

„The role of Switzerland in European peacebuilding“

Concluding report: 3rd Security Talk of May, 10, 2019, University of Bern

More than 60 interested persons attended the third Security Talk of the SWISS SECURITY FORUM. Representatives from European embassies, the business community, public authorities and students met to exchange views on the important role of the OSCE and Switzerland's commitment to peacebuilding in Europe. In his keynote speech, OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger made it unmistakably clear how much the geostrategic architecture has changed worldwide in recent years, leading to new conflicts and crises. This makes the tasks of multilateral organizations such as the OSCE massively more difficult, as the example of Ukraine clearly shows. In the panel discussion, four Swiss experts from various institutions explained why Switzerland can and must perform important tasks in complex missions to contain conflicts and promote peace - especially as a neutral, non-aligned and independent country.

Thomas Greminger, Secretary General of the OSCE and former Ambassador, first informed the participants about the history, structure and principles of the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*, or OSCE for short. With 57 member states from North America, Asia and Europe, the OSCE is today the world's largest regional security organization. The origins of the OSCE go back to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), probably the **most important forum for dialogue between East and West** during the Cold War. Various conferences were held within the framework of the CSCE in the 1970s and 1980s, which generated a growing number of **political commitments** (*soft law*) and contributed to the development of what is today a strong OSCE acquis.

A unique advantage of the OSCE, given today's political tensions, is that **from Vancouver to Vladivostok everyone is sitting at the same table**, large and small countries, both the United States and Russia. The OSCE has a comprehensive concept of security and is a permanent platform for dialogue: The 57 ambassadors of the OSCE member states meet weekly and strive for practical cooperation (see Figure 1).

Was ist die OSZE?

Was macht uns aus?

- Inklusive Mitgliedschaft
- Umfassenden Sicherheitsbegriff
- Starkes Fundament von Grundsätzen und politischen Verpflichtungen
- Plattform des ständigen Dialogs
- Spezialisiertes Know-how und Toolbox
- Engagement vor Ort



Figure 1: Characteristics of the OSCE

Conflict management in the Ukraine as a core task

One important task of the OSCE is conflict prevention. On the one hand, this **includes early, preventive measures** to avoid crises, and on the other, dealing with **acute security crises**, such as in Ukraine. According to OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger, crisis management in and around Ukraine is currently the top priority of the OSCE: With around 1,400 employees, **the OSCE special observation mission** there is the largest of its kind. 80% of the funds are used to monitor the ceasefire in the Donbass. The mission provides the international community with objective reporting from the conflict area. However, through constant intervention, it also brings about local ceasefires. These **windows of silence** are essential for the civilian population, as only in this way can basic infrastructures such as drinking water, heating or electricity be maintained.

The OSCE is engaged in conflict management not only in Ukraine, but also in the context of the **long-term conflicts** in Moldova (Transnistria), Georgia (South Ossetia, Abkhazia) and Armenia/Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh). Thomas Greminger explained that the OSCE basically has two tasks in these conflicts: On the one hand, it plays a supporting role in the mediation process and on the other hand, it tries to prevent the conflicts from escalating further.

Comprehensive concept of security of the OSCE

In the military-political area, the OSCE mainly works with the creation of **confidence- and security-building measures** and is active in the field of arms control. Concrete projects include, for example, the destruction of small arms and light weapons, the disposal of dangerous chemicals or mine clearance. Questions of the military-political dimension are dealt with within the framework of the **Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC)** of the OSCE, which Switzerland presided over from January to April 2019. In the non-military field, the OSCE has been dealing for many years with a large number of **transnational threats** which, by definition, can only be tackled in cooperation, such as the fight against terrorism and confidence-building in cyberspace.

However, the OSCE is concerned not only with classic security risks, but also with the areas of the *economy and the environment, human rights and freedom and development of the media*. For example, it supports certain member states in expanding and securing **transnational transport routes** and energy networks, switching to **sustainable forms of energy** or using new digital technologies. With regard to human rights, racism and xenophobia are combated and states are called upon to **account for compliance** with their obligations.

Polarization and deal making challenge multilateralism

The currently highly polarized, antagonistic, unpredictable and unstable security environment poses a major challenge for the work of the OSCE, Thomas Greminger stressed. The **declining willingness to cooperate** and the **low level of trust** among the key actors in Euro-Atlantic security are particularly problematic. The OSCE Secretary General made it clear: "We are at a time when multilateralism in general is under fire. At the moment, unilateralism, bilateralism and deal-making seem to be more fashionable than approaches of cooperative problem-solving and security. This inevitably has an impact on the work of the OSCE.»

While hard security or territorial security are flourishing again today, every single franc is being turned over when investing in cooperative security. There is a **climate of confrontation**: the OSCE debates are more strongly marked than in the past by recriminations and the repetition of eternally identical positions, which often could come directly from the websites of the respective foreign ministries. "Many of the political commitments that the OSCE made in the 1990s would probably no longer find consensus today," said Thomas Greminger.

Internationaler Kontext

- Zunehmende Polarisierung
- Mangel an Vertrauen
(zwischenstaatlich und innerhalb der Staaten)
- Krise der multilateralen Ordnung/multilaterale Institutionen werden in Frage gestellt
- Bedrohungen und Herausforderungen stets größer und komplexer
- Gefahr gewaltsamer Konflikte steigt



Figure 2: Challenges in the international context

Four approaches to strengthen cooperative security

In view of the blocked formal dialog forums, the OSCE Secretary General believes it is essential to create **informal dialog spaces** for constructive problem-solving. Secondly, **convergences of interest** (e.g. counter-terrorism, cyber security or human trafficking) must be used to restore trust between states. Thirdly, partnerships between various multilateral organizations and civil society actors must be developed to exploit the potential for synergies. Ultimately, however, the internal reform of the OSCE is also crucial in order to be able to meet future, growing challenges. All this, however, requires that the individual OSCE States recognize the **advantages of co-operative security** and make the best possible use of the OSCE's tools, said Thomas Greminger.

Alarming security situation in Europe

In the ensuing panel discussion, led by FSS Managing Director Fredy Müller, the role of Switzerland in European peacebuilding was examined from a variety of perspectives. In addition to Thomas Greminger, representatives from politics, the Swiss Peace Foundation *swisspeace*, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the Swiss military took part.

Asked about the general security situation in Europe, Thomas Greminger emphasized that the situation in Europe at present is quite alarming. As examples he cited the conflict situation in the Donbass and the annexation of Crimea. The **cooperative security architecture** built up over the past decades is **crumbling**, and military risk management has once again become an issue. David Lanz, Head of Conflict Mediation at the Swiss Peace Foundation *swisspeace*, confirmed that the security situation in Europe has become more unpredictable - but with the OSCE and its broad range of instruments one has an ideal organization to respond to major crises. Although the Ukrainian crisis could not be resolved, the containment of the conflict was already an achievement. Romain Thomas Markwalder, Deputy Coordinator OSCE at the FDFA, also stated that continuous progress was indeed not very realistic in the current state of the European security architecture.

Neglect of an international perspective in parliament

There is a certain basic consensus across all parties about the importance of Switzerland's foreign policy activities in peacebuilding, according to Beat Flach, National Councillor for the GLP and member of the Security Policy Commission. However, the clear changes in the security policy environment in Europe are not reflected enough in the work of the Security Policy Commission. Switzerland's security policy has a strong focus on the Swiss Armed Forces; the fact that one lives only a few hours flight time away from a major trouble spot and therefore has to **invest in security outside the country's borders** is often forgotten, according to the GLP National Councillor.

Thomas Greminger replied that no single country in the world can master its security policy challenges all by itself. He said that cooperative approaches were indispensable, particularly for key future problems such as the security policy consequences of **artificial intelligence** or **climate change**. "Confidence killers", such as the Ukrainian conflict, must therefore be tackled directly if progress is to be considered at all.

Plea for small steps and pragmatis

"We must all be aware that European and international conflicts also directly affect Switzerland, whether through economic costs, migration or the threat of terrorism. We must therefore invest in the ability to resolve these conflicts," said David Lanz. The **total global cost of armed violence** amounts to **USD 15 trillion** annually. According to the *swisspeace* representative, this fact alone is an incentive to increase investment in conflict management and conflict resolution.

Often overarching political solutions are not immediately possible. However, small steps can create a basis for resolving the conflict later within a changed political context. Thomas Greminger also stressed that solution approaches must be sought under the political radar when the political process is blocked. In this way, trust can be built up and a **humanitarian impact** achieved.

Non-aligned Switzerland as a credible actor without a regional agenda

At this point David Lanz drew on experience from his previous work at the OSCE, where he himself had been sent to Ukraine. The positive contributions of the special observation mission in Ukraine were only possible, he said, because the OSCE takes a pragmatic approach and is active both on the government-controlled side and in the separatist-controlled area. Neutral and non-aligned Switzerland played an important role in this process, which earned it great international recognition. Thomas Greminger confirmed this point. As an impartial, unsuspected actor without a regional agenda and with highly professional diplomacy, Switzerland has much to offer in this area. However, this alone is not enough - without **political will** and the OSCE chairmanship in 2014, Switzerland would not have been able to play such a central role in the Ukrainian conflict. In this context, the OSCE Secretary General hopes that Switzerland will continue to invest and position and profile itself as a pioneer of cooperative security.

The FSC Chairmanship of Switzerland in the OSCE

Romain Thomas Markwalder of the FDFA added that in the OSCE today one must work with what is available. In concrete terms, these are the commitments that the states made decades ago. It is important to strengthen the currently weakening multilateralism and to stress that the OSCE as a **security community is at the service of the people**. "During the FSC Chairmanship, therefore, we have

not attempted to reinvent the wheel, but have promoted the mutual understanding of the participating States so that they can better implement the **existing commitments**," said the FDFA representative. This approach has enabled small but concrete progress to be made. However, the short, four-month FSC Chairmanship until mid-April 2019 is in no way comparable in scope to the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship of 2014.

Peacebuilding as a moral obligation of Switzerland

Margret Kiener Nellen, SP National Councillor and President of the OSCE delegation of the Swiss Federal Assembly, underlined in this context the excellent support of the parliamentary OSCE delegation by Swiss diplomacy, the FDFA and the DDPS Department of Defence. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has important **instruments of parliamentary oversight** at its disposal. These allow the parliaments to hold their respective governments to account in the implementation of their commitments. "Ever since I saw the charred faces of the men in the hospital in Dnipropetrovsk, I have known that I must use my time and also that of my delegation to conduct talks and open the way for negotiations.»

The Bernese National Councillor added that, as a woman, Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council was also close to her heart, according to which gender parity applies in principle in peace negotiations, mediation and conciliation, meaning that women must be represented equally to men in negotiations. In conclusion, Margret Kiener Nellen emphasized that in the OSCE area one must mutate to a **culture of peace**, away from a culture of war.

Beat Flach expressed his conviction that Switzerland, as a small player in an increasingly complex world, is called upon to further promote dialogue and secure peace accordingly. This is in **Switzerland's own interest**, especially since freedom of alliance also means having no allies. Switzerland has to tighten screw after screw. "Having peace is not something that can be taken for granted in a Europe that has been at war for centuries," said the GLP National Councillor from Aargau. In this context, Switzerland must take responsibility, not lose hope and counteract the destabilization of Europe.

Switzerland's role in peacebuilding in Kosovo

The last part of the panel discussion focused on the role of the Swiss Army in Kosovo within the framework of Swisscoy, with an expert in Colonel Reto Ulrich Flühmann, who was commander of Swisscoy in 2014, providing information. Colonel Flühmann explained that Switzerland has been making a small but important contribution to peacebuilding in Kosovo for the past 20 years. During his time at Swisscoy, he was able to speak with locals in a multinational team, observe the situation and prevent the flare-up of further conflicts.

In response to the somewhat provocative question posed by the discussion leader as to whether the mission in Kosovo was still needed at all, Reto Flühmann said that the mission in Kosovo was not simply over because there was no more shooting. Only thanks to the presence of KFOR [Kosovo Force] was the situation still stable. But the tasks of Swisscoy have changed considerably in recent years: Swiss infantrymen are no longer on the ground, but there has been increased investment in **building up a capacity for dialogue** with the population and key political figures. "We are visible in Kosovo, but we also take care of the problems of the locals," says Reto Ulrich Flühmann. He said that peace building

begins on a very small scale. Swisscoy cannot solve the conflict alone with its commitment. However, by **communicating the needs of the population** to NGOs or other nations, Switzerland can make a significant contribution. "In Kosovo, 1,300 kilometers away from us, four brothers still share a windbreaker in winter". In order to make a difference, one often does not have to look that far, the Swisscoy representative concluded.

In her closing words, Claudia Hollenstein, Vice President of the FSS, thanked the experts present for their valuable remarks and the participants for their great interest. At the same time, she urged them to spread the important knowledge gained at the event so that it could reach as many people as possible.

Wir danke unserem Event-Partner:

