Reimagining the OSCE for a New Generation

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Abridged Version

Introduction

Almost 50 years after its inception, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) struggles as a shell of its former self. Russia, waging an illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, plunged the Organization into disarray by blocking consensus and threatening the OSCE's very existence by hostaging the OSCE's administrative functions. The crisis has limited the OSCE's ability to conduct field missions and confidence-building work among its 57 participating states and has exposed fundamental flaws and institutional weaknesses within the Organization. Despite these challenges, there remain opportunities for reform that—although currently infeasible due to Russia's intransigence—will safeguard the Organization from dysfunction and prevent future conflicts.

The nine authors of this paper all belong to the generation born between the years 1997 and 2012 (hereafter "our generation").[i] While we do not speak on behalf of our entire generation, we recognize that the globally significant events and developments that have taken place in our formative years are engrained in our collective memory, shaping our values, traits, and priorities. Our project team understands the importance of wielding our voice to advocate for the issues that are important to us all.

Through these shared values—our so-called "generational lens"—we reimagine the OSCE as a leading intergovernmental institution aligned with our goals and ideals and devoid of the problems left unsolved by those currently in power.

To adapt to our increasingly interconnected world, enhance the Organization's effectiveness, and address the specific needs of our generation, we recommend that the OSCE:

1. Harness the power of social media to engage new generations;
2. Carve out environmental security as a fourth dimension of the OSCE;
3. Implement a consensus minus two failsafe for the OSCE Chairpersonship;
4. Diversify OSCE funding sources through private sector donations;
5. Extend budget terms to promote continuity and financial health;
6. Reform the Permanent Council to stimulate dialogue and co-operation.

Before delving into a detailed discussion of our recommendations, we will provide an overview of our methodology, discuss our "generational lens," lay out a brief history of the OSCE, and dissect the existential crisis the OSCE faces today.

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[i] We chose not to use the term "Generation Z" due to negative connotations associated with the letter "Z" (initially used to mark Russia's military vehicles in Ukraine; now, a pro-war propaganda symbol that is often compared to the swastika in Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking discourse), which we feel would be inappropriate in the context of this paper.

Methodology

We began our research by conducting an extensive review of existing academic literature, white papers, and official documents related to the OSCE and its current existential crisis. Our team then engaged in structured interviews with more than 25 key stakeholders from a wide range of functions relating to the OSCE, including current and former officials from the Secretariat, participating states and NATO partners. These dialogues provided us with a contextual understanding of the OSCE's role and offered qualitative insights into the Organization's challenges and potential areas for improvement. After conducting interviews and consulting the existing literature, we synthesized our findings to develop a set of well-informed and practical recommendations for reforming the OSCE.

The Generational Lens

This paper and the recommendations presented within it are relevant in that they are colored by our "generational lens." As members of our generation, we have a unique perspective on the world. This perspective forms our "generational lens," a common but non-exhaustive set of characteristics that have shaped our collective psyche. While we recognize that we do not speak on behalf of our generation, we understand the importance of wielding our voice to advocate for issues important to us all. Each of the following considerations have impacted our generation's values, how we interpret the world around us, and ultimately how we choose to navigate the international events unfolding today:

1. We understand that we navigate a more expansive and complex information landscape, and, thus, are more versatile in the mediums we use and more sensitive to misinformation;
2. We recognize the power of our voice in shaping the world beyond geographical barriers with the help of social media, and we take a proactive approaching in wielding this power to create change;
3. We value global interconnectivity and co-operation: across geographical boundaries, across identities and cultures, and across private and public sectors.
4. We will inevitably inherit positions of influence in domestic and international institutions, and we are aware of that. Consequently, we bear anxiety for the future; we are driven to be actively involved; and we are pragmatic.

Together, this generational understanding creates a lens through which we interpret the events unfolding around the world. We are not afraid to call on those in power to reform and redirect our international institutions to tackle what we consider worthwhile causes. In fact, we bear the

responsibility to contribute our ideas on how the current generation can leave our international institutions stronger than they found them.

OSCE: Past and Present

In 1975, the signing of the Helsinki Final Act formed the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). During the Cold War, the CSCE provided a forum for the East and West to negotiate and cooperate.[1] The Post-Cold War era prompted the CSCE to formalize as an institution and enhance operations, which culminated in the transition to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) at the 1994 Budapest Summit.[2]

One of the OSCE's strengths is that the Organization provides a platform for dialogue amongst non-like-minded states. The OSCE's focus on dialogue and the principle of consensus helped build the OSCE's reputation as a key forum for transparency, co-operation, and confidence-building.

The OSCE's missions also play a critical role in promoting security and mitigating conflict. Most OSCE missions focus on Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Central Asia. Each operation has its own mandate, agreed to by consensus, and the host country must consent before establishing field operations. The missions' mandates are often purposefully broad, so that the strategy and goals of the mission can shift to suit unique challenges as they arise.[3] Historically, missions have been successful in improving the human security dimension in their host countries.

Since the Organization's transition from the CSCE to OSCE, the OSCE has faced significant criticism and hurdles, regarding the Organization's objective to uphold the Helsinki Principles. Even prior to the signing of the Charter of Paris in 1990, the international community raised questions about the OSCE's role in peacekeeping and peacemaking operations.[4, 5] The fundamental problems with the OSCE have only become more apparent in the years since.

Particularly, the OSCE operates under consensus—any decision or declaration can only be adopted with the approval of all 57 participating states. This provision weakens the Organization's decision-making capabilities. The consensus rule has been subjected to heavy criticism as the relationship between NATO and Russia and its allies has deteriorated.[6] Various mechanisms have been created to bypass consensus-based decisions, such as the Moscow Mechanism.[7] However, the consensus issue extends beyond voting on missions and matters of policy. In particular, consensus plagues the process of passing a budget and selecting a Chairpersonship. OSCE participating states have only agreed upon a Unified Budget prior to the new year seven times since 2002.[8] Any state that objects to a line item in the budget can reject the Unified Budget, making budgetary agreements extraordinarily difficult. With regards to the Chairpersonship, if

participating states fail to reach consensus on selecting a Chair, the OSCE faces institutional paralysis.

On February 24, 2022, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine exacerbated the OSCE's pre-existing problems. In response to the international backlash against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russia weaponized consensus to stymie the OSCE's day-to-day operations, plunging the Organization into a state of existential crisis. This existential crisis calls into question the OSCE's commitment to its own values and its future. Russia is committing genocide in Ukraine, yet Russia still retains a seat at the OSCE.

Beyond moral concerns, Russia's obstructionism inhibits the Organization's general functions. 2022 marked the first year that the annual OSCE Ministerial Council meeting failed to adopt any decisions.[9] Aside from not having a Unified Budget, the OSCE lacked a Chairpersonship for 2024 until the last moment due to Russia and Belarus's opposition to Estonia's bid. In response to the deadlock, Austria and Kazakhstan each offered to step in as the Chair for 2024 if a consensus could not be reached on Estonia's candidacy.[10] Yet, Estonia remained steadfast in pursuing the 2024 Chairpersonship, emphasizing its commitment to the OSCE's principles and rejecting any substitution.[11] However, at the Ministerial Council in Skopje, the OSCE electorate selected Malta as the Chairperson for 2024, giving them a prohibitively small amount of time to prepare for the role.[12]

The OSCE's existential crisis will persist as long as the Russia-Ukraine War continues. The question is: how can the OSCE circumvent the Russian veto and rebuild its effectiveness for our generation? We hope that our recommendations will equip the OSCE to better respond to similar situations in the future.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are as follows:

1. Harness the Power of Social Media to Engage New Generations

Our generation values global interconnectivity, engagement, and communication, and we have demonstrated the power of our voice on social media. While the OSCE serves as a forum for dialogue amongst non-like-minded nations, providing access to this forum to state leaders is no longer enough. Our generation expects engagement with the public at-large.

> *1.1 The OSCE should focus on harnessing the power of social media to engage with our generation.*

As the world continues to become more interconnected, the OSCE should add layers to its communication strategy that engage with social media to generate greater transparency and accountability with the public.

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

The Biden administration has effectively called on social media influencers and activists to heighten public awareness about crucial legislation and key executive actions.[13] By using this same strategy, the OSCE could target influencers' existing audiences to inform an untapped sector of the public about the OSCE's successes.

> *1.3 The OSCE should focus on generating media content that is attractive and accessible.*

The most effective social media posts are "vivid, practical, interesting, personalized, and interactive."[14] Keeping posts short but 'catchy' will motivate people to engage more with the OSCE's content and learn about the Organization's positive work on operations and missions. Short videos and eye-catching infographics, such as those published by the United Nations, can be used as templates for the OSCE's posts.

> *1.4 The OSCE should employ targeted regional strategies—including immediate and effective translation services—to promote the OSCE's work online.*

By increasing the number and expediency of translation services for their social media and marketing platforms, the OSCE's marketing campaigns would be accessible to a wider audience. As a generation, we value information accessibility and inclusivity. To meet our generational standards of inclusivity, the OSCE should publish statements in real-time and in multiple languages to allow people who speak those languages to understand the OSCE's priorities.

> *1.5 The OSCE should stream Permanent Council meetings.*

Currently, these scripted, formal meetings remain inaccessible to the public. While they are a useful forum for stating and restating national policy positions, real-time streaming and periodic post-meeting press conferences with OSCE ambassadors would allow a broader sector of the public to better understand a complex and seemingly distant organization.

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

Our generation considers the environment to be the most important issue in America, as of 2021.[15] Across the globe this has manifested in high rates of climate anxiety among young people and backlash against poor governmental responses.[16] While the OSCE has preexisting initiatives to

address environmental issues and security, these initiatives are inadequate in addressing an issue that is so pressing for our generation. The OSCE's stance on and approach to environmental issues is outdated, and the following recommendations demonstrate the various ways in which the OSCE should refocus its commitments.

> *2.1 The OSCE should establish an environmental security dimension, separating the present economic and environmental dimension into two parts.*

Within the OSCE, the environment is currently a part of the economic and environmental security dimension.[17] This dimension is responsible for issues including but not limited to: good governance, connectivity, digitalization, migration governance, climate change, disaster risk reduction, environmental security, and energy security. This dimension ought to be divided for two reasons. First, as it is, the dimension is responsible for too many issues, resulting in unnecessary pressure on the Office of the Coordinator. Second, this dimension was developed in the 1990s, and, in the 1999 charter, environmental issues were clearly included as an afterthought.

> *2.2 To implement Recommendation 2.1, the OSCE should create a new Environmental Forum, Environmental Committee, and Office of the Coordinator of Environmental Activities.*

This will allow for focused policy alignment for both economic and environmental issues, as well as targeted resource allocation.

> *2.3 The OSCE should expand current informal working groups on the environment.*

With the formalization of the environmental element of the OSCE, we want to create an environment where policy can be discussed and negotiated informally. The OSCE already has an informal working group on environmental issues called "Friends of Environment," launched at the 2019 Forum on Economic and Environmental Issues.[18] The group only has 14 members, so we recommend that this group expand and welcome other OSCE participating states.

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

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.[19] 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.

Missions are an important and effective part of the OSCE's field work. Some participating states have used extra-budgetary funding to pursue programs in climate security.[20] However, this limits the scope of these projects and makes building the role of the OSCE in environmental security more difficult.[21] Including the environmental dimension in mission mandates is a practical way to enhance the OSCE's environmental action. This should encompass assessing environmental security risks, such as climate risk, and taking direct action in areas such as mitigation and adaptation.

2.6 The OSCE should strengthen the focus on environmental protection and security in missions where this angle is already present.

Some field missions already include certain environmental activities, such as the Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.[22] However, current work within missions is often limited in scope. Given the increasing environmental challenges, particularly climate change, which will disproportionately impact our generation, we value improving the scope of existing environmental action in missions.

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

The OSCE should seriously consider including environmental security in the scope of its other offices and bodies. Recommendation 2.7 could be easily implemented by including a review of climate security risk in other more expansive security risk assessments and conflict prevention.[23]

3. Implement a Consensus Minus Two Failsafe for the OSCE Chairmanship

Our generation is acutely aware of the importance of taking strong actions to preserve our future through the multilateral system like by removing bureaucratic barriers. We recognize the value of existing structures of international co-operation, and we are focused on ensuring that these tools remain effective. Consensus meets our generation's standard of global interconnectivity and communication, but it allows one state to hold the organization 'hostage.' This prevents decision-making for even the most basic administrative matters, such as setting the budget or choosing a Chair.

3.1 To ensure the continuation of the fundamental administrative functions of the organization, the OSCE should introduce a new mechanism, referred to here as the "Estonia Mechanism," which would allow for a "consensus minus two" model if countries fail to reach consensus on selecting a new Chair of the OSCE at least one year before the Chair would take office.

Compared to a "consensus minus one" model, a "consensus minus two" model anticipates that a stubborn state may be able to convince another OSCE member state to align with its hold-out position. The relationship between the stubborn state and the other holdout could take many forms. However, a voting block of 3.5% of the OSCE should not have the power to indefinitely halt a core managerial appointment in the OSCE. At the same time, we do not recommend a consensus minus three model because, if three countries align, we are more confident that they have a legitimate concern about the candidate for the Chairpersonship.

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 their start date 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 Organization and complete a seamless transition when replacing the existing leadership.

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. This reality will de-incentivize countries from using the Chairpersonship selection process as a political battleground.

4. Diversify OSCE Funding Sources Through Private Sector Donations

Our generation understands the utility and pragmatism of pooling resources from the private sector in service of the public sector. Today, the OSCE runs on a budget of approximately $150 million (€140 million), which pays salaries for 400 Secretariat employees, 200 other institutional staff, and about 2,100 field operators, as well as other expenses.[24] The OSCE does engage in joint projects with corporate partners, such as Thomas Reuters. However, the OSCE do not accept private monetary donations, which limits their resources and their impact potential.[25, 26]

4.1 The OSCE should allow supplementary private funding.

In order 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."[27] These proposals 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).[28]

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

WHO published *Guidelines on Working with the Private Sector to Achieve Health Outcomes*, which lays out some fundamental principles for working with private companies.[29] First of all, there should be transparency and active conversation around potential conflicts of interest, as well as a legal assessment of conflicts of interest, to avoid compromised integrity. 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.[30]

Furthermore, the dollar amount accepted from any one donor should be supplementary. If those funds are pulled, it should not result in collapse of the program. This will decrease the leverage any one firm has over a project or program. To that end, private donations should not be used to directly pay salaries because this could cause a conflict of interest for employees. Finally, acknowledgment of all donors must be made publicly available, and donations must be properly accounted for in all financial reporting.

5. Extend Budget Terms to Promote Continuity and Financial Health

Our generation values a strong multilateral system. Therefore, we recognize the need for the OSCE to attract and retain talent, as well as reliably fund its activities. Without strong financial infrastructure, the OSCE will not be able to command the resources it needs to make meaningful contributions to European security. The OSCE's inability to dependably pass a normal operating budget forces the OSCE to meet its financial needs through "monthly allotments,"[31] which is unsustainable in the long run for an organization of this size and scope and negatively impacts the OSCE's credibility worldwide.

5.1 The OSCE should adopt a two-year budget and only require consensus for new budget items and not previously agreed-upon line items for existing programs.

In 2022, the United States spoke at the OSCE Permanent Council meeting in Vienna and offered a series of suggestions and calls to action. Notably, the United States emphasized that extra-budgetary programs are only a short-term solution for the OSCE's funding debacle. They suggested adopting a two-year budget and an "automatic rollover process that requires consensus only for new commitments."[32] These two recommendations posed by the United States are an excellent starting point for OSCE budget reform. And, as indicated in the United States' statement, these reforms already have traction amongst OSCE participating states.[33]

Additionally, financial consistency matters from a human resources perspective. If the OSCE cannot credibly commit to paying their employees in the long run because of budgetary disputes and an inability to reach consensus, the OSCE risks losing talent. If the quality of the people working for OSCE decreases, so too will the quality of the OSCE's work and, therefore, its credibility in the field as well as in the international arena. A two-year budget cycle and an automatic rollover process for previous financial commitments would give employees peace of mind that their paychecks will continue to arrive, even during times of extreme political tension amongst the 57 countries.

6. Reform the Permanent Council to Stimulate Dialogue and Co-operation

Our generation demands that the multilateral system become more efficient and effective. 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. Permanent Council (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. We believe participating delegates' time would be spent more productively if reforms were made to the structure and culture of the PC meetings.

6.1 The Chair should encourage participating states to give joint statements.

Not only would this measure cut down on redundancy and talking time, but it would also encourage co-operation and coalition-building among participating nations. Given that participating states often use the same or similar language during their statements, implementing Recommendation 6.1 would be feasible.

6.2 The Chair in 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. We do not expect countries to reach breakthrough compromises on complex issues during this time, but rather, these unmoderated breaks would allow countries to begin conversations that they could continue outside of the PC.

6.3 In the context of Recommendation 1.5, which suggests live streaming PC meetings, live streams should be paused during the unmoderated breaks.

We want delegations to take risks with each other and push for co-operation. Public scrutiny during such delicate conversations would hinder the negotiation process and may push states towards rigidity, rather than compromise.

Conclusion

The OSCE has been an important component of the world's security framework since its beginnings as the CSCE in 1975. As the world's largest regional security organization,[34] our generation values the infrastructure the OSCE provides for security, dialogue, and co-operation. However, the ongoing European security crisis has exposed many of the weaknesses in the OSCE's current architecture. We wish to preserve the longevity of the Organization for future generations and enhance its ability to tackle critical international security issues, while maintaining the central spirit of the OSCE. Through our recommendations, we seek to reimagine the OSCE as an organization that is socially aware, responsive to current events and opinions, administratively functional, and supportive of constructive discussion. Our recommendations reflect the values of our generation and our vision for multilateral organizations. We hope that by implementing our recommendations the OSCE will bolster its effectiveness and credibility as a pillar of European security moving forward.

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