Introduction to *OSCE Insights*: Securing States and People

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Introduction

In 2024, the OSCE's record was mixed. The primary issue remained—and continues to remain—unchanged: Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. While the impact of the conflict was felt most acutely by the people of Ukraine, who endured death and destruction at the hands of Russian forces, the political fallout of the war also continued to affect the OSCE by stymying consensus on core decisions, most notably the regular budget.

At the same time, 2024 showed that participating States could still reach consensus when their interests aligned, ensuring operational continuity. At the Ministerial Council meeting convened by the Maltese Chair in late 2024, governments appointed a new Secretary General and new heads of the three institutions.

December 2024 also saw a decision by the Permanent Council to extend the mandates of OSCE field operations, and Malta announced that Switzerland would chair the OSCE in 2026.

The OSCE continued to run programs and projects in various policy fields in 2024. The ability to sustain many existing activities—and even launch new ones—was an achievement that reflected support from a sufficient number of participating States. It also underscored the ability of the Secretariat, the field operations, and the institutions to adapt to a highly politicized environment marked by competing state interests and a consensus rule that made decision-making much more difficult than in other international organizations. Running activities was easiest in relatively uncontested policy fields such as counterterrorism and border management. Even in contested fields, however, the OSCE found ways to remain operational. A prime example is the Support Programme for Ukraine, which supporters of Ukraine funded through voluntary contributions.

The papers in this volume examine a wide range of topics—a variety that is

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perhaps unsurprising given the OSCE's broad mandate. Yet there are also thematic similarities between them, with the topics they cover falling into two main categories.

The first group of papers analyzes how Russia's war against Ukraine has affected the work of the OSCE and the policies of participating States. The second group highlights how the OSCE's toolbox can be used to strengthen the security of states and people, emphasizing that its effectiveness depends on governments' willingness to harness its potential. Whereas the first group focuses on strategies for coping with conflict within the OSCE, the second expresses aspirations for better using the OSCE to promote security.

Responding to Russia's aggression

Three of the papers published in this volume examine how the OSCE and its participating States have responded to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Wolfgang Benedek analyzes the OSCE Moscow Mechanism, a key instrument for monitoring and reporting on participating States' compliance with their human dimension commitments, not least because invoking the Moscow Mechanism does not require consensus. After explaining the—rather complicated—procedural rules of the Moscow Mechanism, Benedek traces how it has been used in practice. The Moscow Mechanism has been invoked on several occasions to investigate Russia for violating human rights, with some reports docu-

menting violations committed by Russia in Ukraine, thus contributing to international efforts to hold Russia accountable. The paper also offers recommendations for improving the Moscow Mechanism, including enhanced support for the experts tasked with drafting fact-finding reports.

Vera Axyonova and Tetiana Kyselova also examine how the OSCE has addressed the consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine. Their study of OSCE-supported intra-societal dialogue before and after February 2022 reveals a core asset of the OSCE: its ability to convene and foster interaction among diverse actors. The OSCE has supported dialogue at multiple levels: between Ukrainian government officials at the central and local levels, within communities, and between state representatives and citizens. These initiatives have sought to enhance social cohesion and support reform efforts by creating communication channels as a foundation for building trust. Inside Ukraine, these initiatives have been limited to territories not occupied by Russia and therefore have not allowed the OSCE to foster communication across lines of conflict, as it has done elsewhere. Despite this constraint, the authors argue that OSCE-led efforts have contributed to strengthening Ukraine's resilience and establishing a culture of dialogue in the country by connecting state and civil society actors, developing a professional community of local dialogue facilitators, and nurturing dialogue capacities within the public service.

In his contribution, Vello Pettai examines Latvia's policy toward Russian

Federation citizens residing in the country. Under a decision passed by the Latvian parliament in September 2022, Russian nationals must pass a Latvian language test and a security review as a precondition for remaining in the country. The policy reflects concerns over the loyalty of Russian citizens living in Latvia in the context of Russia's territorial revisionism. Pettai argues that while Russian Federation citizens do not make up a national minority, Latvia's policy nonetheless has implications for the OSCE, as demonstrated by reactions to the policy by the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities. Moreover, the policy has the potential to impact the security situation in the Baltic region more broadly. Pettai describes the policy in detail, examines challenges related to its implementation, and offers recommendations for mitigating the risks it entails.

Better using the OSCE for securing states and people

A second set of papers examines three fields of activity in which the OSCE has the potential to contribute to state and human security. These papers also propose ways to empower the OSCE to better harness this potential.

Asel Doolotkeldieva sheds light on one of the most innovative OSCE initiatives: the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. Her paper discusses the Academy's mission and structure, tracing the evolution of its teaching and research activities since its founding in 2002. Despite its many achievements, the Academy

has faced significant obstacles, including institutional uncertainty, funding shortages, and political pressures that weigh heavily on its daily operations. Worryingly, Doolotkeldieva's verdict is that the many problems facing the Academy "have begun to undermine the fragile achievements of the Academy's faculty, students, and management." Her analysis calls on participating States to provide the Academy with the political space and material resources it needs to serve as a center of learning in Central Asia and beyond.

In his *OSCE Insights* paper, Nicolò Miotto examines a very different policy field, yet one where the OSCE could significantly improve the security of states and individuals if states were willing to cooperate: the military applications of artificial intelligence. AI poses serious security risks, not least with regard to unintended escalation. Miotto argues that participating States could mitigate these risks by drawing on the Vienna Document to develop confidence- and security-building measures for military applications of AI. Implementing such measures for the field of AI would not require updating the Vienna Document (which was last updated in 2011), as any updates remain unlikely for now. Miotto thus sheds light on underutilized yet highly valuable aspects of the Vienna Document that could be drawn on to regulate this highly dynamic technological field.

Anselm Vogler's contribution to this volume explores the OSCE's response to the climate-security nexus. The 2021 OSCE Ministerial Decision on addressing the challenges of climate change

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has accelerated efforts within the OSCE to address climate (in)security. Vogler's paper examines the interconnections between climate and security and shows why addressing this nexus remains a challenge. He then outlines four key principles that should inform climate security policymaking, arguing that future policies should be preventive, ambitious, holistic, and politically feasible. Based on existing OSCE responses to climate-related insecurities, Vogler argues that future OSCE activities in this field should be guided by these principles and offers recommendations for how the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly can move forward.

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