

# Introduction to *OSCE Insights*: Leveraging a Broad Mandate

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## Introduction

We are pleased to present the sixth edition of *OSCE Insights*. This series is the successor to the *OSCE Yearbook*, which the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH) produced from 1995 to 2020. Like previous editions of *OSCE Insights*, this year’s edition presents policy papers by researchers and practitioners on current OSCE topics.

The title of this compilation points to one of the OSCE’s key assets: its broad mandate. While the OSCE is indeed a security organization, its comprehensive security concept means that it is not limited to traditional (military) security. Instead, it covers a wide range of policy fields, with referent objects ranging from international and state security to the security of individuals. A mandate of this breadth is an asset at a time when the OSCE—like many other international organizations—faces severe crises. When contestation and

divergent governmental preferences block progress in certain areas, the organization can prioritize others.

In 2025, Russia’s attempt to destroy Ukraine continued unabated. Russia’s revisionism also undermined the vitality of the OSCE. Its struggle to reassert itself as an important actor in pan-European security was once again underscored at the 2025 Ministerial Council in Vienna, held under the Finnish Chairpersonship, as participating States failed to agree on joint decisions. As in previous years, the strict consensus rule proved a straightjacket in times of crisis. In addition, the OSCE faced a new challenge: a Trump administration that emerged in 2025 as the main obstacle to a consensus decision on the Unified Budget—a signal that US attacks on multilateralism would not spare the OSCE.

Yet despite Russia’s war, the US challenge, the dominant role of deterrence and defense, and the presence of many autocratic states in the OSCE, the OSCE continued not only to exist but to run numerous activities. These included the Support Programme for Ukraine coordi-

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nated through the Secretariat, election observation missions run by ODIHR, and projects in all three dimensions implemented by field operations. This (albeit constrained) operational vitality reflected an understanding on the part of governments that without the OSCE, much would be lost. Moreover, many governments recognized the importance of preserving the OSCE, as future windows of opportunity might allow the Organization to draw on its competitive advantages, in areas such as democratization and peace monitoring.

## Overview of contributions

The contributions to this volume cover a wide range of policy areas, reflecting the broad scope of the OSCE's mandate. Authors discuss climate security, counterterrorism, conflict management, security sector reform, and the promotion of human rights. All contributions highlight challenges to the OSCE's efforts to build security and suggest ways forward.

Alina Viehoff and Raquel Munayer examine the OSCE's role in addressing the security risks of climate change. Even though this topic is contested in the OSCE, their paper demonstrates how, through participatory processes, the Organization has contributed to dialogue and cooperation on this crucial security topic.

Marco Bonabello and Pauline Hennings analyze the involvement of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) in

counterterrorism. That the OSCE PA is largely detached from the "Vienna OSCE" is part of the peculiar structure of the OSCE. In times of crisis, however, when consensus decision-making in Vienna is blocked, this decoupling is an asset—not least because the PA provides more scope for exceptions to the consensus rule than the "other" OSCE. As Bonabello and Hennings demonstrate, the PA has been able to promote counterterrorism efforts, for instance by offering frameworks for national policymaking.

Three papers in this edition of *OSCE Insights* draw lessons from the past for future OSCE activities, with a focus on Ukraine. Fred Tanner reveals the limits of multilateral crisis management in Ukraine from 2014 to Russia's full-scale invasion. He highlights the shortcomings of the complex set of initiatives involving the OSCE that sought to bring peace to Ukraine and draws lessons for future conflict management. Lukasz Mackiewicz also studies the period from 2014 to 2022, focusing on localized ceasefires facilitated by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Despite their shortcomings, these ad hoc arrangements brought concrete benefits, such as enabling humanitarian access. These merits, Mackiewicz argues, suggest that localized ceasefires should be institutionalized as part of future peace operations undertaken amid ongoing hostilities.

Megan Bastick draws lessons from another issue area: gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence. Drawing on findings from Ukraine and

Mali, she shows that security sector reform should include capacity-building to address gender-based violence. The case of Ukraine suggests that such capacity-building should be based on national ownership and involve partnerships with civil society. The OSCE has a role to play here, even if gender-based equality is contested within the OSCE area.

Sebastien Peyrouse examines a practice of contestation in the field of human rights: the presence of government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) in OSCE human dimension meetings. Drawing on research covering the period from 2018 to 2025, he reveals how authoritarian participating States utilize GONGOs to undermine OSCE efforts to promote and support the implementation of human rights commitments. GONGO tactics such as discrediting critics are a standard feature of the international practices employed by authoritarian states. Peyrouse offers recommendations for how the OSCE can defend itself against GONGOs without abandoning its culture of inclusivity.

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