

The Moscow Mechanism of the OSCE: Rules, Practice, and Possible Improvements

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Abstract

While the Moscow Mechanism has remained relatively dormant for some time, the emergence of major challenges for the human dimension of the OSCE and a lack of alternative means of quickly investigating issues concerning alleged violations of human rights have resulted in a resurgence of its use. After outlining the rules governing its construction and the different ways in which it has been invoked, this contribution analyzes how the Moscow Mechanism is used in practice. It provides an overview of past missions and considers the advantages and challenges associated with its application. It then assesses the missions' outcomes and follow-up activities, explores the Mechanism's strengths and weaknesses, and closes with recommendations for its future implementation.

Keywords

Moscow Mechanism, Vienna Mechanism, OSCE, ODIHR, human dimension, human rights fact-finding

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Introduction

The Moscow Mechanism allows OSCE participating States to obtain, without the need for consensus, a fact-finding report written entirely by independent experts on an issue or situation related to the human dimension commitments of the OSCE.¹ It was adopted at the Moscow Meeting of the CSCE on the human dimension in 1991, when the CSCE was

seeking new tools to address the challenge of protecting its human dimension commitments. This meeting reconfirmed previous agreements stemming from the Vienna Follow-up Conference (ending in 1989), known as the Vienna Mechanism, and from the Charter of Paris (1990).² It adopted additional rules to strengthen them, providing for the possibility of investigating their alleged violations.

The Moscow Mechanism was applied a number of times in the 1990s, mostly in the context of the war in the Balkans, and then very rarely until 2018,

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when it was used to investigate reports of a clampdown on LGBTQ+ people in Chechnya. According to the OSCE, the Moscow Mechanism has been invoked fifteen times.³ Its increased use since 2018 has revealed its advantages and shortcomings, as well as the challenges associated with its application. One such challenge, for example, pertains to the refusal of some participating States, such as Russia and Belarus, to co-operate when the issue to be investigated concerns activities under their purview. These states have sought to justify their non-cooperation by arguing that the Mechanism has become outdated and that the OSCE can discuss these matters in its bodies.⁴ The vast majority of OSCE participating States have taken a different position, however, and have increasingly made use of the Mechanism. Its reports serve a wider function than merely informing debates in the OSCE. Nonetheless, experience also shows that there is room for methodological improvement. This contribution therefore ends with several recommendations for how to make the Mechanism more effective.⁵

The rules

The Vienna Follow-up Conference, which ended in 1989, decided to hold three meetings on the human dimension of the CSCE, to take place in Paris (1989), Copenhagen (1990), and Moscow (1991). The Vienna Mechanism, agreed in the Vienna Concluding Document of 1989,⁶ was a first step toward improving the implementation of commitments in

the human dimension. It set out an obligation to provide a written response to requests for information by other participating States. In Moscow, in order to enhance the effectiveness of the Document on the Copenhagen Meeting on the Human Dimension of 1990⁷ and to strengthen and expand the Vienna Mechanism, the deadlines first introduced by the Copenhagen Meeting were shortened.⁸ Upon the issuing of a formal request, participating States now had to respond within ten days, while requests for bilateral meetings had to be replied to as soon as possible, as a rule within one week. In addition, the Moscow Document laid out the elements of a new mechanism that would allow for the establishment of ad hoc missions by independent experts to investigate alleged violations of human dimension commitments, i.e. the “Moscow Mechanism.”⁹ The final version of the Moscow Mechanism contains minor amendments by the CSCE made in Helsinki (1992) and in Rome (1993).¹⁰

There are different ways of invoking the Moscow Mechanism and very strict rules for its application.¹¹ It may in certain cases be preceded by an invocation of the Vienna Mechanism. In general, the Moscow Mechanism can be applied via self-invocation or the invocation of another participating State (or States), and the process can take either a co-operative or a contentious approach. In the case of self-invocation, the aim is “to address or contribute to the resolution of questions in [a state’s own] territory relating to the human dimension” (Moscow Mechanism, para. 4).¹² Such an approach would be co-operative. Table 1 at the end of this

section summarizes the main terms associated with the invocation of the Moscow Mechanism.

One or more participating States may also request that another participating State invite a mission of experts “to address a particular, clearly defined question on its territory relating to the human dimension” (para. 8). If the other state agrees, the mission of experts is established according to the same procedure as self-invocation, which again falls under the co-operative category. In such cases, the inviting state selects the experts who will take part in the mission, which in practice is done in consultation with the initiating state(s). The report must be provided within three weeks. When a situation requiring investigation arises in the territory of another state and no invitation is issued, however, this is deemed a refusal to co-operate, and the approach thus falls under the “contentious” category. In most such cases in the past, the states to be investigated recognized that they had a duty to provide information according to the Vienna Mechanism but chose not to co-operate with the Moscow Mechanism procedure.

For contentious cases, the rules provide that the requesting state, with the support of at least five other participating States, may initiate a mission of up to three rapporteurs to investigate the facts and give advice on possible solutions (paras 9–11). Again, the expectation is that the Vienna Mechanism will have already been applied. The report must be submitted within two weeks following the appointment of the last rapporteur. In principle, the requesting states and the

requested state may each appoint one rapporteur from the resource list, and the two should agree on a third, forming a joint mission. Should the requested state fail to co-operate and to appoint its rapporteur within the six-day deadline following notification by the first rapporteur, however, the expert appointed by the requesting states must submit the report as a single rapporteur. The experts selected must not be nationals of the requesting or the requested state.

As a fast-track procedure, if a participating State requests an investigation of “a particularly serious threat to the fulfilment of the provisions of the CSCE human dimension” in another participating State, it can, with the support of at least nine other participating States, request an expert mission as described above without first resorting to the Vienna Mechanism (para. 12). A mission of experts may also be established by the OSCE Permanent Council upon the request of any participating State (para. 13). This option has never been applied, mainly because in such cases consensus would be required, which is unlikely. The main advantage of the Moscow Mechanism is that, except in such a case, no consensus is required, and the Mechanism cannot be blocked at any point.¹³

In order to avoid disputes on the selection of experts, the Moscow Mechanism provides for the establishment of a resource list or roster of experts, which is managed by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). For this purpose, each participating State may appoint up to six experts who are eligible to serve for one or two

mandates of three years each. No particular qualifications are required. Other participating States may voice reservations about up to two experts, in response to which the appointing state may either make other appointments or insist on its appointments, in which case the appointed experts cannot take part in missions related to the state that voiced the reservation. In order to be operational, at least forty-five experts must be appointed to the roster (para. 3).¹⁴ In the case of self-invocation or the invitation of a mission of experts upon request, the three experts are selected by the inviting state; in contentious cases, the first expert or rapporteur is selected by the invoking state(s). In the event of a lack of co-operation, he or she may remain a single expert/rapporteur.

The terms of reference are determined by the requesting and/or inviting state(s). In the case of self-invocation, paragraph 5 of the Moscow Mechanism provides that the state concerned will agree with the mission on the precise terms of reference, which may include fact-finding and advisory services to facilitate the observance of OSCE commitments. In practice, the experts play no role in defining the mandate, although they do have some discretion in interpreting it in light of feasibility considerations (for example, they may limit themselves to what they consider possible in view of time and resources). The purpose is indicated as facilitating the resolution of a particular question or problem related to the human dimension. If invited, the mission may even use its good offices and mediation services to promote dialogue and co-

operation among the interested parties. In contentious cases, the establishment of facts, proposals, and advice on possible solutions is expected (para. 11). Accordingly, the report should also include a number of recommendations.

The cost of the mission is covered by the requesting states (para. 14), which usually distribute the costs among themselves. This includes operative costs for services provided to the experts by ODIHR, such as travel, translation, and light editing, while staff costs for administrative and logistical support must be covered by ODIHR. ODIHR also provides the experts with a list of useful contacts and establishes a mailbox through which they can receive relevant information. Neither ODIHR nor the OSCE in general provides substantive support to the experts, however, as this is not their role. For their work, the experts receive a lump sum from which they are to cover the costs of personal assistants, whom they are free to hire.

While the required co-operation of an inviting state is usually not a problem, when the process is contentious the requested state cannot be forced to co-operate. The Moscow Mechanism only provides that the participating States must refrain from taking reprisals against persons, organizations, or institutions who make contact with or submit information to the experts. Only the inviting state must provide the mission with state officials to accompany it, facilitate its work, and guarantee its safety (para. 6).

Regarding the drafting of the report, it is written by the experts themselves, and ODIHR only assists with light editing.

In the case of self-invocation, the report is first shared with the invoking state, which has two weeks to provide its own comments on it, which it can add to the report. In contentious cases, the report is first shared with the requested state, which has two weeks to provide its own observations, should there be any. The report must then be placed on the

agenda of the next Permanent Council to be discussed. There is no need for a formal adoption, which would be difficult given the consensus requirement on all Permanent Council decisions. In practice, the report is generally published on the OSCE website immediately following the discussion and is thus made publicly available.¹⁵

Vienna Mechanism	Obligation of participating States to provide written information on a human dimension issue upon the request of other participating States within ten days and to engage in a bilateral dialogue within one week.
Moscow Mechanism	Right of a participating State to invite an expert mission to facilitate the resolution of questions related to the human dimension on its own territory or of a certain number of invoking states to send an expert mission to address a particular question regarding, or a serious threat to, the fulfillment of the human dimension provisions on the territory of another participating State.
Requesting (or invoking) state(s)	Participating State(s) that invoke(s) the Mechanism; possibility of self-invocation for the resolution of questions in a participating State's own territory.
Requested state	State subject to the invocation of the Mechanism.
Co-operative approach	Mission of experts is established and undertaken with the co-operation of the requested state.
Contentious approach	Mission of experts is established and undertaken without the co-operation of the requested state.
Rapporteur(s)	Expert(s) who serve(s) on the mission to facilitate the resolution of a human dimension issue through a fact-finding report and advisory services or to investigate a particular question or a particularly serious threat related to the human dimension and who produce(s) a report with recommendations.
Resource list	Roster of experts, nominated by participating States, from which experts can be chosen to serve on a Moscow Mechanism mission.
Terms of reference	Mandate of the expert missions, to be defined by the requesting state(s).
Deadlines	Strict timelines regulating the composition of the expert missions, the delivery of the reports, and the opportunity to comment on them.

Table 1. Definitions of major terms.

The practice

Application of the Vienna Mechanism

The Vienna Mechanism may be employed on its own or as a first step toward the use of the Moscow Mechanism

(para. 8). In 1989, for example, the Vienna Mechanism was used by sixteen countries to inquire into the arrest of the playwright Vaclav Havel.¹⁶ In the case of the Chechen Republic, the Vienna Mechanism was used by the invoking states first. Unsatisfied with the results,

they subsequently invoked the Moscow Mechanism. The Vienna Mechanism was invoked in November 2021 by thirty-five participating States to gain information on the implementation of the recommendations made by the Moscow Mechanism rapporteur to Belarus.¹⁷ While the Russian Federation and Belarus have sought to justify their non-cooperation by arguing that the Moscow Mechanism is outdated and obsolete, they claim to recognize the Vienna Mechanism and, at least in principle, co-operated with it in the above examples. However, in the case of the invocation of the Vienna Mechanism by forty-one participating States in March 2024 as a follow-up to the Moscow Mechanism report on alleged human rights violations in the Russian Federation in 2022, Russia refused to respond to the questions asked.¹⁸

Application of the Moscow Mechanism: Cases

According to a list maintained by the OSCE, the Moscow Mechanism has been invoked fifteen times thus far. This list also contains an invocation by the Russian Federation in the case of NATO strikes on Yugoslavia in 1999, for which no report is available (this despite the fact that other sources only consider it an invocation of the Vienna Mechanism).¹⁹ Among the four other cases from the 1990s, two were related to the war in the former Yugoslavia. They were requested by twelve members of the European Community and the United States and concerned reports on atrocities and

attacks on unarmed civilians in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The request resulted in a report on Croatia alone, as the mission could not be sent to Bosnia-Herzegovina for security reasons. A follow-up mission in 1993 at the request of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of CSCE participating States led to a proposal for the establishment of an International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and thus contributed to its later creation by the UN Security Council. Also in 1993, the CSCE Committee of Senior Officials established a mission to investigate human rights violations in Serbia and Montenegro, which, however, was unable to deliver due to a lack of co-operation on the part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.²⁰

The list includes two self-invocations: in 1992, Estonia requested a review of the conformity of Estonian legislation on citizenship with universal human rights norms, and in 1993 Moldova requested an examination of its legislation and policies regarding the implementation of minority rights.

In the case of Turkmenistan in 2003, ten OSCE participating States requested a report on the November 2002 attack on Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov and related investigations. In 2011, fourteen OSCE participating States invoked the Mechanism with regard to human rights violations following the presidential elections in Belarus of December 19, 2010. In both cases, the country under investigation did not co-operate, but the rapporteur was able to produce a substantive report based on multiple sources,

which was discussed in the Permanent Council.

After another period of non-use, the Moscow Mechanism was invoked again in 2018 by sixteen OSCE participating States to investigate alleged human rights violations, mainly against LGBTQ+ people in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation. In 2020, seventeen participating States invoked the Mechanism against Belarus under paragraph 12 to examine alleged human rights violations related to the presidential elections of August 9, 2020. In these cases as well, the requested states refused to co-operate. As a result, there was no opportunity to form a commission of experts, and the single rapporteur had to provide a report to the Permanent Council within the two-week deadline.²¹

Since 2020, the popularity of the Moscow Mechanism has increased, leading to a growing number of cases. In 2022, following consultation with Ukraine, forty-five OSCE participating States invoked the Mechanism under paragraph 8 to investigate “the human rights and humanitarian impacts of the Russian Federation’s invasion and acts of war, supported by Belarus, on the people of Ukraine, within Ukraine’s internationally recognized borders and territorial waters.”²² A commission of three experts was established by Ukraine, which presented its report on alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed in Ukraine since February 24, 2022, within the three-week deadline. There was no co-operation from the Russian Federation, although it was

invited to share information in accordance with paragraph 6 of the Moscow Mechanism. As the inviting state, however, Ukraine pledged full co-operation. It also made use of its right to attach its comments to the report (para. 7). Due to the urgency of the matter, the commission of experts presented its report at a special meeting of the Permanent Council convened by the Polish Chairpersonship on April 13, 2022.²³ In the debate, only Russia and Belarus criticized the report. Because of the report’s narrow deadline, it could not investigate the atrocities and other human rights violations committed by Russian soldiers in Bucha and other locations (such as Hostomel) in any depth. Therefore, the same states triggered a follow-up report under the Moscow Mechanism, which was delivered by a different commission in July 2022.²⁴

From July 2022 to February 2024, the Moscow Mechanism was invoked four more times: in July 2022 by thirty-eight participating States (under para. 12) on alleged human rights violations in the Russian Federation; in March 2023 by thirty-eight participating States to examine human rights violations and abuses in Belarus; in March 2023 by forty-five participating States following consultation with Ukraine on the forcible transfer of children from occupied Ukrainian territories and their deportation to the Russian Federation;²⁵ and in February 2024 by forty-five participating States following consultation with Ukraine on the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Ukrainian civilians by the Russian Federation.²⁶ Consequently, the Moscow Mechanism

has already been used four times to investigate allegations of violations of human dimension commitments related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In both the implementation of the Moscow Mechanism and the relevant follow-up processes, but also with regard to reflections on how to strengthen it, civil society organizations have played an important role.²⁷

Application of the Moscow Mechanism: Main issues

The application of the Moscow Mechanism raises several practical issues. The mandate, as indicated in the terms of reference, is usually too broad to be fully covered. Agreement is more likely when the mandate is broad, covering the concerns of all invoking states; nevertheless, the purpose of the Moscow Mechanism is to facilitate the resolution of a particular question or problem (para. 5) or of a particular, clearly defined question (para. 8). Only in the case of the fast-track or emergency mode, when a particularly serious threat to the provisions of the human dimension is at issue (para. 12), is a wider approach foreseen. In practice, not least because of the narrow deadlines, the experts are free to write their report in a way that allows for the mandate to be met in its main substance. For example, the report on the mission carried out in 2022 to investigate alleged human rights violations in the Russian Federation, which was given a very broad mandate by the invoking states, limited its scope to assessing Russia's legal and ad-

ministrative practice in light of its OSCE human dimension commitments.²⁸

The methodology used by the experts is crucial to reaching results within tight deadlines. This requires co-operation with trusted local and international human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and gaining access to victims and witnesses. Although human rights fact-finding methodologies have evolved significantly in recent years,²⁹ thanks in part to the availability of online open-source information and the use of geolocation and satellite imagery,³⁰ there are obvious limits to what can be done by the experts of the Moscow Mechanism within the given time and resource constraints. However, besides their own investigations, they may be able to draw on interviews conducted and analytical reports produced by local and international NGOs. All this material, as well as reports from investigative media, need to be cross-checked with other sources. These sources can be diverse, including interviews conducted by the mission as well as reports and material from international organizations (such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe) and university research teams. With an eye to transparency and credibility, it is important to indicate the sources in the methodology section of the reports, albeit in a way that does not put anyone at risk.

The tight deadlines are an obvious challenge for any serious report. They may be explained by the original purpose of addressing "a particular, clearly defined question" (para. 8). In co-operative cases, the deadline can be prolonged, if necessary, as paragraph 7 indicates a

deadline of “preferably” three weeks. In practice, however, this has been avoided as far as possible, as an important advantage of the Moscow Mechanism is that it provides quick results. Ideally, the experts envisaged will have been alerted to their task before the formal decision on the invocation is taken, providing them with extra time, yet in concrete cases how well the experts perform their task within the limited time will depend on their expertise and network.

The situation regarding the experts is aggravated by the fact that, unlike most other international missions, the organization hosting the experts does not, as a matter of principle, provide substantive input, as ODIHR (and the OSCE in general) does not see this as their role and has no budget for such input. While the strong commitment of ODIHR/OSCE staff to assisting the experts logically must be recognized, the rules of the Moscow Mechanism do not prohibit the provision of more substantive support for experts, and there is no reason to think that such support would jeopardize their full independence. This could take the form of a focal point which assists the rapporteurs in pinpointing relevant information. Experts also benefit from information received from other international organizations, such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe. Certainly, the short timelines make any co-operation on issues of substance difficult; nevertheless, providing access to existing knowledge within OSCE executive structures should be possible.³¹

Outcomes of the reports under the Moscow Mechanism

Following their presentation and discussion in the OSCE Permanent Council, the reports are published on the OSCE website in English, and where appropriate also in Russian and the local language of the relevant state (for example Ukrainian). Because of the consensus requirement, which gives *de facto* veto power to each participating State, it is nearly impossible to agree on common OSCE follow-up activities. However, this does not mean that the implementation of further activities is impossible. In practice, based on the reports under the Moscow Mechanism, side events have taken place at the subsequent annual OSCE Ministerial Conferences, and the reports were also discussed at the Warsaw Human Dimension Conferences in 2022 and 2023, which were held despite Russia’s blocking of the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. As noted above in the case of Belarus and the Russian Federation, the Vienna Mechanism has been invoked as a follow-up mechanism for inquiring into whether the recommendations of the report were taken up. As another type of follow-up, the Moscow Mechanism was invoked a second time to investigate repression and political detentions in Belarus since the first report of October 2020.³² In the case of the reports on Ukraine, it is worth noting that since June 2022, ODIHR has published semiannual reports on violations of international humanitarian law and human rights in Ukraine. This has been made possible through an extrabudgetary fund

for rapid monitoring missions which has supported other missions in the past. The monitoring, which began right after the military attack on Ukraine, has been stepped up with the deployment of monitors on the ground since May 2022. These regular reports could also serve as follow-up for the ad hoc missions carried out under the Moscow Mechanism.³³

The reports under the Moscow Mechanism have an even broader set of uses, however. As the (co-)author of three reports, for example, I have been invited to present reports at hearings in the US Senate, informal meetings of the Political and Security Committee of the European Union, Arria formula meetings of the UN Security Council and side events of the UN General Assembly, and various pertinent academic and other conferences, in addition to responding to numerous media requests. The purpose of this engagement is to share the results contained in the reports, which may be taken into account in the political and legal decisions of these organizations and institutions. In all these activities, the rapporteurs are free to accept or decline invitations and in how to present their report. However, they may only speak about their findings following the publication of the report. When accepting their mandate, rapporteurs may not be fully aware of this part of their role, which is not regulated in any way.

Finally, the reports are widely read and used by a variety of actors, including local and international NGOs, whose work the reports both confirm and encourage and who can also draw on the reports in their consultations with policymakers.

The Council of Europe and the Human Rights Council have acknowledged the reports in their own work. As an example of best practice, the establishment of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB) has served as a follow-up to the report on human rights violations related to the presidential elections of 2020. It is based on a joint declaration by nineteen states, seventeen of which had already invoked the Moscow Mechanism in the case of Belarus, and was also supported by the European Union.³⁴ The IAPB was founded in response to a recommendation made in the report on Belarus to ensure accountability for human rights violations and to prevent a culture of impunity. It was formed as a coalition of independent international and Belarusian NGOs with the purpose of “collect[ing], consolidat[ing], verify[ing] and preserv[ing] evidence of gross human rights violations constituting crimes under international law.”³⁵ It is led by the Danish Institute against Torture (DIGNITY), the Viasna Human Rights Centre, the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, and REDRESS, and it co-operates with additional international and local human rights NGOs on its advisory council. Its professional legal and medical staff has experience with criminal investigations and prosecutions and with a victim- or survivor-centered approach. It may also share its findings with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in its examination of the human rights situation in Belarus and with national prosecution authorities.

The particularities of the Moscow Mechanism

Applying the Moscow Mechanism comes with both advantages and challenges. Among the advantages is the fact that the Moscow Mechanism is relatively easy to invoke, ensures a fast procedure with quick results, cannot be obstructed, and is very flexible in its implementation. In addition, the operational costs of the missions are mainly covered by the invoking states, and the report is swiftly discussed in the Permanent Council and published on the OSCE website. Importantly, the speed with which the procedure is carried out also signals to victims and human rights defenders that their situation will be given the necessary attention.

Among the challenges are the often overly broad mandates, the very narrow deadlines, the limited resources, the lack of experienced staff, the frequent lack of co-operation, and the lack of regulations regarding the protection of witnesses and evidence. Regarding the selection of rapporteurs, more information should be provided on their expertise, although the invoking states certainly examine the pool closely before choosing an expert for a mission. Beyond the report itself, there is no other record of the collection of evidence relied on by the rapporteurs. There are no specific security arrangements for the rapporteurs and no rules (and only limited guidance) governing the activities of the rapporteurs following the completion of their missions. The ad hoc nature of the investigation only allows for an assessment of the situation at a given time. Finally, there is no established

monitoring procedure regarding the implementation of the reports' recommendations.

Recommendations

Narrowing the mandate of the missions. The mandates under the Moscow Mechanism are generally too broad. It would be preferable to be more specific, so as not to raise unrealistic expectations. The possibility foreseen in the rules of the Moscow Mechanism to the effect that the state concerned "will agree with the mission on the precise terms of reference" (para. 5) has yet to be put into practice but could be in the future.

Implementing a thorough expert selection process. In view of the highly demanding task carried out by the experts/rapporteurs, their selection should take their experience and networks, as well as their ability to present the results following the missions, into account.

Supporting the experts. The experts should be well briefed on their role and on the support available from the invoking/requesting states and ODIHR, regarding both their mission and possible follow-up activities. Meetings with former experts could be organized by ODIHR to share pertinent experience. Relevant knowledge gleaned by OSCE structures should also be shared.

Improving co-ordination among experts. In the case of missions comprised of three experts, there is a need for co-ordination regarding both the sharing of tasks and follow-up activities such as media engagements. ODIHR could assist in this, but

in the end, it is the responsibility of the three experts to ensure a consistent approach to responding to requests. For this purpose, the experts should co-ordinate their activities using safe channels of communication.

Engaging in more structured follow-up activities. Follow-up activities ought to be made more structured, for example by holding regular debriefings and debates on the implementation of the recommendations, by using either the Vienna Mechanism or the regular meetings of the Permanent Council. The practice of holding side events on the reports at ministerial meetings and the Human Dimension Conferences should be continued and could be extended to involve the OSCE Human Dimension Committee. The International Accountability Platform for Belarus offers an example of how to institutionalize a professional follow-up mechanism, although it was organized outside the auspices of ODIHR and the OSCE for reasons of ensuring its independence, but also in view of ODIHR's limited engagement.

Finally, in view of the recent increase in Moscow Mechanism missions, ODIHR and interested participating States could arrange meetings of former experts to discuss best practices and consult on ways to strengthen the Moscow Mechanism.

Notes

1 See OSCE ODIHR, *OSCE Human Dimension Commitments*, vol. 1, *Thematic Compilation*, 4th ed. (Warsaw: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human

Rights, 2022), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/human-dimension-commitments-thematic>; OSCE ODIHR, *OSCE Human Dimension Commitments*, vol. 2, *Chronological Compilation*, 4th ed. (Warsaw: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2022), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/human-dimension-commitments-chronological>

2 See CSCE, Charter of Paris for a New Europe (Paris: November 21, 1990), <https://www.osce.org/mc/39516>

3 For an overview, see OSCE, "Human Dimension Mechanisms," <https://www.osce.org/odihr/human-dimension-mechanisms>

4 See the responses received by the rapporteur to his requests for co-operation by the representatives of the Russian Federation and of Belarus, annexed to the reports related to Chechnya (2018) and Belarus (2020). The reports can be accessed at: OSCE, cited above (Note 3).

5 The author has had the opportunity to serve as a single expert for the reports on Chechnya (2018) and on Belarus (2020) and as a member of the first Commission of Experts on Ukraine (April 2022).

6 CSCE, Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting 1986 of Representatives of the Participating States of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Held on the Basis of the Provisions of the Final Act Relating to the Follow-up to the Conference (Vienna: January 19, 1989), <https://www.osce.org/mc/40881>

7 See CSCE, Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (Copenhagen: June 29, 1990), paragraph 42, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/14304>

8 The description on the OSCE website does not contain the Moscow amendments. See CSCE, Vienna Mechanism (Vienna: December 1, 1989), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/20064>

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9 See CSCE, Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (Moscow: October 3, 1991), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/14310>

10 See CSCE, Moscow Mechanism (Moscow: December 1, 1991), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/20066>

11 Among the few descriptions available, the US Helsinki Commission Report Brief on the Moscow Mechanism of July 18, 2017, stands out. See US Helsinki Commission, Helsinki Commission Report: The OSCE Moscow Mechanism (July 18, 2017), <https://www.csce.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Report-Moscow-Mechanism-FINAL.pdf>

12 Here and below, all paragraph references are to the Moscow Mechanism, cited above (Note 10).

13 On the issue of consensus in the OSCE, see Rick Fawn, "The Limits and Potential of Consensus in Times of Crisis," in *OSCE Insights*, eds. Cornelius Friesendorf and Argyro Kartsonaki (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2024), <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/10.5771/9783748917366-04/the-limits-and-potential-of-consensus-in-times-of-crisis?page=1>

14 For a list of the experts, see OSCE, List of Experts for the Human Dimension Mechanism Appointed by OSCE Participating States (April 8, 2024), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/20062>

15 See OSCE, cited above (Note 3).

16 See US Helsinki Commission, cited above (Note 11).

17 See the joint letter of the thirty-five participating States to Belarus at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6186bdbd3bf7f56080b1d32/20211104_Joint_letter_to_Belarus_Vienna_Mechanism.pdf. See also the statement on the response by Belarus at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/response-by-belarus-to-the-vienna-mechanism-joint-statement>

18 See the invocation at: https://delegazione.osce.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Vienna-Mechanism-statement_22032024.pdf

19 US Helsinki Commission, cited above (Note 11).

20 US Helsinki Commission, cited above (Note 11).

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