

Briefing Paper: The Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship 2021

Author:

Mathilde Roedenbeck

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Nordic Countries Project

OSCE

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is a consensus-based organization with 57 participating States in Europe, Central Asia and North America. OSCE has its origins in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) which started during the Cold War and was a series of meetings where the states who took part, worked to keep the peace in Europe. In 1975 the Helsinki Final Act was signed, which was one of the groundworks for establishing a European security order. The Helsinki Final Act was followed by the Paris Charter in 1990. OSCE was developed to its current form 1994 when the CSCE became an international organization, which is the largest regional security organization. The last time Sweden held the OSCE Chairpersonship was in 1993¹.

What Sweden wants to prioritize

The aim with Sweden's Chairpersonship 2021 is to focus on the basic principles of the OSCE through the program "Back to Basics"². This includes defending the European security order, addressing protracted conflicts and enhancing democracy and gender equality. The Chairperson-in-Office (CiO), the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde states that "our region needs to come together to focus on our common security, based on the principles and commitments we all have made"³. Sweden will continue to act to re-establish respect for the principles that the European security order relies upon and to prioritize to strengthen democracy, human rights as well as equality in all relevant fora⁴. The grounds for getting back to basics is the worrying security policy situation and the increased tension within the OSCE area. Linde is referring to Russia's illegal

¹ Utrikesdepartementet, 2020. <https://www.government.se/articles/2020/06/what-does-the-osce-chair-involve/> [2021-02-11]

² OSCE, 2021. <https://www.government.se/48fc10/contentassets/8f0c4fe257764166942efe735735af5f/programme-of-the-swedish-osce-chairpersonship.pdf> [2021-02-11]

³ OSCE, 2021. <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/474992> [2021-02-11]

⁴ Regeringskansliet, 2020. <https://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2020/04/vad-innebar-ett-ordforandeskap-i-osce/> [2021-02-11]

annexation of Crimea, the conflicts in Ukraine and Georgia, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh as well as the repressions of the demonstrations in Belarus⁵. In a presentation at the Permanent Council in Vienna in January 2021, Linde stated that “[u]pholding these commitments is our shared responsibility and should be in the interests of all OSCE participating States” and by holding each other accountable for their actions we make our commitments stay relevant⁶. Linde underlined the importance of linking climate change and security together⁷. In short, the basic principles and foundation of the European security order that are emphasized are sovereign equality, refraining from the threat or the use of force, respect for territorial integrity and the freedom of states to choose their own security arrangements as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedom. The right to freedom of opinion and expression and the freedom of the media are key elements which are underlined, as well as the democratic processes, civic space and participation. These are central to preserving and promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law.

Linde emphasizes that her aim as CiO is to start dialogues between conflicting states, work for an increasing democratization and continue to run a feministic foreign policy with regards to women, peace and security. In addition, Linde stresses that Sweden is a nonaligned country and therefore the principle in regards to territorial integrity is very important⁸. Linde wishes to be able to deal with the most stressful conflicts effectively, such as the crisis in Belarus. Thus, she wants to protect OSCE’s basic principles and to make all of the participating States to re-agree and to follow them, which is a challenge for OSCE’s at the moment.

Different perspectives of the OSCE

Dr Ian Anthony, Director of Stockholm’s International Peace Research Institute’s (SIPRI) European Security Programme, states that “many states appear to no longer have a shared understanding of how to interpret their commitments”⁹. Anthony continues to state that the European security framework in recent years has performed worse than expected “when faced with a series of shocks: a financial crisis; a return of major conflict inside Europe and escalating conflicts at its periphery; a growing number of mass-impact terrorist attacks; and the sudden and uncontrolled mass movement of people into Europe, in part as a spillover from conflict outside of Europe”¹⁰. Furthermore, he means that an increased sense of insecurity is reflected in the European discourse on politico-military affairs¹¹ and refers to the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov’s, speech at OSCE Ministerial Council in December 2015. In this speech, Lavrov

⁵ Länegård, C. 2020. SVD. <https://www.svd.se/lindes-linje--nationens-intresse-framst> [2021-02-11]

⁶ Linde, A. 2021.

<https://www.government.se/48e87a/contentassets/8f0c4fe257764166942efe735735af5f/210114-osce-presentation-14-jan.pdf> [2021-02-10]

⁷ Linde, A. 2021.

https://www.government.se/48e892/contentassets/8f0c4fe257764166942efe735735af5f/final_programme_osce_2021.pdf [2021-02-11]

⁸ Linde, Ann. 2021. UD-podden, “Vad är grejen med OSSE?” 15 januari.

⁹ Anthony, I. 2017, p.123 Sipri Yearbook. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRIYB17c04sI.pdf> [2021-02-10]

¹⁰ Anthony, I. 2017, p.119 Sipri Yearbook. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRIYB17c04sI.pdf> [2021-02-11]

¹¹ Anthony, I. 2017, p.119 Sipri Yearbook. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRIYB17c04sI.pdf> [2021-02-11]

meant that the European partnership is moving towards deeper distrust and instability¹². The multiple failures to reach agreements over important aspects of European security can be seen as signs of division among the OSCE participating States¹³. Edi Rama, Prime Minister of Albania and former OSCE CiO emphasized the lack of trust in cooperation in his speech at the 2020 OSCE Annual Security Review Conference¹⁴. In short, the lack of trust and evidence of a division between participating States within the OSCE can be seen.

Simultaneously, scientists argue that the OSCE as an organization rather is profiting than suffering from the rising tensions and crises in Europe¹⁵. The OSCE has existed in the shadow of the EU and NATO after the Cold War but has got increasing attention due to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the latest insecurities in the region. The organization is regarded as one of the few remaining multilateral communication forums between the East and the West¹⁶. In summary, even though the division within OSCE has been highlighted as a challenge undermining the organization, it can also be seen as an opportunity.

The Ukraine Crisis and the illegal annexation of Crimea

Strategic trends have over the years been less predictable, which constitutes a challenge for the common security agenda within the OSCE¹⁷. The states within the OSCE are moving away from the usually defined vision of a value-based security community and the tension between Russia and the West has made the daily work in the OSCE more difficult. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the military intervention in Eastern Ukraine was a crisis for the OSCE, due to the violation of the OSCE basic principles, including the respect for the territorial integrity, the abstention from the threat or use of force and inviolability of borders. Scientists also argue that the OSCE would lose importance if it no longer tries to uphold a long-term vision of a value-based security community¹⁸. In summary, the annexation of Crimea and the military intervention of Eastern Ukraine, can be seen as divisions in regard to the common values between the states within the OSCE, which makes the security policy situation less predictable. Even though scientists mean that this can be seen as signs of a division within Europe and signs of distrust, the OSCE as an organization is doing better now than a couple of years ago. The Ukraine Crisis can be seen as a comeback due to the fact that it was the only organization that responded to it¹⁹.

¹² Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the 22nd OSCE Ministerial Council, Belgrade, December 3, 2015'. https://www.osce.org/event/mc_2015 [2021-02-11]

¹³ Anthony, I. 2017, p.139 Sipri Yearbook. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRIYB17c04sI.pdf> [2021-02-11]

¹⁴ Rama, E. 2020, p.1 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/5/455314.pdf> [2021-02-11]

¹⁵ Zellner, W. 2017, p.33. https://ifsh.de/file/publication/OSCE_Yearbook_en/2016/Zellner-en.pdf [2021-02-11]

¹⁶ Smolnik, F. 2019, p.1 https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2019RP16_smk_WEB.pdf [2021-02-11]

¹⁷ Nünlist, Christian, 2018, p. 5 <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/N%C3%BCnlist-121818-BackgroundPaperOSCEin2018.pdf> [2021-02-11]

¹⁸ Nünlist, Christian, 2018, p. 8 <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/N%C3%BCnlist-121818-BackgroundPaperOSCEin2018.pdf> [2021-02-11]

¹⁹ Nünlist, C. 2014. S.13-14

https://www.academia.edu/24425891/Overcoming_the_East_West_Divide_Perspectives_on_the_Role_of_the_OSCE_in_the_Ukraine_Crisis

Belarus

The internal governance crisis in Belarus adds another layer of insecurity within Europe. Already before the recent presidential election in Belarus, the military response to worsening relations between countries in Western Europe and Russia had already increased the insecurity and risks in the region around Belarus. The repression of the protests and the domestic situations thus decreased the European security further. Considering the situation, Ann Linde and the previous CiO Edi Rama, offered to mediate and help to start a dialogue between the conflicting parties²⁰. Nevertheless, statements regarding the outrageous current situation in Belarus and remarks stressing universal values seems to have little impact unless they are connected to means that offer real benefits and a stable European perspective to the citizens in Belarus²¹.

In summary, the OSCE, with Sweden as the 2021 Chair, is facing challenges to rebuild the trust for the organization and for the European security. The questions to be asked are, what can it actually achieve? What are Germany's expectations and contributions to maintaining the basic principles of the OSCE-based European security order? Only the future can bring clarity to the many uncertainties and challenges of the OSCE and answers to these questions.

²⁰Utriksdepartementet, 2020. <https://www.regeringen.se/uttalanden/2020/08/utrikesminister-ann-linde-har-haft-ett-telefonsamtal-med-belarus-utrikesminister-vladimir-makei/> [2021-02-11]

²¹ Anthony, I. 2020 <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/expert-comment/2020/belarus-election-challenge-stability-and-security-northern-europe> [2021-02-11]