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Vitality amid Adversity

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**Nomos**

# Unseen and Unheard: OSCE Efforts to Address the Situation of Crimean Tatars Under Russian Occupation

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## Abstract

Crimean Tatars, an indigenous ethnic minority, have faced escalating repression following the 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, including political persecution, cultural suppression, and human rights abuses. The OSCE has sought to address this situation through its monitoring, diplomatic, and dialogue mechanisms. The organization's efforts have been severely constrained, however, not only by the fact that its decisions are not legally binding and cannot be enforced coercively, but also by limited access to the peninsula and political obstacles posed by Russia. This paper examines the OSCE's multifaceted efforts to protect and advocate for Crimean Tatars under these challenging conditions. It presents a set of recommendations aimed at strengthening the OSCE's capacity to respond effectively to the ongoing human rights crisis in Crimea, emphasizing the urgent need for innovative strategies and increased international political will.

## Keywords

OSCE, Crimean Tatars, minority rights, HCNM, ODIHR, Russian annexation

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## Introduction

Crimea has long occupied a contentious position at the crossroads of empires, identities, and geopolitical ambitions. Among its oldest inhabitants are Crimean Tatars, an indigenous Turkic-speaking Muslim people who have historically experienced phases of marginalization, forced displacement, and cultural suppression, most infamously during Stalin's 1944 mass deportations. The 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia reignited these

historical wounds and intensified repression against the Crimean Tatar community. Today, Crimean Tatars endure a litany of human rights violations: arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, the suppression of political dissent, and the outlawing of their civil society and political representative body, the Mejlis. According to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center (CTRC), 6,730 violations of the fundamental rights of indigenous Crimean Tatars were recorded between 2017 and 2024 alone.<sup>1</sup>

Amid these grave challenges, the OSCE stands as a key international actor man-

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dated to uphold human rights, democratic governance, and minority rights across all of its fifty-seven participating States. Yet the implementation of its commitments in these fields is constrained by the organization's consensus-based decision-making, which allows any of the fifty-seven participating States, including Russia, to block decisions and operations. This has enabled Russia to perpetuate the geopolitical stalemate surrounding Crimea and to obstruct monitoring and reporting efforts.

This paper examines the OSCE's institutional engagement with Crimean Tatars from 2014 to 2024. It analyzes the organization's use of human rights monitoring, advisory roles, and diplomatic platforms in advocating for the rights of Crimean Tatars. Drawing on primary documents, official reports, and multilateral statements, it argues that although the OSCE has consistently expressed concern for the Crimean Tatars' plight, its interventions remain largely declaratory rather than enforceable due to the non-coercive nature of the organization. This reflects the OSCE's difficulty to move beyond consensus-based decision-making and to operationalize normative commitments.

The Crimean Tatars' situation merits research by scholars and policymakers, as it can be an indicator of the effectiveness of international human rights frameworks and minority protections. Studying their case shows how overlooking minority rights can grow into wider regional insecurity, with implications that transcend the borders of Crimea. The OSCE's in-

volvement underlines not only its principles of defending sovereignty, territorial integrity, and minority rights but also the real challenges of doing so in the current European security landscape.

This study starts by outlining the human rights situation of Crimean Tatars and the OSCE's monitoring mechanisms. It then reviews the OSCE's engagement and challenges in Russian-occupied Crimea from 2014 to 2025. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening the OSCE's effectiveness in addressing one of Europe's most enduring and underreported minority rights crises at the international level.

## Background

### The human rights situation of Crimean Tatars

Crimean Tatars, the largest indigenous people of the Crimean Peninsula, trace a major stage of their ethnogenesis to the period of the Crimean Khanate (1441–1783).<sup>2</sup> Ever since the Russian Empire's first annexation of Crimea in 1783, its history has been marked by persecution and forced displacement. An estimated 20 to 30 percent of the Crimean Tatar population emigrated during this annexation.<sup>3</sup> Those who remained faced religious repression, "Russification" policies,<sup>4</sup> land expropriation, and conditions resembling serfdom.<sup>5</sup>

During the Crimean War (1853–1856), Russian authorities baselessly accused

Crimean Tatars of collaborating with the Ottoman Empire, leading to surveillance, arrests, and harassment.<sup>6</sup> Even in the absence of a centralized deportation program, more than 200,000 Crimean Tatars emigrated by the 1860s due to growing insecurity.<sup>7</sup>

Soviet rule intensified repression. Between 1917 and 1933, approximately 150,000 Crimean Tatars were either killed or forcibly displaced.<sup>8</sup> On May 18, 1944, the Soviet authorities ordered the mass deportation of the entire Crimean Tatar population, over 208,000 individuals, to remote settlements in Central Asia, the Urals, and Siberia,<sup>9</sup> under accusations of collaboration with Nazi Germany.<sup>10</sup> Within the first six months, an estimated 30,000 perished due to harsh conditions.<sup>11</sup> Only in the late 1980s were they permitted to return, and mass repatriation followed the collapse of the USSR.<sup>12</sup>

Renewed threats emerged after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, which Crimean Tatars heavily opposed. Russian forces raided the Mejlis headquarters, homes, and mosques.<sup>13</sup> From 2014 to 2017, the CTRC recorded a total of 6,730 violations of fundamental human rights against Crimean Tatars, including searches, detentions, arrests, interrogations, and systematic abuses within the judicial system.<sup>14</sup> These abuses were largely perpetrated by the FSB (Russia's Federal Security Service), judges, court clerks, prosecutors, and occupation authorities.<sup>15</sup>

## OSCE monitoring and reporting mechanisms

As a regional body with a strong human rights mandate,<sup>16</sup> the OSCE has monitored the situation of Crimean Tatars since the collapse of the Soviet Union. While its involvement before the 2014 annexation was largely concentrated within the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) and the 1994–1999 OSCE Mission to Ukraine,<sup>17</sup> the illegal annexation of Crimea prompted more active engagement by various OSCE bodies. This paper will examine the actions of various OSCE structures in relation to Crimean Tatars. These include field operations, the Permanent Council, the Parliamentary Assembly, procedures such as the Moscow Mechanism, and institutions such as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the HCNM, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM). Collectively, these bodies and mechanisms comprise a significant part of the operational foundations of the OSCE, and their efforts reinforce the organization's role in promoting regional security and safeguarding the rights of vulnerable populations like the Crimean Tatars.

## The OSCE's work with Crimean Tatars under Russian occupation: 2014–2024

### 2014: Initial human rights assessment missions, RFoM statements, and the establishment of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

Russia's unlawful annexation of Crimea in early 2014 triggered urgent OSCE engagement due to its serious human and minority rights implications for Crimean Tatars. At Ukraine's request, ODIHR and the HCNM undertook a human rights assessment mission (HRAM) to Ukraine, including to Crimea, from early March to mid-April 2014.<sup>18</sup> Their joint report assessed compliance with OSCE human dimension commitments and highlighted immediate challenges faced by Crimean Tatars, offering recommendations for safeguarding their rights.

The HRAM documented the Crimean Tatars' resistance to the annexation and increased hostility from Russian authorities and the pro-Russian community in Crimea. Within the first month of the annexation, Crimean Tatars made up 80 percent of the initial three thousand individuals who fled Crimea, largely motivated by fear and historical trauma.<sup>19</sup> The report also drew attention to the legal uncertainty during the transition to Russian control, particularly for those refusing Russian citizenship, who risked losing access to not only property but also education, employment, and healthcare. It further emphasized the importance of upholding the land and property rights

of indigenous peoples and vulnerable minorities.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the HRAM noted credible allegations of restricted freedom of movement, including identity checks and the establishment of temporary checkpoints in Crimean Tatar-populated areas ahead of the 2014 referendum.<sup>21</sup>

During the same period, the RFoM repeatedly raised concerns about the rapidly deteriorating media environment in Crimea, with particular attention to the targeting of Crimean Tatar-language outlets. In March and September 2014, the RFoM condemned intimidation, censorship, and pressure against Crimean Tatar media,<sup>22</sup> threatening the continued operation of key broadcasters such as ATR.<sup>23</sup>

In parallel, on March 21, 2014, the OSCE Permanent Council adopted Decision No. 1117 establishing the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine.<sup>24</sup> The mission was mandated to monitor the security situation, report on violations of OSCE commitments, and support respect for human rights, including minority rights.<sup>25</sup> Although Russia claimed readiness to contribute,<sup>26</sup> it barred the SMM from entering Crimea. Consequently, the mission relied on information from Crimean Tatar activists and NGOs without being able to independently verify the reports it received.<sup>27</sup> One such report came in September 2014, when Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Djemilev informed the SMM that Russian security forces had conducted a search at the Mejlis headquarters in Simferopol, seizing documents and funds.<sup>28</sup> According to information corroborated by oth-

er Crimean Tatar sources, the Crimean de facto authorities subsequently issued a court order to confiscate the Mejlis's property.<sup>29</sup>

### **2015: HRAM, RFoM, and SMM reporting and observations on intensifying pressure**

A second HRAM in mid-2015, focused specifically on Crimea, reinforced earlier concerns about systemic restrictions on political expression, religious freedom, and the cultural rights of Crimean Tatars.<sup>30</sup> The mission met civil society representatives in Kyiv, Odessa, and Kherson and conducted interviews by phone, via Skype, and in person with, among others, Crimean Tatar representatives located either in Crimea or regularly traveling between Crimea and mainland Ukraine.<sup>31</sup>

The report found that rights had continued to deteriorate after the 2014 annexation, including restrictions on political rights, self-governance, religious freedom, cultural rights, and access to education in Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages.<sup>32</sup> It urged Russian and de facto authorities to cease the intimidation of Mejlis leaders, guarantee freedom of movement, protect media independence, address housing and land issues, support cultural and linguistic revitalization, and facilitate access for the High Commissioner.<sup>33</sup>

Building on the concerns first articulated in 2014, the RFoM issued a series of

warnings. In January 2015, it condemned a large-scale raid on the Crimean Tatar television broadcaster ATR, which resulted in staff detentions and the channel's being taken off air.<sup>34</sup> Later, in April, the RFoM criticized the expiry of the media re-registration deadline imposed under Russian legislation, noting that virtually all Crimean Tatar outlets had had their applications rejected on procedural grounds and warning that this was intended to silence their voices.<sup>35</sup>

The SMM similarly reported increasing pressure on Crimean Tatar media and civic institutions,<sup>36</sup> as well as rising displacement to mainland Ukraine due to restrictions on political and religious activity.<sup>37</sup> Its September 2015 report covered the blockade of the Kalanchak, Chaplynka, and Chonhar crossings to Crimea, organized by the Mejlis and aimed primarily at commercial traffic while allowing passenger movement.<sup>38</sup> It involved Crimean Tatar participants, members of Right Sector and the NGO Sich, and multiple Ukrainian security forces.<sup>39</sup>

### **2016–2017: Parliamentary Assembly resolution and 1944 remembrance in Permanent Council statements and SMM monitoring**

In April 2016, the Russian Supreme court banned the Mejlis as an "extremist organization,"<sup>40</sup> drawing coordinated condemnation from multiple OSCE participating States at the Permanent Council and the Parliamentary Assembly. On May

12, 2016, during the seventy-second anniversary of the 1944 Soviet deportation of Crimean Tatars, the EU,<sup>41</sup> US,<sup>42</sup> and Ukrainian<sup>43</sup> delegations condemned the ongoing Russian occupation of Crimea, highlighting parallels between historical and current abuses.

Conversely, Russian Ambassador Alexander Lukashevich acknowledged historical suffering but argued that conditions had improved since Crimea's "reunification" with Russia. He referenced legal rehabilitation measures, cultural and economic support, political inclusion, and recognition of the Crimean Tatar language. At the same time, he dismissed allegations of repression as politically motivated and contrasted Russia's conduct with alleged neglect under Ukrainian rule.<sup>44</sup>

The SMM also closely monitored commemorations of the 1944 Crimean Tatar deportation during its observations in mainland Ukraine on May 18, 2016, and May 18, 2017. In 2016, the mission reported large gatherings in Kherison, Henichesk, and near the Chonhar administrative boundary crossing, with participation ranging from several hundred to approximately two thousand people.<sup>45</sup> The SMM noted speeches delivered by regional officials, Mejlis representatives, and Crimean Tatar activists, as well as the appearance of groups in military-style attire. Smaller gatherings in Kyiv featured traditional Crimean Tatar clothing.<sup>46</sup> In 2017, at Chonhar, the mission recorded a peaceful symbolic procession to the bridge's midpoint, where partici-

pants sang the Ukrainian national anthem and raised both the Ukrainian and the Crimean Tatar flags.<sup>47</sup>

Concerns about Crimean Tatars were again raised in July 2016, at the Parliamentary Assembly's Annual Session. A draft resolution introduced by the Ukrainian member of parliament Natalia Ahafonova<sup>48</sup> emphasized several issues, including state-sponsored repression, the persecution of the Mejlis, and restrictions on religious and media freedoms.<sup>49</sup> In light of this, it urged Russia to cease political repression, release unlawfully detained activists (including Mejlis Deputy Chair Ahtem Ciygoz), and comply with international human rights obligations.<sup>50</sup>

## 2018–2020: Continuation of contesting narratives

In a May 2018 statement to the Permanent Council, Russia affirmed that Crimea had been fully integrated and that the rights of Crimean Tatars were being upheld. It also accused Ukraine of ongoing discrimination, claiming that roughly thirty thousand individuals from Crimea, half of them Crimean Tatars, face violations within Ukrainian territory, including restrictions on religious and cultural expression.<sup>51</sup>

By 2020, the divergence between these narratives had sharpened. On 27 February, marking six years since the illegal annexation, the EU issued a statement at the Permanent Council condemning Russia's imposition of Russian citizenship and

its systematic human rights abuses, especially against Crimean Tatars. The EU called for international monitoring access, the release of detainees, and a renewed commitment to international law. Several states aligned with this position.<sup>52</sup>

The annual May commemorations of the 1944 deportation of Crimean Tatars further intensified debate. At the meeting of the Permanent Council on May 21, 2020, Russia reiterated that Crimea's "reunification" restored justice, citing infrastructure investments, cultural initiatives, and respect for religion and the media.<sup>53</sup> Ukraine countered this with stark warnings of a "second, hybrid deportation," pointing to repression, forced demographic shifts, the ban on the Mejlis, restrictions on Crimean Tatar-language education, and systemic rights violations. It urged a stronger international response, including sanctions and recognition of the 1944 deportation as genocide.<sup>54</sup>

### **2022–2023: The Moscow Mechanism and HCNM efforts amid shifting priorities**

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 redirected the OSCE's focus, and while key concerns persisted, references to Crimean Tatars grew less frequent and more symbolic. The 2022 Moscow Mechanism reports devoted some attention to the situation of national and ethnic minorities, including Crimean Tatars. The April report noted ongoing human rights violations

since 2014 that disproportionately targeted those who supported Ukraine's territorial integrity and national unity, including Crimean Tatars.<sup>55</sup> It further stated intensified repression following the escalation of hostilities in 2022, with a growing number of minority representatives subjected to arrest on charges of alleged treason or financing terrorist activities.<sup>56</sup> The July report cited the findings of a May 2022 report by Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, on the human rights situation in Crimea and Sevastopol.<sup>57</sup> The report highlighted harassment, the detention of activists, the suppression of Crimean Tatar-language education, and the militarization of children.<sup>58</sup>

On December 8, 2022, at the OSCE Permanent Council, HCNM Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov briefly addressed Crimean Tatars in his comprehensive report.<sup>59</sup> He expressed concern about the disproportionate conscription of Crimean Tatars into Russian military campaigns and pointed to ongoing engagement with Ukrainian authorities and minority representatives, including Crimean Tatars, to support minority rights and improve legal frameworks as part of Ukraine's broader postwar recovery efforts.<sup>60</sup>

### **2024: The Moscow Mechanism and ODIHR support for Ukrainian legislative efforts**

In April 2024, a Moscow Mechanism report highlighted a long-standing pattern

of arbitrary detentions targeting Crimean Tatars for political and religious reasons.<sup>61</sup> According to the Ukrainian Ombudsman, 208 political prisoners had been held in Crimea, 125 of whom were Crimean Tatars. The Office of the Ukrainian Prosecutor General reported slightly higher figures, noting that 134 of the 217 Crimean residents persecuted on political or religious grounds were Crimean Tatars. Although these numbers pertain to political and religious detentions, the report highlighted that other groups resisting the illegal occupation had likewise been targeted.<sup>62</sup>

In June 2024, upon Ukraine's request, ODIHR reviewed the Draft Law on the Status of the Crimean Tatar People.<sup>63</sup> While the draft law constitutes a significant step toward addressing the historical marginalization of Crimean Tatars, ODIHR recommended improvements to bring it in line with international standards.<sup>64</sup> These included adopting an approach based on the self-identification of Crimean Tatars, ensuring representation within state institutions, strengthening protections for language, education, and access to natural resources, and incorporating a robust gender-sensitive framework. ODIHR emphasized that the process must comprise inclusive and transparent consultations with Crimean Tatars and civil society to ensure legitimacy and effectiveness.<sup>65</sup>

## Challenges to OSCE efforts

Compared to other international organizations, the OSCE is unique in its regional span, all-inclusive participation, and consensus-based structure, which allows it to sustain continuous dialogue and engagement on sensitive issues. This level of ongoing attention is difficult to achieve in organizations with a broader geographical focus and multiple competing priorities. Nonetheless, the OSCE's efforts to monitor and address the situation of Crimean Tatars under Russian occupation continue to face profound and multifaceted challenges.

Foremost among these is the shifting geopolitical landscape. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, international attention has understandably shifted to the broader war, leaving Crimean issues lower on the global agenda. As global attention has continued to concentrate on active conflict zones and large-scale humanitarian crises, the plight of the Crimean Tatars has increasingly been neglected.<sup>66</sup> This reflects a wider pattern of geopolitical fatigue, in which sustained international engagement with protracted or less visible crises gradually wanes. This fatigue poses a serious threat to the continuity of international advocacy and weakens the pressure necessary to uphold the rights of Crimean Tatars under international law.

Although organizations such as the UN, the EU, and the Council of Europe (CoE) have also addressed the plight of Crimean Tatars and have extensive le-

gal tools and enforcement mechanisms at their disposal, the OSCE occupies a distinct and complementary role. Its regional expertise and capacity to maintain sustained, regionally focused dialogue allow it to provide continuous monitoring, mediation, and technical support, complementing the legal and coercive instruments of other international bodies. Therefore, while efforts to monitor and report on human rights developments in Crimea may be constrained by reduced global attention, the OSCE's position also presents opportunities for closer and more effective collaboration with other international organizations.

Moreover, the Russian Federation's continued denial of access to Crimea, a policy that has remained in place since the annexation of the peninsula in 2014,<sup>67</sup> constitutes a direct violation of Russia's commitments under the OSCE's *acquis*. This restriction has effectively prevented the OSCE, particularly the SMM, from operating on the ground. This limitation was acknowledged and criticized during a UN General Assembly session in February 2020, where states expressed their support for the OSCE's work and underscored the importance of allowing the SMM to access Crimea.<sup>68</sup> The inability to conduct on-site monitoring severely limits the OSCE's capacity to independently verify reports of human rights violations and engage directly with affected communities, forcing it to rely primarily on secondary sources and remote monitoring methods.

Compounding this operational constraint is the decision-making deadlock inherent in the OSCE's consensus-based structure, which gives Russia the power to block initiatives, resolutions, the renewal of field operations, and the adoption of the unified budget.<sup>69</sup> In addition to repeatedly hampering the overall functioning of the OSCE, this veto power has prevented the organization from enhancing its presence in Crimea and implementing stronger measures to address the unfolding human rights crisis in the region.<sup>70</sup> As a result, the OSCE's ability to act decisively and cohesively on this, as on many other controversial issues, has frequently been compromised, undermining its mandate to uphold security and human rights in the region.

Further limiting the OSCE's impact is its lack of coercive and enforcement mechanisms. As a primarily political organization, the OSCE depends on the voluntary cooperation and political will of participating States to implement its recommendations.<sup>71</sup> Without binding legal authority or the capacity to impose sanctions, its findings often provide only non-binding guidance rather than compulsory directives, thus constraining the ability to influence tangible changes in Crimea's complex and disputed environment.<sup>72</sup> This has been exacerbated by Russia's active use of disinformation campaigns within the OSCE framework, which aim to undermine the organization's credibility and manipulate the narrative surrounding Crimea and the treatment of Crimean Tatars.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, on the ground, Russian authorities have intensified repression against Crimean civil society, targeting independent media outlets, the Mejlis, and numerous NGOs. The banning of the Mejlis in 2016<sup>74</sup> and the subsequent harassment, arrests, and intimidation of activists have decimated the community's organized representation and restricted avenues for local advocacy and reporting.<sup>75</sup> Russia's systematic campaign of oppression seeks to silence dissent and erase independent voices, effectively consolidating control through fear and coercion.<sup>76</sup> This shrinking civic space not only impedes the OSCE's information-gathering efforts through local sources but also increases Crimean Tatars' vulnerability to ongoing abuses.

## Recommendations

The OSCE's decade-long engagement with the plight of Crimean Tatars under Russian occupation has underscored both the potential and the limits of multilateral diplomacy in a contested and constrained environment. Although it faces severe challenges, the OSCE has played a vital role in documenting abuses through HRAMs and corroboration with Crimean Tatar sources, supporting Ukraine's legal reforms and offering a platform for marginalized voices. As the geopolitical landscape has shifted and international attention has increasingly focused on the broader war in Ukraine, however, there is an urgent need for the OSCE to recal-

ibrate its approach to ensure its continued relevance and impact in addressing the humanitarian concerns of Crimean Tatars.

To enhance its effectiveness in this context, the OSCE must prioritize strengthening its monitoring and reporting mechanisms in collaboration with local NGOs and displaced Crimean Tatars by making them more consistent and frequent, as these efforts seem to have decreased over time. Given the ongoing ban on deploying direct monitoring missions in Crimea, these actors remain essential intermediaries for providing accurate and timely information about developments on the ground. Establishing structured and sustained channels for engagement with displaced communities, journalists, and NGOs would significantly improve the organization's capacity to verify reports of repression and adapt its strategies accordingly. This approach would not only enhance the OSCE's situational awareness but also empower Crimean Tatars to participate actively in shaping international responses to their cause.

Simultaneously, participating States must reinforce their advocacy efforts, both individually and collectively, to demand that international organizations be provided unhindered access to Crimea and to draw sustained attention to the occupying authorities' persistent violations of international law. This responsibility does not rest solely on the shoulders of states with direct political or geographic ties to the conflict; rather, it should be shared across all OSCE participating

States as part of their collective commitment to upholding the principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE documents. Their engagement is crucial not only in bilateral and multilateral diplomatic arenas but also within the OSCE's main bodies, where concerted pressure and consistent messaging can help to keep the situation of Crimean Tatars on the international agenda.

With that said, OSCE institutions themselves must adopt a more proactive and strategic approach. Bodies such as ODIHR and the HCNM, while constrained in their operational capacity due to lack of access to Crimea, retain critical normative and analytical capacity that should be leveraged more assertively. To this end, these institutions should strengthen their engagement with participating States, not only to maintain awareness of the deteriorating human rights situation in Crimea but also to reinforce the significance of the Crimean Tatar issue as a core concern of the OSCE's human rights mandate. Closer coordination with participating States would help to ensure that this topic remains a priority for national delegations and is consistently raised on OSCE platforms. Cultivating political will among participating States would allow these institutions to pursue their mandates more effectively, including through thematic reports, legal analyses, and targeted recommendations, and would keep the Crimean Tatar issue visible within the organization and the wider international human rights discourse.

Finally, the OSCE's efforts would benefit from deeper coordination with other international bodies, including the UN, the EU, and the CoE. Joint monitoring efforts, shared reporting mechanisms, and collaborative advocacy campaigns would enhance international visibility, increase pressure on the occupying power, and lend greater legitimacy to the OSCE's work. Multilateral cooperation not only broadens the reach of each institution's interventions but also signals a collective rejection of the normalization of occupation and repression.

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# Civil Society at a Critical Juncture: Finland’s 2025 OSCE Chairpersonship and the Future of Civic Engagement

Bradley Reynolds and Johanna Ketola\*

## Abstract

Over the past decade, democracy has experienced a steady decline. As part of this trend, civic spaces across the globe have continued to shrink. The OSCE has a significant legacy of defending civic space, as civil society participation in security politics is fundamental to its approach to peace and security. Yet Russia’s war in Ukraine, together with a broader erosion of commitment to OSCE values, has led many to question the continued validity of the OSCE *acquis*. This paper examines how engagement with non-governmental actors has evolved throughout the CSCE/OSCE process. Focusing on Finland’s activities during its 2025 OSCE Chairpersonship, we categorize contemporary forms of civil society participation in the OSCE. By analytically connecting past and present, we contribute to the broader debate on the changing relationship between civil society and the OSCE. We argue that the OSCE remains well placed to serve as a forum for comprehensive security dialogue between governments and civil society. However, both individual and institutional innovation is needed if respect for fundamental freedoms is to endure in a shifting international order.

## Keywords

OSCE, civil society, Helsinki Principles, Helsinki 50+, comprehensive security

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## Introduction

Finland’s 2025 Chairpersonship of the OSCE coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and was originally associated with Finnish Presi-

dent Sauli Niinistö’s broader objective of reviving the Helsinki spirit.<sup>1</sup> In the lead-up to 2025, however, support for cooperative security significantly diminished following Russia’s illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. At the same time, the alarmingly rapid decline of free and open civic space across the OSCE region—paralleling a prolonged global erosion of democracy, media freedom, and the rule of law<sup>2</sup>—has ushered

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in a dangerous new era in European and global politics.

In response, supporting the unique role of civil society in the OSCE became a key priority of Finland's 2025 Chairpersonship.<sup>3</sup> Although this priority was endorsed by many participating States, particularly within the EU, it was not without controversy. Despite the CSCE/OSCE's long history of engagement with non-state actors and civil society,<sup>4</sup> as well as the numerous OSCE commitments that underpin such engagement,<sup>5</sup> tensions have developed over the years regarding whether—and how—the role of civil society actors in the organization should be maintained.<sup>6</sup>

The problems facing civil society are manyfold. To begin with, governments are becoming less willing to fund civil society initiatives. In 2024 alone, funding for non-governmental work recorded as official development assistance fell 7 percent among leading OECD countries.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, among the most pressing issues within the OSCE region is the phenomenon of “foreign agent laws.”<sup>8</sup> This is compounded by the growing trend of GONGOization—the increased presence of government-sponsored NGOs that advocate state interests—which impedes genuine dialogue between free and independent civil society actors and participating States.<sup>9</sup> Even within the EU and the United States, legal experts and civil society actors increasingly warn of shrinking civic spaces.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the historical narrative of the Helsinki effect, which valorizes transnational social

movements and civil society as forces that helped end the Cold War, a parallel rhetoric has emerged that re-prioritizes the sanctity of internal affairs. This counternarrative is increasingly invoked by decision-makers not only in Russia but in Georgia, Hungary, Azerbaijan, and the United States. In this environment, many civil society organizations (CSOs) are simply fighting to remain viable. This contrasts sharply with the situation in the 1990s, when civil society actors were often described as “the conscience of Helsinki” and, in consensus CSCE/OSCE documents, regarded as important partners in maintaining democratic standards.<sup>11</sup>

In this paper we present various CSCE/OSCE histories that have largely developed in parallel but within separate strands of academic discussion. We argue that, when considered together, these histories offer a novel framework for reflecting on contemporary civil society activity in the OSCE. We then apply this framework to analyze a range of initiatives undertaken during Finland's 2025 Chairpersonship to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Civil society actors have historically been, and remain, co-producers of comprehensive security, often serving as more vocal supporters of this concept than states themselves. Historical reflection on the present moment highlights the pressing need for new and innovative strategies to sustain this independent comprehensive security tradition in a changing European security landscape. We conclude with historically informed recommendations for strengthening

ning continued civil society cooperation within the OSCE.

### **The evolution of non-governmental actors in the CSCE/OSCE context**

The Final Act, signed in Helsinki in 1975, transformed prevailing conceptions of security.<sup>12</sup> It allowed security discussions to extend beyond armament—that is, beyond the political-military dimension or hard security—to include economic, environmental, and human dimension issues. This holistic approach would come to be known as “comprehensive security,” though the term itself was not formally incorporated into CSCE mandates until the early 1990s.<sup>13</sup>

Although the innovative potential of the Final Act was not immediately realized universally, it was gradually taken up by social movements, dissidents, and non-governmental organizations. This development formed part of a broader historical process already underway in the 1960s, in which “the rising focus on human rights” supported “claims to give individuals more standing as the ultimate referent object for security.”<sup>14</sup> For example, the Finnish National Committee for European Security organized the first-ever “Security Days” in November 1970, collecting over 250 Finnish citizens and civil society actors to discuss the prospect of a European security conference and the German question.<sup>15</sup>

The Helsinki Final Act also provided a new language through which individu-

als could demand the rights and freedoms that governments had internationally agreed to respect.<sup>16</sup> What came to be known as “*détente* from below” emerged largely because participants in social movements “rejected existing conditions,” creating greater openness to transnational contacts.<sup>17</sup> By drawing on the emerging language of human rights, activists used the Final Act as a foundation for connecting diverse transnational social movements concerned with environmental and political-military issues, while also encouraging broader participation in debates on international security.

The Helsinki Committees are the most extensively studied of these networks, but they represent only one piece of the puzzle.<sup>18</sup> Activists on both sides of the Iron Curtain built forms of cooperation despite being odd bedfellows—Eastern European dissidents, Reaganite and Thatcherite Cold Warriors, interfaith groups, left-leaning peace activists, and nuclear disarmament movements selectively set aside political differences to pursue common goals.<sup>19</sup> For example, the demands of environmental movements increasingly became intertwined with broader social and political concerns.<sup>20</sup> Diplomacy also began to change, as “Western embassies were increasingly expected to have contacts with dissidents.”<sup>21</sup> These new connections “broke the Cold War field-of-force and gave history a new hinge,”<sup>22</sup> enabling citizens to uncover “the hidden possibilities in the Helsinki Process.”<sup>23</sup> Civil societies and Helsinki Committees may not have ended the Cold War, but they signifi-

cantly strengthened the legitimacy of non-governmental actors in international relations.<sup>24</sup>

With the end of the Cold War, the range of issues and actors that could be discussed in relation to security again expanded. This shift was reflected in the emergence of concepts such as human security, introduced in the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 Human Development Report, as well as in the rise of critical security studies in academic debates. In turn, "expectations of what civil society could contribute to international politics" grew in the post-Cold War period.<sup>25</sup> This juncture, which ushered in the "golden era" of civil society,<sup>26</sup> coincided with the liberal internationalist "belief that NGOs were shaping a new, post-Westphalian world."<sup>27</sup>

For many observers at the time, the CSCE/OSCE stood as a forerunner in realizing a new vision of a liberal security community—an era sometimes described as "the Helsinki Moment."<sup>28</sup> The 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the 1999 Istanbul Declaration strongly praised CSOs for historically upholding CSCE/OSCE principles and for "stimulating citizens' participation in public affairs," instructing that CSOs continue to be involved in CSCE/OSCE activities and structures.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the formalization and institutionalization of civil society cooperation advanced significantly within the third dimension. The Office of Free Elections, later renamed the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), was established in

1991 with a clear mandate to work "with civil society organizations, strengthening national monitoring capacities, assisting in trial monitoring, and strengthening the independence of the judiciary."<sup>30</sup> Despite these advances, some commentators argued that the question of how to incorporate CSOs into emerging OSCE structures was only partially addressed during this period.<sup>31</sup>

Formalization also took place within civil society itself. Founded in 1982, the International Helsinki Federation (IHF) functioned as a formal "federation" of Helsinki groups as well as a clearinghouse for activists monitoring the implementation of the Helsinki Principles. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the IHF became "more complex" and "multi-dimensional" in the 1990s, as the number of Helsinki groups grew from seventeen to thirty between 1989 and 1996.<sup>32</sup> At its peak, the federation coordinated forty-six human rights organizations.

In the early 1990s, the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (HCA) movement also emerged in parallel with the Helsinki Committees, coordinating social movements loosely connected to the Helsinki Process that focused on peacebuilding. While the HCA functioned as a transnational forum for public debate, it was first and foremost a space in which participants sought to take responsibility for their own societies.<sup>33</sup> Between 1990 and 1995, the HCA brought together around 600–1,000 participants annually, representing one of the first attempts to integrate Europe at the grassroots le-

vel.<sup>34</sup> Even so, some scholars argue that the new international environment of the 1990s incentivized many CSOs to recalibrate their missions in response to funder requirements and pressure to ensure organizational survival. In this context, organizations increasingly sold expert services rather than addressing the needs of their constituencies,<sup>35</sup> leading to what has been described as the “NGOization” or “commodification” of civil society.<sup>36</sup> Over time, many local peace organizations also found that working with the EU or national funding bodies was more financially sustainable than engaging with the OSCE, offering one explanation for the subsequent decline in civil society engagement in the OSCE today.

In 2007, the IHF declared bankruptcy and was forced to cease operations following fraud committed by its financial manager. The Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) was subsequently established in 2011 to coordinate civil society cooperation within the OSCE context, effectively replacing the IHF, though with substantially less funding and a more diverse membership (110 organizations as of 2025).<sup>37</sup> The CSP brings together a mixture of HCA and IHF participants, including proponents of both constituency-building and human rights education,<sup>38</sup> as well as those who emphasize a more expert or watchdog role for civil society. Since 2011, the CSP has developed into an important network of OSCE-oriented CSOs and human rights organizations, facilitating the rapid mobilization of cooperation and solidarity across the OSCE

area. The closure of the IHF nevertheless dealt a significant blow to institutionalized networks of human rights advocates and continues to cast a shadow over perceptions of civil society partners’ financial management capacities. As a result, many participating States have come to prefer working with larger, more established partner organizations.<sup>39</sup>

The new millennium also witnessed a structural development in the international system with the emergence of GONGOs—organizations that function as “extensions of authoritarian states” and that seek “to distort public debate, discredit genuine activists, and reshape the OSCE’s liberal norms from within.”<sup>40</sup> The participation of GONGOs in OSCE meetings became increasingly evident after 2008, as these organizations began to exploit the inclusive nature of OSCE events.

### **Institutionalized engagement, watchdogs, and new initiatives**

While practically every OSCE Chairperson-in-Office since the position’s inception in 1993 has noted the significance of cooperating with civil society in one form or another for the purpose of “keeping the principles of Helsinki alive,”<sup>41</sup> Chairs have differed on how much to invest in civil society participation and which dimensions of security to prioritize. In 2025, strengthening civil society engagement across all three dimensions of the OSCE was a key priority for the Finnish Chairpersonship. This approach

was inspired by the fiftieth anniversary but was also shaped by political realities that, from the official Finnish perspective, did not permit a renewed *détente* or revived “Spirit of Helsinki.”<sup>42</sup> Civil society engagement within the OSCE in 2025 can be divided into three categories: the continuation of established, consensus-based institutionalized cooperation; watchdog activities; and new forms of cooperation that are not always consensus-based. In what follows, we introduce these three distinct yet overlapping forms of civil society engagement and analyze their implications.

### Institutionalized engagement

The best-known example of institutionalized engagement is the Warsaw Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), Europe’s largest annual civil society conference. Traditionally, the meeting has provided a forum for critical exchanges on participating States’ implementation of human dimension commitments. Since 2022, however, the conference has taken place as the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference (WHDC) in the absence of a consensus mandate. In 2025, consensus was again blocked by Russia, leading the Finnish Chair, in cooperation with ODIHR, to organize the ten-day conference as the WHDC. Even without a mandate, the event attracted a record number of almost 1,900 registrations, resulting in 1,200 participants.<sup>43</sup> The HDIM/WHDC is complemented by

smaller, specialized Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings (usually three per year) held in Vienna.

In 2025, specific committee meetings under the Permanent Council for each OSCE dimension also served as relevant entry points for in-depth exchanges between participating States, experts, and civil society representatives.

Another formalized civil society event in the OSCE context is the annual Parallel Civil Society Conference, held since 2010 on the day before the Ministerial Council. Members of the CSP are the main organizers of this event, with technical and financial assistance from the Chair and other participating States. The Parallel Conference provides a forum for high-level dialogue and exchange between civil society and the OSCE leadership. In 2025, the conference showcased CSP recommendations and outcomes of the Helsinki+50 Reflection Process, which was designed and implemented by the CSP, to “develop a set of concrete recommendations on change and reform” and expand the “circle of stakeholders interested in making the OSCE more effective.”<sup>44</sup> Over a nine-month period, the Helsinki+50 Reflection Process brought together over sixty CSOs from across the OSCE area in five reflection workshops covering all three dimensions.<sup>45</sup>

Institutionalized engagement of this kind has both positive and negative aspects. Critics argue that the ten-day event in Warsaw (whether mandated or not) is excessively long, while also falling short of systematically reviewing partici-

pating States' fulfillment of OSCE commitments. Over the past decade, several participating States—including Russia, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and others—have blocked consensus on holding the HDIM.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, the number of GONGO participants at the HDIM/WHDC has increased, as has the presence of civil society actors that do not respect human rights, including anti-rights movements. These groups take up the limited speaking time, diluting meaningful state–civil society cooperation. The Parallel Civil Society Conference, in turn, is viewed by many as more performative than substantive, limiting its ability to motivate new partners to engage with the OSCE. In 2025, the Secretary General of the OSCE did not attend the Parallel Civil Society Conference, further constraining exchanges between civil society and OSCE leadership.

In the OSCE context, the institutionalization of civil society cooperation generally means that participating States and OSCE institutions work with established circles of civil society partners. Funding is often allocated to the same individuals and organizations that regularly engage with OSCE institutions, rather than being used to expand networks of stakeholders.<sup>47</sup> Delegations generally trust the selection of civil society actors proposed by autonomous OSCE institutions, which maintain lists of established partners. Moreover, the Parallel Civil Society Conference is not an open event, and new actors may find it difficult to secure a place among the speakers in Warsaw without

prior exposure to the OSCE. As a result, a genuine tension emerges: How can both civil society and the OSCE expand and renew their circles of partners while also defending against authoritarian actors who exploit this same openness to undermine meaningful OSCE–civil society cooperation?

### Watchdogs

To expand the circle of partners, Finland facilitated informal side events at Chairpersonship meetings throughout 2025, giving both new and established CSO partners the opportunity to exercise their watchdog roles. In Warsaw alone, over 120 side events were organized. Across the year, the Chair also facilitated side events related to all three dimensions at major Chairpersonship meetings, including the Ministerial Council in December. Civil society actors used these opportunities to highlight participating States' (non)compliance with OSCE commitments. Ukrainian civil society actors presented evidence of Russia's violations of human rights and humanitarian law in Ukraine. Other side events highlighted issues such as the growing use of strategic lawsuits against public participation in the United States to silence environmental activists, as well as Azerbaijan's widespread use of GONGOs at COP29.<sup>48</sup>

Finland also opened itself to scrutiny and criticism from independent CSOs through the Helsinki+50 Reflection Process and by commissioning the Finnish

Foundation for Media and Development (Vikes) to assess Finland's implementation of OSCE commitments related to media freedom. In addition, the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs hosted three hearings with domestic CSOs, allowing participants to raise issues directly with the Chairperson-in-Office, the Special Representative on Civil Society, and foreign ministry staff. These were valuable events, as many attendees came from CSOs that did not typically engage with the OSCE. The Special Representative on Civil Society highlighted this approach as best practice for future Chairpersonships,<sup>49</sup> emphasizing that engaging a diverse range of domestic actors is essential to ensuring an inclusive Chairpersonship.

## New initiatives

To promote new forms of both formal and informal civil society cooperation beyond the human dimension, Finland contributed substantially to the OSCE Fund for Civil Society Participation. One key outcome was the Helsinki+50 initiative. The Helsinki+50 Conference, held on July 31, reflected on the past fifty years of the CSCE/OSCE and its relevance in a changing world, while incorporating CSOs as both participants and key speakers. This was followed by the Helsinki+50 Discussions in Finlandia Hall on August 1, where civil society actors and government representatives were brought together to discuss the future of the OSCE—a historic first in that civil society ac-

tors were invited to contribute formally to OSCE political discussions.<sup>50</sup>

In further experimenting with new forms of civil society engagement, Finland supported the OSCE by All project, implemented by Historians without Borders in Finland from January 2024 to May 2025.<sup>51</sup> One key aspect of this project was the introduction of new (environmental) civil society partners to the OSCE, contributing to the Chair's objective of developing the OSCE as a forum for environmental and climate security.<sup>52</sup> Civil society actors involved in the project subsequently played a significant role in planning, designing, and implementing the OSCE Chairpersonship Conference on Climate and Security: Unleashing the Potential of the Comprehensive Approach, which took place in June 2025.<sup>53</sup>

In the first dimension, the Finnish Chairpersonship contributed to a range of events and projects aimed at strengthening cooperation between civil society and think tanks. These efforts included support for the OSCE-wide network of think tanks and for individual workshops organized by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, and the European Leadership Network.<sup>54</sup> Cooperation resulted, for example, in a book on indivisible security and a policy brief on gender-responsive arms control.<sup>55</sup> Collectively, these activities reflect a renewed effort to consider how civil society actors can shape discussions related to the OSCE's first dimension.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, the Chairpersonship published recommendations on how to sustain meaningful engagement with civil society in the OSCE context.<sup>57</sup> These Helsinki Recommendations sought to dispel the myth that civil society is relevant only in the human dimension.

### The limits of civil society—OSCE Cooperation

In the post-2022 European security environment, participating States have ceased negotiating new commitments at the annual Ministerial Council. While consensus on holding the Ministerial Council itself has been maintained, the absence of consensus on holding other key OSCE events meant that the Chairpersonship had to rely on its discretionary authority to invite civil society actors to key tables throughout 2025.<sup>58</sup> The CSO community, as well as CSO-friendly countries such as France, the Netherlands, and Ireland, welcomed this attention for practical reasons: CSOs offer valuable insights, contribute to the design of an integrated, whole-of-society approach to security and resilience, and help raise awareness of local problems and solutions.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, Finland's 2025 efforts to strengthen the status of civil society within the OSCE hierarchy were not universally welcomed. Participants remarked after the Helsinki fiftieth anniversary conference that "the omnipresence of civil society representatives in Helsinki's main and side events risks further frustrating

those states that have for many years criticized the virtual amputation of the OSCE's other two pillars (politico-military and economic and environmental)."<sup>60</sup> Even in Finland, despite substantial political support for civil society, austerity measures led to cuts in government funding for CSOs, particularly for peace organizations.<sup>61</sup> These cuts illustrate some of the contemporary obstacles to further streamlining civil society participation in the OSCE: many still view civil society as relevant primarily to third-dimension discussions and as out of place in a "traditional" hard security context. However, civil society actors operate across all three dimensions, with human rights serving as a key connecting theme.

Reflecting the politicized nature of civil society cooperation with state delegations, the Swiss Chairperson-in-Office for 2026, Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis, did not mention civil society, human rights, or the human dimension in his January 15, 2026, speech officially launching Switzerland's Chairpersonship,<sup>62</sup> despite human rights being a Swiss priority for 2026.<sup>63</sup> It is nevertheless a positive sign that Finland's Special Representative on Civil Society from 2025, Anu Juvonen, continues in her role under the Swiss Chairpersonship, maintaining a degree of continuity with Finland's work in 2025. In another positive development, the Swiss Task Force and the Swiss Helsinki Committee have reestablished the national civil society working group created during the 2014 Swiss Chairpersonship to engage Swiss CSOs with the OSCE. This initia-

tive offers hope that national-level CSO actors will be more consistently incorporated into the implementation of future Chairpersonship programs.

## Recommendations

In an increasingly challenging environment for civic activism, new strategies are needed to protect fundamental freedoms and strengthen the diverse roles civil society actors play in ensuring comprehensive security. The analysis presented above can help guide this work. Rather than replicating the 1990s model, states must be reminded of their international commitments, particularly with regard to fundamental rights, as a minimum requirement for upholding core principles of peace and security. Finland's Chairpersonship helped engage a broader range of stakeholders, but lasting change and a renewed "conscience of Helsinki" among states and citizens will require sustained effort. Building on the momentum of 2025, we offer the following historically informed recommendations to support this process.

First, civil society actors are an essential part of the OSCE's work in times of crisis due to their ability to transcend borders and political divides in ways that diplomats and government representatives cannot. In this vein, *people-to-people contacts should be maintained and facilitated as a fundamental part of the CSCE/OSCE's legacy*. In an age of disinformation and social media, returning to the original

Helsinki objective of human contacts appears more vital than ever. Civil society actors themselves have asserted that they are not bound by the east and west of Vienna dichotomy. OSCE fora, as well as independent bodies such as the CSP, remain among the few remaining platforms where Ukrainian and Russian civil society actors can still meet. Other independent social movements and civil society groups likewise provide important examples of how broader interest in and discussion of the OSCE can be mobilized.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, governments have become increasingly adept at restricting the movement and political activities of individuals who hold unfavorable political views. Human contacts must therefore be reconsidered and actively defended in an era marked by growing polarization, disinformation, surveillance, and repression.

Second, *civil society needs political support*. In-person meetings between decision-makers, diplomats, and civil society representatives are significant signals of state solidarity. In 2025, the Chairperson-in-Office, Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen, revived the best practice of systematically meeting with civil society representatives during field visits. This runs counter to the growing tendency among diplomats and politicians toward disengagement from civil society as violations of the Helsinki Final Act by participating States increase. Numerous examples illustrate that personal contact between diplomats, decision-makers, and civil society actors can encourage greater adherence to Final Act principles. For instance, several

EU diplomats remained at Svetlana Aleksevich's apartment during the Belarusian protests in 2020, preventing her imprisonment. Similarly, former US Ambassador David Pressman participated annually in the Budapest Pride parade, which Viktor Orbán cited as a reason for allowing the event to continue.<sup>65</sup>

Third, *the OSCE should build on Finland's 2025 efforts to incorporate civil society voices across all three dimensions*. While civil society has not historically been a key focus of the OSCE's second dimension, this represents a missed opportunity. Environmental movements are among the most significant international social movements of our time, and civil society participation is now widely seen as essential to the legitimacy of global environmental governance.<sup>66</sup> Environmental CSOs also generate "strategic and high-quality environmental knowledge on environmental conditions, developing and implementing innovative and inspiring sustainable practices [...] and capitalising on existing networks to link professionals from NGOs with individuals to collaboratively work towards transitions."<sup>67</sup> If the OSCE is to adapt to a new era of European security and to remain a meaningful forum for civil society-state cooperation, new partners across a wider range of issue areas must be (re)incorporated.

Fourth, *more sustainable structures for civil society engagement should be established, for example through a civil society troika*. As the troika structure has played an important role in maintaining politi-

cal continuity between Chairpersonships, some have suggested establishing a similar mechanism for sustained civil society engagement. The CSP could coordinate a civil society troika working group, supporting NGO and activist networks seeking to promote public support for a Chairpersonship both domestically and internationally. Such a structure would enable civil society actors to maintain continuity in their advocacy from year to year, amplifying important messages and recommendations from a broad range of actors rather than relying solely on the CSP.

Continuity in civil society engagement is crucial, as initiatives within the CSCE/OSCE have historically developed slowly and recommendations are not always implemented immediately. For example, Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office Dr. h.c. Gernot Erler was regarded by some as an informal liaison between the German Chairpersonship and civil society actors, organizing ninety outreach events for civil society partners throughout 2016.<sup>68</sup> Following recommendations from the CSP that same year,<sup>69</sup> this liaison role gradually evolved into the more formalized position of Special Representative on Civil Society, which has been maintained in the Maltese 2024, Finnish 2025, and Swiss 2026 Chairpersonships. Identifying shared interests between participating States and civil society and gradually developing them through sustained engagement will be critical to finding new ways to uphold the OSCE's comprehensive security philosophy in

practice in a new era of European security.

Fifth, *the OSCE should form a Group of Friends/Task Force on civil society participation in the OSCE*. This group should comprise experts, civil society actors, and diplomats or decision-makers to examine which aspects of civil society participation can be institutionalized most effectively, how to address the challenge posed by GONGOs, and how best to support autonomous networks—historically a strength of the Helsinki Process. As Christian Strohal argued, naming and shaming becomes less effective when states are shameless.<sup>70</sup> Innovation is therefore required in what increasingly appears to be an era without shame, and the Special Representative on Civil Society would be well placed to advise on or lead such efforts.

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