-operate with a good number of partners, but there is still big room for improvement. I witnessed this from the UN side during my year in Tajikistan. I had my then OSCE colleagues there, as well as a number of other international organizations and NGOs. But in spite of all our efforts to improve co-ordination, I would say we were really only somewhere midway through the process. So when I came here to assume my new responsibilities as the Secretary General, one of the tasks I put before myself is to look into co-operation with international organizations and to improve this as necessary.

Looking back over the past six months, how far would you assess you have been able to achieve these tasks?

It is too early for me to talk about success or achievements at this point in time, but I can definitely say some first steps have been taken in a new orientation. I have been able to delimit more specifically what are the concrete tasks within this broad frame work of objectives, and also probably to fine tune certain areas in understanding what I would like to do in the future.

Besides that, what was extremely important in this period were some of the decisions taken at the Istanbul OSCE Summit, which again moved us forward and gave us a clearer perspective of what are our tasks. Also, since the autumn season is usually the period of budget preparation and discus-

sion and adoption, it focused us very much on the issues of better budgetary management, better management of our field operations and internal auditing, including financial auditing.

Another element is that we were active participants in the preparation for the Istanbul Summit and therefore we were able to deliver some of the points for consideration before the OSCE Review Conference, preceding the Istanbul Summit. Again, we used the opportunity not only to deliver some of our points, recommendations and concerns, but to come out with a number of proposals. At the same time, it gave us the possibility to look into matters and evaluate and assess where we are. So through this process, I believe that we were able to pinpoint a good number of more specific tasks in all four fields.

As to ways of improving our co-ordination of the management of field operations and inter-relations with other OSCE institutions, as well as work with other international organizations, we have started the discussion and we will continue and fix certain modalities of co-operation very soon, with additional touches regarding our field operations at the Heads of Missions meeting in January.

What does this process mean in practice?

Regarding the administration and management, first of all we must bring about an improvement of the whole budgetary process, starting with the preparation, and this must be done in close co-operation with our field operations, because of the delegation of a number of tasks there. It is also in many ways primarily their responsibility, but we in the Secretariat are requested by the participating States to have a much enhanced role in the whole process, not only as a sort of guardian for the OSCE rules and regulations, but also as a kind of filter which that assists the participating States to better focus field operations, particularly on their priorities. So we function as a sort of transmitting mechanism in a way, and the first filter through which budgets must be processed before reaching the participating States.

One could say that I'm only talking here about budget matters, but it is through the budget that we assess and form opinions on a whole range of activities. We can effectively assist the participating States in the way they prepare their positions, giving them better understanding regarding the operations of our Missions, so although it's done through technical means, I would say it is a politically important task.

Coming to international organizations, in Istanbul we received new guidance regarding our co-operation with them, by the adoption of the Charter for European Security and in particular the Platform for Co-operative Security. This

gives us a firm basis and guidance on how to structure our future relations with international organizations. During Istanbul and since, I've had number meetings with different partners from several international organizations. We talked with the Council of Europe, the European Union, and the European Commission and talks will continue with some members of the UN system. For example, I was able to have good discussions with our UN colleagues in New York recently, on ways to improve our co-operation and to push it forward.

What other aspects of the Istanbul Summit would you single out for emphasis?

From my point of view, Istanbul resulted in extremely important decisions regarding the strengthening of the operational capabilities of the Organization and the participating States took a number of important decisions, again moving us forward in this field. Regarding the strengthening of the operational capabilities, the decisions to develop the REACT programme (Editor's note: Rapid Expert Assistance and Co-operation Teams), as well as to establish an Operation Centre in the OSCE Secretariat, are the ones which, in my opinion, can bring a new quality to the process of planning and deployment of our field operations in particular, as well as to the whole field of our co-operation with other international partners – both in the field and on the level of headquarters.

The objective of the REACT programme is to enable this Organization, and first of all its participating States, to identify, prepare and deploy non-military expertise, including components of a peacekeeping operation extremely rapidly – probably more rapidly than many of our partners. It will do this by creating a sort of roster of candidates available at short notice for this kind of deployment.

What I also had in mind when I spoke about important decisions of the participating States in strengthening our ability to act quickly and to be up to the task was the decision to improve the employment conditions. A decision was taken which is bringing us closer to the other main international organizations, first of all our colleagues from the UN system. It should enable us to compete for the most qualified personnel, to recruit them and then to keep them as necessary in our Institutions. So I would say that was an extremely important decision that can also be taken, in a way, as a sign of a maturing of this Organization, a recognition that we have certain functions as Institutions, that we are now a firm part of the international landscape and that, if we have to be prepared to co-operate and interact with other players in the international field, we need competitive conditions to do so.

How important do you consider it is for the Organization to convey an accurate image of itself to the outside world?

I would say that it is extremely important. This is another one of the fields, which I'm thinking about, together with the participating States and with the Chairmanship. It is a question not only of the image but also of the visibility of this Organization. Unfortunately, the OSCE is acting at what can be called the "soft" end of the scale of conflict – early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, post conflict resolution, etc.. Very often, we are dealing either with anticipatory tasks or with defusing situations before they develop too far, and, of course, they don't have that necessary attraction for those who are creating the image in the media etc. So it's sometimes very difficult for us to have the appropriate public image, since it's quite natural that media are focused on matters which are politically right in the spotlight of international attention, or else are important from this or that participating State's point of view. There may be internal political developments, or they might be in focus because of the humanitarian dimension. Whatever the case, very often we are just unable to deliver the kind of hard "news" that attracts focused attention.

We are trying, of course, but the fact is that, through our work, for instance field operations lasting for years, we are a factor for stability. This is something, which is very difficult for us to "sell" to the media, to get their attention. We should try to improve this, but I believe it will come rather slowly. Operations such Kosovo are definitely helping us to establish ourselves in a much more identifiable way, not just vis-à-vis the media community, but also the general public.

Similarly our political role in the discussions of the developments in and around Chechnya, and specifically the activities of the Chairmanship, again bring us some sort of attention. But I can also name another two or three examples out of dozens of other developments and engagements of this Organization, which are not highlighted in any way, but that as I said is probably natural.

You mentioned visibility as well as image, could you elaborate a little more on that point?

Yes, I believe that it is very important to give the Organization its due. We have to ensure that every time that, for instance, we are engaged in delivering something important that it is attributed to us, as the Organization responsible. Sometimes the international community is acting here or there, very often in complex, composite operations, and it may be only the key

agency in the league that gets mentioned. This is happening on occasions in Kosovo, but also in other places the leading partner, or umbrella partner, is being mentioned and the OSCE seems to be hidden behind.

This also applies the other way, regarding our partners in different composite operations. We are now talking, for instance, with our colleagues from the Council of Europe, the EU, and the European Commission on the question of visibility. Very often they support us as the OSCE in certain operations and they have the very same valid claim to visibility. So public relations is one of those spheres, which I believe must be in the focus of our, and my, attention as a part of the wider picture.

With respect to both image and visibility, do you see the forthcoming 25th anniversary of the signature of the Helsinki Final Act as having a major potential impact?

I hope that, with the Chairmanship, we shall be able to use this special anniversary to put down our marker. In the Secretariat we began our preparations last year and certain activities in this line have already come to fruition. We have selected a 25th Anniversary logo, and this has been introduced on our general factsheet about the OSCE. It is also featured on the cover of the Helsinki Final Act booklet, that we have re-issued in a special edition. And we have prepared a number of recommendations as a sort of action plan of small-scale activities. Some of this could be covered by normal budgetary means, and some of this will require some extra budgetary financing, for which we would like to get the support of the participating States. We shall be contributing an article here and there, preparing some media material etc.

However, the general trend is not to have some spectacular celebrations, but to mark this anniversary by individual OSCE participating States, and also in our field activities by appropriate activities. For example, there will be some activity in Finland, and we already have an invitation to an international conference or seminar connected with this anniversary. With the Austrian Chairmanship for the year 2000, we are beginning to discuss what kind of activities we might have here. Of course, many of them will be sponsored and conducted by Austria, but some of them we can participate in or support. Definitely, there should be at least one key activity in the summer, around the time of the year when, 25 years ago, the Helsinki Final Act became the basic OSCE charter.

