Addressing the Conflict Cycle: The OSCE's Evolving Toolbox

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Abstract:
The year 2021 marks the tenth anniversary of Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/11 on Elements of the Conflict Cycle. Since this key decision was adopted, the Conflict Prevention Centre has been working to strengthen the OSCE's ability to prevent conflicts from escalating into violence, to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution, and to support the building of sustainable peace and security. The OSCE has at its disposal a comprehensive set of conflict cycle tools that can be applied across the OSCE area. While their implementation can always be enhanced by learning lessons from the past and anticipating future challenges, what is urgently required are sufficient OSCE resources and the political will of participating States to make proactive use of relevant instruments.

Keywords:
Conflict prevention, early warning, crisis response, conflict resolution, mediation support, peacebuilding, OSCE

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Introduction

Three decades ago, the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe established the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC),[1] which later became part of the OSCE Secretariat. Since then, the CPC's key role has been to support OSCE participating States in preventing violent conflicts, in resolving them peacefully when they occur, and in building sustainable peace and security. Another vital element of the OSCE's present toolbox was added in 1992 with the final document of the Helsinki Summit, The Challenges of Change,[2] in which participating States agreed to enhance their joint engagement in conflict prevention and resolution, including through the establishment of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). The HCNM is mandated to inform participating States when ethnic tensions threaten to escalate into conflict and thus continues to perform one of the OSCE's most important early warning functions.

In 2011, a further milestone was reached with the adoption of Ministerial Council (MC) Decision No. 3/11 on

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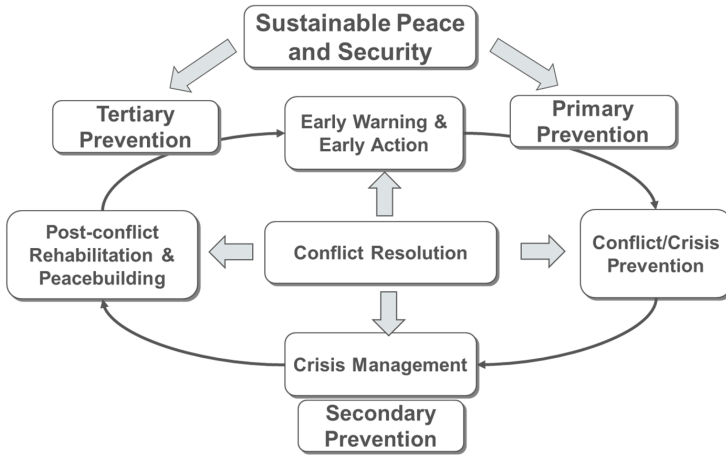
Elements of the Conflict Cycle,[3] which aimed to systematically enhance OSCE capacities for conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management, post-conflict rehabilitation, and peacebuilding. Against this backdrop, this OSCE Insights paper examines, from a CPC perspective, how the OSCE's conflict cycle toolbox has evolved over the past decade and how it can be further strengthened in the future.

Conceptual foundations

The conflict cycle toolbox is based on the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security and thus recognizes that root causes of conflict and instability exist in all three dimensions of security. Among many others, these include military threats between states, socio-economic tensions, environmental degradation, and deficiencies in the rule of law. The multi-dimensional causality of conflict also forms the basis of the OSCE's early warning methodology.[4] Another important conceptual foundation of the conflict cycle toolbox is a "tiered approach" to prevention: primary prevention refers to preventing violent conflict by successfully applying early warning and early action instruments and by implementing long-term measures that address root causes of conflict. Secondary prevention takes place when a conflict escalates into violence. It involves crisis management actions to stop the violence from spreading both in intensity and geographically. Tertiary prevention, which is usually referred to as post-conflict rehabilitation and peacebuilding, aims to hinder the re-emergence of tensions and the recurrence of violent conflict. Efforts to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution should be applied in all three prevention phases.

Figure 1: The CPC's internal conceptual framework for addressing the conflict cycle



OSCE participating States are faced with a multifaceted web of diverse and overlapping security challenges and complex conflicts, many of which are neither exclusively intra-state nor inter-state in nature.[5] Accordingly, the OSCE monitors a wide range of conflict settings and an increasing number of transnational and regional security threats, both inside the OSCE area and in neighbouring regions.

The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security and the "tiered approach" to prevention allow for sufficient flexibility in addressing a wide range of conflict settings. This flexibility is critical in a highly dynamic security environment, not least because many conflicts do not evolve in a linear fashion but vacillate between times of latent and acute crisis. Moreover, because multiple conflicts with varying levels of violence can exist in the same country or region, various OSCE actors may simultaneously be engaged in conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation. As a result, specific attention must be paid to coordination and cooperation within and between OSCE executive structures to ensure mutually reinforcing approaches.

The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security and the "tiered approach" to prevention also necessitate a holistic conception of peacebuilding, comparable to that on which the United Nation's Sustaining Peace Agenda is founded. Accordingly, peacebuilding instruments that facilitate non-violent conflict resolution and address root causes of conflict should be applied throughout the conflict cycle rather than in post-conflict environments alone.

Picking up the signals: Early warning and situational awareness

Effective early warning is fundamental to the OSCE's conflict cycle toolbox, providing policymakers with analytical assessments of risks and conflict dynamics. Early warning analysis helps to identify entry points for short-term operational prevention aimed at averting violent escalation. It also provides options for long-term structural prevention and peacebuilding related to areas such as democratic governance, economic and environmental affairs, the security sector, and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms – all of which are addressed by various OSCE executive structures within their respective mandates.

In line with MC Decision No. 3/11, the CPC acts as an OSCE-wide early warning focal point. As such, it provides early warning reports to the OSCE Chair and the Secretary General (SG) and builds the capacities of OSCE field operations to conduct early warning and conflict analysis. The CPC also coordinates a network of early warning focal points in all OSCE executive structures, which is a crucial asset for sharing information and expertise, not only on early warning but also on other conflict cycle tools, such as dialogue facilitation, mediation, crisis management, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. The network plays a key role in fostering an early warning culture among its members, keeping the OSCE's eye on prevailing trends and scanning the horizon for emerging risks. These include transnational and regional security threats and unprecedented challenges

such as the COVID-19 crisis, the wide-ranging impact of which has increased the risk of political instability and tension in some parts of the OSCE area.

The prerequisite for successful early warning is comprehensive situational awareness, which the OSCE maintains by tracking relevant developments throughout its area and beyond. While the organization's early warning capacities benefit immensely from the OSCE's field presence in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia,[6] situational awareness must not be limited to those areas that host field operations if early warning is to be effective. To this end, the CPC's Situation/Communications Room (SitRoom) plays a key role by monitoring relevant developments in all 57 participating States and the OSCE's neighbouring regions. On a 24/7 basis, it follows open media sources, providing breaking news and regular updates to the Chair, the SG, and the Secretariat's senior management.[7] During crises, the SitRoom plays a vital role in the security chain between the Secretariat and field operations, which is especially critical outside official working hours.

To keep abreast of information requirements related to prevailing and emerging security challenges, SitRoom staff are briefed on relevant thematic issues, such as transnational threats. The SitRoom also integrates new digital technologies for open-source monitoring and reporting into its daily activities, when possible. In today's complex environment, increased attention must be given to security challenges posed by political fragmentation, polarization, nationalism, radicalization, and populism, all of which affect a growing number of participating States to various degrees. Moreover, in the age of social media and fake news, latent conflicts may be pushed towards violent escalation more rapidly than before. While tensions may take a long time to build up beneath the surface, a tiny "virtual spark" can quickly ignite the flames. Therefore, a SitRoom with sufficient capacities to monitor and report on such developments in real time is now more important than ever.

The SitRoom's capacities are currently insufficient to pay the same level of attention to every development in the OSCE area and its neighbouring regions. Sharing expertise, best practices, and open-source information with the crisis centres and situation rooms of other international organizations (such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union) is therefore crucial and should be encouraged as much as possible. In addition, further efforts are required with regard to systematically collecting information from a growing number of initiatives and projects engaged in conflict and crisis mapping.[8] Moreover, as MC Decision No. 3/11 highlights, early warning is also the responsibility of participating States. Accordingly, one way to strengthen the OSCE's early warning capacities would be for participating States to share relevant, unclassified situational awareness information with the CPC's SitRoom.

MC Decision No. 3/11 also mandates the SG to provide formal early warnings to the OSCE Permanent Council (PC) in Vienna. This mandate was a significant development, as the provision of formal

early warning signals had previously been limited to the HCNM.[9] Despite this mandate, the SG has only issued two formal early warnings to the PC since 2011. The first formal early warning was issued in December 2012 in relation to a possible violent escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.[10] The second formal early warning came in November 2018 following an incident between Russian and Ukrainian naval vessels in the Kerch Strait.[11]

Formal early warning should be used as a last resort. Early warning is not an exercise in naming and shaming but a crucial prerequisite for effective conflict prevention. Accordingly, early warning needs to be conducted in a "do no harm" manner, freeing the way for preventive efforts, including silent diplomacy. Before issuing a formal early warning, the OSCE Chair and the SG will therefore make use of different forums to express concern about emerging tensions and to facilitate discussions about preventive action. For example, the SG's weekly report to the PC has been used on numerous occasions to deliver what could be considered an informal early warning.

Some participating States would like the SG to have greater visibility when it comes to early warning, including through facilitating exchanges between participating States on possible responses. In line with the clear early warning mandate given to the SG in MC Decision No. 3/11, consideration could be given to augmenting the SG's reporting to the PC through regular early warning reports that would contribute to enabling participating States' early engagement related to emerging trends, including with regard to transnational and regional security issues.

A key challenge for OSCE early warning and the SG's role in it is politicization. While all participating States supported the development of a more systematic and structured approach to early warning in MC Decision No. 3/11, not all of them are equally supportive of its practical implementation. Some participating States may wish to be exempt from early warning monitoring, considering it a stigma or an intrusion on sovereignty.

However, no participating State is immune to crisis. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is the most recent example in this regard. Therefore, systematic early warning efforts and over-the-horizon scanning must cover the entire OSCE area and beyond, as these are essential to assessing emerging trends and future risks.[12] When providing the SG and the OSCE Chair with timely assessments of relevant developments, the CPC pays the utmost attention to preventing the politicization of its early warning analyses. Accordingly, the CPC provides early warning reporting and early action advice in a confidential manner. OSCE Chairs must make active use of the CPC's early warning function. They must also provide the SG and the CPC with the political support needed to carry out their early warning mandate,[13] taking the "political heat" if required to protect this critical part of the conflict cycle toolbox.

Early action and crisis management: Learning lessons for the future

Following the adoption of MC Decision No. 3/11, a number of immediate steps were taken to enhance the OSCE's capacities for crisis response. One was the establishment of the "Virtual Pool of Equipment", which allows for the swift transfer of essential assets (such as armoured vehicles) between OSCE field operations. Another was the "Rapid Deployment Roster", which allows first responders from OSCE executive structures to be quickly deployed to set up new field operations or to temporarily augment existing ones. In addition, the "Operational Framework for Crisis Response" was developed for use by the OSCE Secretariat to take coordinated action in response to crises in line with lessons learned and best practices. All three instruments proved critical in the planning and deployment of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) in March 2014.[14]

The SMM has been the most challenging OSCE field operation since the Kosovo Verification Mission in 1998,[15] which was also deployed in a complex security environment and in the context of a violent crisis. While the SMM started out as a preventive deployment to help address the deteriorating security situation in Ukraine, it quickly became a full-fledged crisis management operation. The rapidly worsening security environment in eastern Ukraine created unprecedented operational risks for the civilian monitoring mission.

The Mission's evolving tasks and activities, in particular ceasefire monitoring in eastern Ukraine, have required a steep learning curve for the OSCE that has not yet fully flattened.[16] Together with other parts of the Secretariat, the CPC has been helping the SMM to continuously adapt its operations, staffing, and assets. The provision of such support is resource intensive, however, and the number of staff within the CPC is the minimum of what is needed to facilitate operational support,[17] not only for the SMM but for all 16 OSCE field operations.

The SMM is not only a *sui generis* mission but also a pivotal example of a complex peace operation. As such, it provides many valuable lessons for the OSCE. One of the key lessons to be learned for future field missions deployed under similar circumstances is that they require a different staffing model than more "traditional" OSCE field operations, which are mostly focused on programmatic and project activities. Complex peace operations require robust management and leadership frameworks, as well as senior staff with experience in high-risk environments. They also need staff with medical, engineering, infrastructure, and demining expertise and highly qualified security personnel, who understand the essential nexus between operations and security.

To benefit from the experience of the SMM's initial planning and deployment and the Mission's expansion in the wake of the Minsk agreements,[18] the CPC engaged in an extensive lessons-learning exercise in 2015.[19] Based on a tasking from the German OSCE Chair in 2016, the CPC then led a Secretariat-wide effort to develop a set of 20 internal standard

operating procedures (SOPs) for effective action in urgent response situations. These SOPs provide good practices for both new and existing field operations on mission structure, command and control, operational reporting, and the rapid deployment of human resources, among others. Based on the insights gained from the responses of OSCE field operations to the COVID-19 crisis, these SOPs could be further developed in the future.

The lessons (being) learned from the SMM are not limited to the establishment of new missions or the restructuring of existing ones under changing circumstances on the ground. They also encompass lessons related to a wide range of new technologies that are applied as part of the SMM's monitoring operations.[20] The use of satellite imagery, acoustic sensors, camera systems, and drones as part of a civilian peace operation has thrust the OSCE into the forefront in this field, offering many valuable lessons not only for the organization but also for the international community at large. A related aspect is how to manage the enormous amount of data gathered with technological monitoring tools. Accordingly, the CPC is assisting the SMM in enhancing its information management capacities, including the implementation of a mission-wide geospatial information system.

The good practices established by the SMM in technical monitoring constitute a significant enhancement of the OSCE's conflict cycle toolbox. To capture lessons from past and present OSCE field operations, including the SMM and its technological innovations, the CPC is developing a reference guide on monitoring in all phases of the conflict cycle. It aims to institutionalize the extensive knowledge of OSCE missions that conduct monitoring in support of their mandated activities. Moreover, building on the SMM's experience, the CPC is now recruiting an Associate Technology Officer, who will support executive structures on technological issues related to monitoring and surveillance.[21]

Learning lessons is important for future crisis response. However, crisis management – as in eastern Ukraine – should remain the exception, while preventing violent crises and resolving conflicts peacefully should always be the rule. Conflict prevention requires successful early action, and the OSCE's toolbox contains a multitude of well-established instruments, such as OSCE mechanisms and procedures,[22] confidence-building measures,[23] and Special or Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office (CiO). For example, the latter instrument was used by the 2017 Austrian OSCE Chair to conduct silent diplomacy during the political crisis in the then former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Other important instruments include fact-finding missions, which can be used with the support of the receiving country to gather information or to engage in dialogue facilitation, confidence building, and preventive diplomacy. One preventive deployment, which included both fact-finding and dialogue-facilitation elements, was the OSCE National Dialogue Project in Ukraine in spring 2014.[24] Another instrument was the OSCE Community Security Initiative

in the south of Kyrgyzstan from October 2010 to December 2015, which made an important contribution to building confidence between the local population and the police.[25]

The early warning–early action gap is a key impediment to successful conflict prevention and resolution. This is usually related not to a lack of early warning analyses or early action instruments but rather to a lack of political will to make full use of existing early action tools. Moreover, as a soft power organization, the OSCE can apply its crisis response capacities effectively only if local actors on the ground show good faith and take a cooperative approach.

To help bridge the early warning–early action gap, in 2018, the CPC developed the internal "Early Warning–Early Action Matrix", which provides a broad overview of possible early action measures that can be taken, *inter alia*, by OSCE Chairs and executive structures. The CPC also engages in a crisis simulation exercise (SIMEX) with incoming OSCE Chairs before the start of their term to prepare them for the practical application of crisis response instruments. Based on a fictitious scenario, the SIMEX provides incoming Chairs with an opportunity to apply existing OSCE tools and procedures while responding to an evolving crisis and to clarify their crisis response responsibilities, procedures, and decision-making processes.

The crown jewel of the toolbox: The facilitation of peaceful conflict resolution

Supporting the peaceful resolution of conflicts through mediation and dialogue facilitation is at the heart of the OSCE's mandate.[26] With its comprehensive approach to security, the OSCE is in a unique position to foster community-level, regional, and state-to-state dialogue on various conflict-related issues. Given the complexity of today's conflicts and conflict-resolution processes, institutionalized, systematic, and structured mediation support is needed more than ever.[27] Mediators must be able to handle the complexity of the conflicts they deal with if they are to assist the parties in finding common ground and developing joint solutions. Therefore, mediators and their teams require dedicated support in conflict analysis, process design, and micro skills, for example process analysis and communication techniques.

In MC Decision No. 3/11, participating States tasked the SG to prepare a proposal on how to "maximize the continuity, consistency and effectiveness of OSCE engagement in conflict mediation and to strengthen the role of OSCE mediators".[28] In fulfillment of this task, a Mediation Support Team (MST) comprised of three Mediation Support Officers was established within the CPC and acts as an OSCE-wide focal point for dialogue facilitation, mediation, and mediation support.[29] Now an indispensable instrument, the MST serves to strengthen the OSCE's capacity to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution. In support of all OSCE execu-

tive structures and participating States, its main activities include:[30]

- facilitating the development of mediation strategies;
- providing advice on mediation and dialogue processes;
- facilitating in-depth conflict analysis;
- providing thematic briefings and skills coaching for high-level OSCE mediators, such as CiO Special Representatives and heads of OSCE field operations;
- facilitating platforms for exchange among mediators;
- debriefing OSCE mediators to identify lessons and good practices;
- providing operational guidance on mediation-related topics;
- providing training for OSCE staff in mediation and dialogue facilitation skills;
- facilitating expert deployments in support of mediation processes.

With the growing need for mediation support, the MST has seen a corresponding increase in demand for its activities. An expanded MST would allow for more dedicated mediation support to be provided to high-level mediators dealing with protracted conflicts in the OSCE area. The dialogue facilitation and mediation activities of OSCE field operations would also benefit from an expanded MST, as it could provide more process support. It could also provide more assistance to field operations in developing their own mediation support capacities. This has already been done for the SMM, and by increasing the number of specialized mediation and dialogue facilitation officers in field operations, an OSCE-internal network of mediation support structures could be created.

The MST continuously explores new ways to strengthen the OSCE's conflict resolution instruments. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, the MST researched and developed a structured approach to identifying windows of opportunity for peace processes. From a process design point of view, this approach provides ideas on how to induce positive dynamics in ongoing peace processes in times of acute crisis. Another area of MST research is supporting so-called insider mediators – those mediators who live within and are thus intrinsic to a conflict context and may be better placed to engage with conflict actors than external third parties.[31] Acknowledging that local, indigenous, and insider methods of dealing with conflict enhance peace and stability over the long term, supporting insider mediators puts local efforts at the centre of peacebuilding.

A further topic at the centre of the MST's research is the meaningful inclusion of women in peace processes. Women's experiences of conflict and violence differ from men's. Therefore, by including women's perspectives in conflict resolution efforts, the diverse needs of affected societies can be better addressed. Accordingly, women's participation as mediators and/or negotiators in peace processes can increase the likelihood of reaching an agreement and can reduce the risk of relapsing into conflict. To this end, in 2019, the MST and the

Secretariat's Gender Section developed the toolkit Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes, which provides practical advice and recommendations on how to achieve more gender-responsive dialogue and mediation processes.[32]

Focusing on sustainability: Structural prevention and peacebuilding

The OSCE has extensive experience in working to address root causes of conflict and instability through the long-term programmatic work of its executive structures. This includes efforts by the three autonomous institutions, the Secretariat, and the OSCE's field operations. More than 80 per cent of OSCE staff work in the field, carrying out programmes to support the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments in all three dimensions of security. These activities aim to build lasting peace and security through comprehensive support on a wide range of topics, from combating violent radicalization and extremism, trafficking in human beings, hate crimes, and corruption to assisting the good governance and reform efforts of host countries related to elections, education, and/or the security sector – to name just a few.

Building sustainable peace and security is a long-term effort that requires patience, perseverance, prudent planning, and foresight. Field operations must ensure that their support is tied to the evolving needs and priorities of their host countries. To that end, the OSCE works with a plethora of actors on the ground, including governmental agencies, public administrations, civil society, and non-governmental organizations. Accordingly, field operations can play an important bridge-building function by engaging governmental and civil society actors in joint efforts in support of OSCE commitments and principles.

To draw lessons from the longstanding expertise of OSCE field operations, the CPC produced a reference guide in 2018 that provides insights into the structural prevention and peacebuilding activities of OSCE field operations in South-Eastern Europe.[33] The reference guide highlights OSCE support to host countries in seven thematic areas – institution-building, community security, education, electoral reform, reconciliation, diversity, and people-to-people contact. It also shows how OSCE peacebuilding efforts complement the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),[34] in particular SDG 16 to promote peaceful and inclusive societies.

A key lesson from the reference guide is that the OSCE's work is most effective if delivered in a context-specific and conflict-sensitive manner, taking into account historical and societal developments on the ground. Therefore, to improve the OSCE's ability to build lasting peace and security by addressing root causes of conflict and instability in a structured and systematic manner, the CPC has partnered with the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution to develop the first-ever OSCE Peacebuilding Course for OSCE staff from different executive structures.

One important area where more effort is needed to capture OSCE lessons is the gender mainstreaming of long-term conflict prevention and peacebuilding work. Another is the active engagement of youth in addressing prevailing and emerging security challenges, as young people can be forceful catalysts for positive societal change. A third area of critical importance to structural prevention and peacebuilding is the support given by the OSCE to interested participating States in the area of security sector governance and reform (SSG/R), for example with respect to the democratic control of the armed forces. The CPC plays a central role in these efforts, including by coordinating a network of SSG/R focal points in OSCE executive structures.

Although different OSCE executive structures have been providing SSG/R-related support for many years, it was only in 2014 that the first steps toward a more systematic and structured approach to SSG/R were taken. The then Swiss OSCE Chair initiated a process to develop SSG/R guidelines for OSCE staff,[35] published in 2016. Together with SSG/R focal points in executive structures, the CPC promotes the implementation of these guidelines and helps OSCE staff and mission members to develop the capacities required for their practical application. A review of the guidelines is currently underway, with a second edition to be published in 2021.

SSG/R was also given particular attention when Slovakia chaired the OSCE in 2019. At the Ministerial Council in Bratislava, Slovakia and 43 other participating States highlighted SSG/R as a crucial part of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security.[36] Moreover, in March 2019, the SG reported to participating States on the efforts made since 2014 to develop a more coherent and coordinated approach to SSG/R that builds on the OSCE's comparative advantages.[37] He stressed that the concept of SSG/R is embedded in core OSCE principles and commitments, such as the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security (1994), and called for SSG/R to be further integrated into the conflict cycle toolbox, thus leveraging the added value of SSG/R in conflict prevention.

A security sector that is accountable and inclusive and that abides by the rule of law can effectively contribute to building sustainable peace and security. While SSG/R remains a fundamentally national process, the OSCE is well placed to support the implementation of national priorities, particularly through its field operations. The OSCE has established a long track record of successfully supporting national security sector institutions and related actors, such as parliaments and civil society organizations. Accordingly, the CPC will continue to work on a coherent and systematic approach to SSG/R as a key peacebuilding instrument within the conflict cycle toolbox. In this regard, further topics can be explored, such as the inclusion of SSG/R-related provisions in ceasefire and peace agreements and the contribution of SSG/R to addressing the (organized) crime–conflict nexus.

Sharing expertise and knowledge: Leveraging partnerships

The CPC's efforts to further enhance OSCE capacities to address the different phases of the conflict cycle benefit from strong partnerships with other international and regional organizations. For example, the CPC shares expertise and best practices on conflict cycle tools with the European Union External Action Service (EEAS) as part of a so-called structured working-level dialogue. The CPC's MST also maintains regular contact with the mediation support structures in the EEAS and the UN Secretariat. By partnering with the UN's Mediation Support Unit, the MST has access to the UN Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers, who can be rapidly deployed to advise a wide range of mediation and preventive diplomacy issues. Regular and active collaboration with the UN and the EEAS also takes place with regard to SSG/R.

The OSCE's cooperation with the UN Department of Field Support resulted in the signing of a Letter of Understanding in 2017 that established collaborative arrangements for enhancing technical capacities and expertise. Based on the Letter of Understanding, the OSCE is able to access UN systems contracts, for example in the area of procurement, and technical training programmes, which provide cost-effective and rapid access to resources for early action and crisis response.

The CPC also enjoys fruitful engagement with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). In 2014, together with the UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE and Vienna-based UN agencies, the CPC published a Protection Checklist that addresses displacement and the protection of displaced populations and affected communities in all phases of the conflict cycle.[38] Since then, the CPC and UNHCR have been providing joint capacity building on the Protection Checklist's practical application for OSCE and UNHCR staff on the ground in field operations.

Conclusion

The OSCE's conflict cycle toolbox has significantly evolved since the early 1990s. The adoption and implementation of MC Decision No. 3/11 was vital to that end. The toolbox includes a solid set of instruments that can be applied across the OSCE area. While the implementation of conflict cycle tools can always be enhanced, what is urgently required are sufficient OSCE resources to do so and the political will of participating States to make proactive use of relevant instruments and mandates.[39]

With the growing complexity of today's security challenges, the OSCE must be ready to make a meaningful contribution to conflict prevention and peacebuilding whenever and wherever it can within its broad geographical area. To that end, flexibility is required, as are sufficient financial and human resources. As the cost of crisis management far outweighs the cost of preventive action,[40] countless dividends arise from investing in structural prevention and peacebuilding activities. Nonetheless, recent years have witnessed a continuous decrease in

the OSCE's Unified Budget, constraining the organization's ability to respond to emerging tensions and to address root causes of conflict. Political will is needed now more than ever to unleash the OSCE's immense potential and make full use of its mandate and capacities.

The tenth anniversary of MC Decision No. 3/11 in 2021, during Sweden's OSCE Chairpersonship, provides an excellent opportunity to take stock of the conflict cycle toolbox, including ways to further strengthen relevant instruments and adapt them to newly emerging security challenges. In that context, participating States could reaffirm the commitments they made ten years ago in MC Decision No. 3/11, for example in a commemorative declaration at the 2021 Ministerial Council. By acknowledging the important work done since the adoption of MC Decision No. 3/11, participating States would provide new impetus to OSCE endeavours to enhance the conflict cycle toolbox, reinvigorating efforts in the areas of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and sustainable peacebuilding.

Notes

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