

The Future of OSCE Field Operations

Introductory remarks of Barend ter Haar (Clingendael)

at the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference in Basel on 3 December 2014

Introduction

The Report on *The Future of OSCE Field Operations* that is presented today by the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions requires your attention now and requires further study later.

There are three points I like to make here:

1. A thorough study of OSCE field operations is long overdue
2. Our Network of think tanks has great potential, but to use that will require more effort
3. There is a large number of questions that require further research and analysis.

The need of a thorough study

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from our Report is that a systematic enquiry into the pro's and con's of OSCE field operations is long overdue. During the last 25 years the number of different types of OSCE field operations has proliferated. The OSCE Secretariat displayed impressive creativity in developing new names and mandates for these operations. No doubt that this flexibility is one of the strengths of the OSCE, but the great variety of formats makes it more difficult to discern what works well and what presents problems.

The present report can be considered as a first inventory of questions that have to be elaborated further. Most of them could only be dealt with superficially; some have not yet even been mentioned. The present report should therefore be seen as a starting point. As field operations, for example in Ukraine, have slowly moved from a sideshow to the central stage, a wider and deeper consideration of their role could be very useful.

Optimal involvement of the Network

To help the OSCE learn both from its successes and its failures, think tanks can play an important role, in particular when they join forces, as a number of them have done in the OSCE Network. It has great potential, not only because a division of labour makes more research possible, but also because the differences between the involved institutes can deepen the debate. The first report of the Network, on "Threat Perceptions in the OSCE Area" that was published in April 2014 was a good example. It was not perfect, but it was a joint effort with substantial contributions from many institutes and experts. One important factor that made this possible was that the participating institutes got about three months to prepare their contributions and again a few months to discuss the final report. This made it possible to involve other experts in our institutes and to include some substantial research in the working programme of our institutes.

The OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions was involved in the preparation of the present report, but a preliminary conclusions might be that the time allotted proved to be too short to involve the whole network in an optimal manner.

The fact that our network exists and still exists is noteworthy, but we should not underestimate the difficulty of making it actually work. To make best use of it, we might have to put more effort in it and accept that we cannot work as quickly as a single institute is able to do.

Questions that require further attention:

An important result of the present Report is that it has helped to make clear how complicated a thorough analysis of OSCE 's field operations is. Among the many questions that require further consideration and study are the following:

1. What can OSCE field operations learn from UN peace keeping?
2. What can they learn from field operations of the ICRC?
3. What can they learn from specialised UN-organisations such as UNDP and UNHCR?
4. How do these organisations value the strengths and weaknesses of OSCE field operations?
5. What are the experiences of other organisations with extra-budgetary funding? How do they solve the problems involved?
6. How can the loss of expertise because of the 10-years limit for hiring personnel be remedied? What can be learned from other organisations in this field? Has an exchange with experts from other organisations been considered?
7. What is the (potential) role of the HCNM in OSCE field operations?
8. How should OSCE field operations coordinate with other players in the field, such as local and international NGO 's, for optimal results?
9. In what manner can the Council of Europe complement the work of OSCE field operations?
10. Would it be useful to agree MOU 's with other organisations that are active in the field?
11. What measures should be taken to ensure an optimal division of labour between OSCE field operations and operations of other organisations?
12. What are the comparative deficits of OSCE field operations?
13. Which improvements are needed?

In short: the OSCE is currently confronted with a unique opportunity to prove its relevance for security and cooperation in Europe. This requires not only active involvement, but also reflection on how it can improve its work. The network of think tanks can play an important role in supporting such reflection.