



## STOCKHOLM DECLARATION

**on the Need to Critically Review and Strengthen the OSCE's Work on Conflicts to Strengthen Security, Protect Human Rights and Uphold the Helsinki Principles**

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## Reasons for concern and the importance of strengthening the OSCE's work on conflicts

1. The year of 2021 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 3/11 in Vilnius on "elements of the conflict cycle"<sup>2</sup>. It is an important basis for strengthening the OSCE's work in early warning, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, crisis management, as well as post-conflict rehabilitation and peacebuilding. The OSCE's comprehensive approach underlines the importance of addressing conflicts across all three OSCE dimensions and engaging with civil society.
2. This anniversary provides a valuable opportunity to take stock of the work done from a civil society perspective and assess the way the OSCE addresses conflicts by looking at conceptual approaches, discussing progress and challenges in its work, and analysing concrete situations on the ground.
3. The year of 2022 will also mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of emergence of several conflicts in the post-Soviet space as well as of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many of these conflicts remain unresolved and protracted, and some of them experienced recent resurgence of violence.
4. The OSCE and multilateralism are on the brink of a serious crisis. Disagreement and mistrust among OSCE participating States are the "new normal". This has resulted in the emergence of a fragile security situation across the OSCE region and has a direct impact on people's lives on the ground: wars and unresolved conflicts across the OSCE region, increasing threats to human rights, rule of law, and democracy, and shrinking space for civil society are dramatic examples of this development.
5. As a result, the OSCE's Charter of Paris for a New Europe (1990) and the Astana Commemorative Declaration on a Security Community (2010) remain an unfulfilled vision. This mere vision has its costs for the security situation in the OSCE region. There's a high risk of new conflicts emerging and old conflicts reoccurring. Lack of progress in addressing protracted conflicts over such a long period and the emergence of new conflicts in the last few years call for critical reflection and a strategic review of the OSCE's capacities to prevent and resolve conflicts.

## Observations on conceptual approaches, institutional arrangements, and capacity

6. The OSCE's main tools to address conflicts include its field operations<sup>3</sup> and the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC). The CPC provides policy advice and analysis to the Secretary General, the Chairpersonship, participating States, and field operations<sup>4</sup>. Currently, the OSCE is engaged in four conflict resolution formats where it cooperates with other inter-governmental organisations and participating States<sup>5</sup>. The Chairperson-in-Office appoints Special and Personal Representatives, some of which have a special role in addressing conflicts<sup>6</sup>. The High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) strengthens the OSCE's conflict prevention capabilities by getting involved when inter-ethnic tensions could lead to conflict, promoting inclusive dialogue and consultative mechanisms, and issuing guidelines used as tools for conflict prevention<sup>7</sup>. Comprehensive analysis based on evidence from multiple sources, including contacts in the field, is of fundamental importance for the CPC and the HCNM in their conflict prevention efforts. Finally, the MC Decision 3/2011 gave an additional mandate to Secretary General to compliment the role of the Chairpersonship in early warning and conflict

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<sup>2</sup> Decision No. 3/11 on elements of the conflict cycle, related to enhancing the OSCE's capabilities in early warning, early action, dialogue facilitation and mediation support, and post-conflict rehabilitation. 18th OSCE Ministerial Council, Vilnius, 6 – 7 December 2011. <https://www.osce.org/ministerial-councils/86621>

<sup>3</sup> There are currently 15 OSCE field operations. See <https://www.osce.org/where-we-are>

<sup>4</sup> See the Factsheet on the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/3/13717\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/3/13717_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The Minsk process on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Transdniestrian settlement process, the Geneva International Discussions on the 2008 conflict in Georgia, and the Trilateral Contact Group for the peaceful settlement of the situation in eastern Ukraine. See <https://www.osce.org/conflict-prevention-and-resolution>

<sup>6</sup> Currently include Special Representative in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group, Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Special Representative for the Transdniestrian Settlement Process, and the Personal Representative on the conflict dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference. See <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/chairperson-in-office-representatives>

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.osce.org/hcnm>

prevention. The Secretary General and the HCNM are the two OSCE officials formally mandated to provide early warning to the Permanent Council.

7. Since the MC Decision 3/11, the OSCE bodies mandated to work on conflicts have made great progress in developing various instruments, toolboxes, trainings, and guidelines to make the OSCE's work along the conflict cycle more effective<sup>8</sup>. However, the OSCE and its executive bodies cannot make full use of their mandates and capacities due to a lack of political will of participating States to make proactive use of relevant instruments and a constant decrease of the organisation's Unified Budget, which constraints its ability to respond to emerging tensions and address root causes of conflicts.
8. Conflicts are too often addressed by OSCE participating States through the prism of the first dimension of military-political security. "Hard security" concerns dominate their discussions and actions on conflicts, while the human and the economic-environmental dimensions are given secondary attention. The primacy of "hard security" considerations in the perception of participating States leads to situations when early warning signs of a conflict – such as large-scale human rights violations, the deterioration of rule of law, the growing use of propaganda and hate speech, identified by field operations, the CPC and civil society – are seen as factors of secondary or tertiary order and are thus neglected.
9. Addressing conflicts effectively requires a consistent cross-dimensional approach, with the human and economic and environmental dimensions given a more prominent and equal role. This would not only correspond to the Helsinki comprehensive security concept but would allow for earlier and more efficient identification of warning signs and better conflict prevention. Working across dimensions along the conflict cycle should include addressing economic welfare, social development, environmental threats and climate crisis, and their impact on population. These threats could contribute to conflicts but can also serve as an opportunity for dialogue, cooperation and sustainable peacebuilding. Addressing them requires inclusion of civil society, especially women and youth.
10. The complexity of the OSCE institutional framework designed to address conflicts reflects the diversity of the OSCE's toolboxes. At the same time, it leads to situations when various aspects of conflict-related problems fall into cracks in the patchwork of various bodies. Due to problems in communication and coordination, different elements of relevant expertise available inside the OSCE often fail to be accumulated and translated into action when a conflict unfolds and a fast reaction is required.
11. In spite of robust guidelines and agreements, analytical capacity, and commitment of the relevant bodies and individuals, for civil society dealing with conflicts and affected populations, the OSCE system of working on conflicts often appears non-transparent, having no entry points for information and cooperation, and slow, especially when rapid response is required.
12. The current negative and highly polarized political climate in the OSCE and the lack of trust among participating States lead to slow and often ad hoc, reactive decisions and actions. The lack of political will by participating States to make use of the OSCE's toolboxes and the lack of financial and human resources are the leading factors in terms of bridging the early warning – early action gap.
13. Most of the conflicts in the OSCE region are protracted, and displacement of population in the conflict-affected areas is also protracted. This makes it difficult to organise proper assistance in integration/resettlement/return of displaced people, as the existing instruments are more applicable to emergency situations and do not produce tangible results in working with displaced population over longer time.

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<sup>8</sup> See Michael Raith, "Addressing the Conflict Cycle: The OSCE's Evolving Toolbox" In: Institute for Peace Research and Security policy at the University of Hamburg: "OSCE Insights 2020 - Corona, War, Leadership Crisis", page 43-58, Nomos 2020 (ISBN online: 978-3-7489-2233-9) <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/10.5771/9783748922339-03/addressing-the-conflict-cycle-the-osce-s-evolving-toolbox>

14. While field operations serve as a key tool in OSCE conflict work, they are often understaffed, some of them lack a clear mandate on conflict work, experience pressure from host governments, and do not effectively interact with independent civil society. Moreover, field operations are not present in many participating States, falling victim of positions of participating States involved in conflicts which take advantage of the consensus rule and block extension of field operations' mandates. In particular, the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan and Armenia took advantage of the consensus rule to delay or paralyse political decision making, including on the extension of the mandate of field operations, their budgets, and staff capacities. A monitoring mission such as the SMM cannot be effective when conflict parties impose restrictions on its operations and prevent effective fulfilment of its mandate.

### **The role of civil society in addressing conflicts and the challenges it faces**

15. Human rights defenders, peacebuilders, including women and youth, play a particularly important role in peacebuilding by being active in the protection of civilians against violence; monitoring human rights violations and the implementation of peace agreements; advocacy for peace and human rights; socialisation to values of peace and democracy as well as development of the in-group identity of marginalised groups; building inter-group social cohesion by bringing people together from adversarial groups; facilitation of dialogue on the local and national level and beyond borders; and creating caring economy which helps to create entry points for all of the above elements of peacebuilding<sup>9</sup>.
16. While civil society's ability to act during the acute stage of a conflict is limited, it can make a stronger contribution to transitional justice by documenting violations of international humanitarian law and thus fight impunity and help in prevention of new conflicts. Documentation by civil society groups may be used in legal and truth finding processes, help to provide legal representation to victims of conflict, and be used to counter divisive narratives spread by parties to the conflict. This work is challenging because of security risks to civil society documenters who receive death threats, are attacked, and sometimes even killed. Recently, credible reports have been produced by NGO coalitions on violations of international humanitarian law during the conflicts in Donbas and Nagorno Karabakh<sup>10</sup>.
17. The role of civil society is especially crucial in the current situation where historical prejudice, enemy images, and xenophobic narratives are again on the rise in many countries due to the surge of nationalistic and populist parties who manipulate public opinion and increase tensions. Civil society could play a stronger role in mobilising members of the public against hate speech, divisive narratives and nationalistic sentiments propagated by political leaders in their power interests and preventing some parts of (un)civil society from contributing to these negative developments. More active civil society engagement is needed before, during and after conflicts, given the deteriorating situation.
18. The vast potential of civil society remains largely untapped in the OSCE's conflicts-related work. While some OSCE bodies involved in conflict-related work strive to engage with local and international civil society actors, these efforts are not sufficient: civil society expertise and information are not used effectively, and necessary information is often not provided to them<sup>11</sup>.
19. Space for civil society is shrinking across the OSCE region even in peaceful circumstances but pressure is truly systematic in countries involved in conflicts. NGOs and activists involved in conflict prevention, documentation of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law in conflict zones and in the post-conflict transformation work, are often labelled "traitors" and "enemies". Their

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<sup>9</sup> Paffenholz, Thania/ Spurk Chris. Civil society, Civic engagement, and Peacebuilding. In: Social Development Papers, No. 36/2006, p.27-32.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, When Embers Burst into Flames. International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law Violations During the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. Report by the International Partnership for Human Rights, Truth Hounds and Global Diligence. May 2021. [https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NK\\_final\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NK_final_report_2021.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Natascha Cerny Ehtesham/Laurent Goetschel. Civil Society in the OSCE: From Human Rights Advocacy to Peacebuilding. In: OSCE Yearbook 2015, p. 359 - 374

ability to contribute to the work on conflicts is undermined by the adoption of discriminatory laws and policies in conflict zones restricting freedoms of association, expression and movement, such as blocking external funding of NGOs, suppressing critical opinions, or blocking civil society's access to conflict zones. Monitoring of human rights violations in the occupied and unrecognised territories can often be done only from the outside because of highly insecure conditions for local activists.

20. Pressure on civil society is not gender neutral: women activists are often particularly targeted and disproportionately affected both in peaceful circumstances and conflict situations. This has highly negative consequences for their work at all stages of the conflict cycle.
21. Effective participation of civil society in conflict prevention and peacebuilding is undermined by a lack of security for peacebuilders. They are not recognised as a distinct civil society group, requiring particular support and protection, similar to those for human rights defenders, to ensure their protection from violence, persecution, and discrimination.

### **The role of women and the importance of gender perspective in addressing conflicts**

22. The MC Decision 3/2011 stressed the importance of women's participation in addressing conflicts and the importance of the application of provisions of UNSCR 1325 that can give additional impulse to conflict transformation. Other relevant OSCE documents include the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for gender equality which states that participating States, the Secretariat, institutions, and missions need to ensure that a gender perspective is integrated into OSCE activities, programmes, and projects; the MC Decision 14/05 on women in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation; and the Toolkit on the Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes (2019). The CPC's Mediation Support Team and the Secretariat's Gender Unit have instruments which could increase women's and youth participation in mediation and dialogue, negotiations, and conflict transformation processes. Strengthening these efforts and fully implementing the MC Decisions and the toolkit's recommendations are necessary to allow women and youth to become involved in these processes.
23. Gender sensitive information is crucial to early warning systems and can reveal otherwise unseen conflict drivers and triggers. To implement the Beijing Platform for Action and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 calling for increased roles for women in conflict prevention, the OSCE's conflict early warning systems must be strengthened profoundly with regard to gender issues. While these bodies are well aware of gender implications, just like other international organizations, the OSCE struggles to integrate them effectively into early warning analysis from a conceptual point of view.
24. We see a lack of gender analysis of underlying root causes of conflict and violence, which has a strong impact on the protection and participation of women and marginalised groups as change makers and actors in a preventive approach.
25. The concurrent shrinking space for women's organising happening in the climate of a global backlash against gender equality further calls for protecting civil society organizations, particularly women's rights actors, human rights defenders and feminist peace activists and their engagement in the public sphere. Across the OSCE region, we witness huge cuts in direct funding for women's organisations.
26. In addition to an alarming increase in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is also a growing threat to women's safety in the public sphere. In many countries in the OSCE region, women are confronted with violence and other forms of extremism which directly or indirectly induce sexual, gender-based and other forms of violence.
27. Women are key actors against radicalisation and violent extremism and all forms of discrimination and not necessarily as mothers but as persons and legal subjects with voice and power to act. Therefore, a priority goal across the OSCE region must be to develop concrete mechanisms which will increase women's participation at all levels of decision making and negotiation.

28. Women are also key actors in post-conflict rehabilitation, in formulating post-conflict transition, trauma healing, but also transitional justice measures and political initiatives. Yet, there is a need to address discriminatory economic conditions and support care work as a pillar of women's peace work.
29. In post conflict societies women are often killed by firearms, the gun being the most frequently used weapon. Although the possession of firearms and their presence in the household poses a great threat to security, some of the post conflict societies do not even have a statistical database or records on post-traumatic stress syndrome/PTSD, or on the number of women exposed to violence at the hands of former participants of wars affected by PTSD.

### **Conflict prevention (early warning and early response)**

30. A human dimension crisis should serve as a key warning sign for a military security crisis. It requires an early response from the international community before it escalates into an armed conflict. Civil society groups gave warnings on these early signs in many conflicts, but their voice has not been heard.
31. The OSCE Moscow Mechanism is an important tool for reaction to human dimension crises, especially when OSCE action is blocked by the consensus rule. It allows for credible documentation of human rights abuses and for maintaining the situation in the spotlight. Effectiveness of its application depends on the willingness of participating States to hold violators of commitments among them accountable and on taking strong follow-up steps after a report under the Moscow Mechanism is issued.
32. Acknowledging the sensitive nature of the work of the CPC and the "quiet diplomacy" conducted by the HCNM, greater transparency in their conflict prevention work and better communication with civil society beyond the limited circle of their regular sources is necessary. The CPC coordinates a network of Early Warning focal points in OSCE executive structures, including field operations and their civil society contacts. HCNM regularly upgrades its legal, political and media analysis with the help of its multi-lingual staff, including on the ground. However, information on early warning signs from broader civil society does not reach the CPC and the HCNM in a systematic manner as there are currently no effective mechanisms in place for civil society to forward relevant information.
33. The CPC's Situation/Communication room (SitRoom) has a key early warning relevance for monitoring developments in all 57 participating States, giving regular update to the Chair, the Secretary General and senior management. However, due to the lack of resources its capacities are insufficient.
34. Non-cooperation of a participating State is major obstacle to effective monitoring on the ground, as is seen in the case of Crimea and Donbas, where the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine is prevented from fully implementing its mandate. The OSCE has no field operations in the South Caucasus, Russia, Belarus, and in countries to the "West of Vienna". It makes operational capacity of the OSCE to react to possible deterioration of situations throughout the OSCE region much weaker.
35. The OSCE monitoring capacity in conflict-affected areas is insufficient, including protracted conflicts (such as in the Transnistrian region of Moldova), conflicts where violence stopped fairly recently (Tajik-Kyrgyz border) or where armed confrontation continues (Nagorno Karabakh and Donbas). This problem is exacerbated by the weak presence of monitors from other inter-governmental bodies.
36. Refusal by de facto and de jure authorities to accept requests for visits by human rights rapporteurs of inter-governmental organisations further undermines the ability of the international community to monitor the situation on the ground and detect possible early warning signs of conflict.
37. Violations of the rights of national minorities, including gender-based violation of rights, can lead not only to internal violent conflict but also to external aggression.

38. In the last two years, de-facto authorities in various conflict zones have been using the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions as a pretext to block passage of the so-called administrative boundary lines by local population living on different sides, adding to their suffering and undermining dialogues.

### **Conflict resolution and crisis management (monitoring, mediation, and de-escalation)**

39. Dealing with conflicts in the OSCE is increasingly driven by the desire to overcome growing divisions among participating States and engage political leaders on both sides of the divide in dialogue. As a result, the focus on conflict management is more than ever narrowed down to political dialogue among political leaders and mediation between them, rather than participation of a broad range of actors to address the root causes of conflicts. Such “engagement at any cost” makes all parties involved hostages of political bargaining and focuses on “negative peace”, to the detriment of building durable “positive peace”. Conflict resolution efforts at Track-2 and Track-3 facilitated by OSCE field operations are a positive example of a more comprehensive and inclusive approach and should be supported and scaled up.
40. Proper conflict analysis, including stakeholder analysis, is of paramount importance for effective conflict resolution. If the analysis is wrong or deceptive, then the processes built upon it are inefficient. In particular, a conflict party should not act at the same time as a mediator or a peacekeeper. This is illustrated, specifically, by an ambiguous role of the Russian Federation in the Geneva International Discussions. While the format includes Russia as one of the negotiating parties, Russia perceives itself as a mediator in the discussion on security and stability in the South Caucasus, causing a deadlock in negotiations. The same applies to the 5+2 format of the Transnistrian Settlement process where Russia imposed its peacekeeping and mediating role, blocking progress in resolving the conflict for many years.
41. Since parties to many conflicts are so entrenched, it is difficult to change the nature of the conflict. Therefore, the role of civil society in conflict resolution is ever more important. However, peace negotiations do not involve civil society in any way – contrary to current policy debates and best practices. Dialogues and discussions between political actors taking place in the conflict settlement formats are considered closed to and distanced from civil society and affected communities.
42. Access to information and developing a transparent and systematic mechanism of communication and cooperation between the OSCE and civil society is essential for CSOs to make a meaningful contribution to conflict mediation, monitoring and de-escalation. In theory, civil society input could be channelled through OSCE field operations, but they often have limited staff capacities and limited mandates on conflicts, and insufficiently engage with CSOs – or are simply absent in a number of states.
43. The CPC established a Mediation Support Team as an OSCE-wide focal point for dialogue facilitation and mediation support. It lacks resources to cover the current demands for its work on mediation and dialogue processes and on assisting field missions for enhancing peace and stability over the long term. Outreach to civil society for a meaningful inclusion in peace processes has to be more systematic, creating opportunities for its engagement as the main stakeholder for sustainable peace.
44. As in conflict prevention, the OSCE ability to effectively pursue conflict management (e.g., monitoring of ceasefire agreement) is undermined by the insufficient number of monitors on the ground, problems with access to territories, and security risks for people working on crisis management.

### **Post-conflict rehabilitation (dealing with the past, transitional justice and peacebuilding)**

45. Building durable peace after the end of hostilities is not possible without truth, justice for the victims, and ending impunity of the perpetrators, including accountability for war crimes and crimes against

humanity, fighting against propaganda and hate speech, and addressing the needs of displaced and affected people. All these lines of work are important for preventing the resumption of conflicts.

46. Well documented violations of international humanitarian law include the use of unconventional weapons and non-conventional armed violence against peaceful population, including tribal killings and torture, recruiting and trafficking in mercenaries and impoverished foreign soldiers, intentional targeting of civilians, journalists, and medical workers, cultural heritage, and schools, and causing mass displacement of population. The problem of prisoners of war and illegally detained people persists in a number of conflict areas, such as Nagorno Karabakh and Donbas. Likewise, the problem of missing persons undermines post-conflict transformation. The OSCE needs to take a more active role in addressing these problems. Cross-regional learning on different topical issues should be applied. For example, lessons from South Eastern Europe on missing persons might prove helpful in other regions.
47. Violations of international humanitarian law are often dealt with only on the local level. As a result, members of the elites are rarely, if ever, prosecuted. Insufficient persecution and impunity has led to a situation when many persons accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity remain part of the political elite in some states and are given awards or are hailed as national heroes. They continue playing a destructive role in the transition processes.
48. The OSCE could claim a special role in addressing violations of international humanitarian law and assist in bringing alleged violations under prosecution at the local and international level. This will have a strong preventive effect on emergence of new conflicts or renewal of violence in protracted conflicts.
49. Dealing with the past is a key component of post-conflict rehabilitation and prevention of new conflicts. It is vital to continue underlining the importance of engagement with the past and developing ongoing acknowledgement of suffering through actions and statements, including art and culture. Condemnation of violations of international humanitarian law should be expressed as frequently as it is required by victims, survivors, or their descendants.
50. Healing and reconciliation are long-term processes that require substantial investment. When lessons from past conflicts are not learnt and historical memory is not addressed, nationalistic narratives prevail and aggressive propaganda persists. In this case, negative sentiments about neighbours and resentment are promoted by media, at schools and universities. Many field operations are engaged in this area of work. However, reconciliation cannot be imposed and needs to be locally driven. Lack of local ownership and willingness to engage in reconciliation is a key challenge. The CPC has captured lessons in this field, including on working with civil society, which need to be shared and supported<sup>12</sup>.
51. Propaganda encourages hatred and provokes violence, division, and conflicts. Particularly worrisome is its influence in fragile countries with unfinished processes of statehood and identity building, post-conflict societies and countries in crisis. Media involved in disinformation and propaganda do not respect professional standards, breach the code of ethics, and support frozen conflicts. Changing the narratives, educating the public to resist propaganda and develop critical thinking is an important task.
52. Protracted displacement of people continues to be one of the roots of conflict revival. The needs and priorities of people in the situation of protracted displacement and of people living on conflict-affected territories should be addressed as a matter of priority. They should be actively involved and supported as important participants of post-conflict reconstruction, conflict transformation and reconciliation.
53. Lack of access to justice in conflict zones undermines durable peace. In many conflict areas, especially controlled by unrecognized authorities, there are no legitimate and credible courts. Moreover,

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<sup>12</sup> See: Building Sustainable Peace and Democracy: OSCE Experiences in South-Eastern Europe. A Reference Guide. OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. 2018. <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/383751>



judgements of local “courts” in these regions are not valid outside of them. In the absence of a legitimate justice system in these territories, effective protection of human rights of the affected population and impunity for violators remain a serious problem, adding to insecurity and instability.

54. Developing infrastructure for peace requires a shift from “negative peace” (no violence) to positive peace (rule of law, protection of human rights, strong democratic institutions, social cohesion, resilience to violence, etc.). In the OSCE this is the task of field missions who work to support this kind of transition and empower locals to be resilient to violence and hatred. However, in reality their ability to act is limited by their mandates, resources, and pressure from states. Post-conflict transformation should not be left to field missions alone; civil society has to play a more prominent role.

## **Recommendations to OSCE Decision-Making Bodies, Institutions, and Participating States**

### **On conceptual approaches**

55. The human dimension should be an important part of the conceptual framework of the OSCE’s work to address conflicts. A more systematic link between the three OSCE dimensions (security, economic-environmental and human) is important to increase the effectiveness of efforts to prevent human rights violations that may cause conflicts, to resolve conflicts, and to ensure durable peace.
56. Improved coordination and cooperation between all relevant OSCE political bodies, institutions, and executive bodies is necessary to ensure the best use of expertise and institutional memory available inside the OSCE for well-informed decision-making.
57. The OSCE bodies should systematically work to promote the inclusion of civil society in all relevant processes in the political, social, economic, and human rights sphere. Coordination, communication, and cooperation of the OSCE with civil society regarding early warning, monitoring, conflict resolution, mediation, transitional justice, and peacebuilding should be enhanced, including by the establishment of communication platforms and mechanisms for each specific conflict or crisis in participating States with and without OSCE field missions. The OSCE hate crime reporting website<sup>13</sup> or the UN Civil Society Support Room (CSSR) on the conflict in Syria<sup>14</sup> could serve as inspiration.
58. Gender sensitive conflict analysis, including differential impact of conflict, needs to be developed in the OSCE. Active involvement of women, especially conflict-affected women, and their networks, should be safeguarded. In OSCE activities on providing protection and support to human rights defenders, special focus should be made on women human rights defenders. OSCE institutions and participating States should work with each other and other international actors towards full implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and ensure women a meaningful and effective engagement in all stages of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

### **On capacity and institutional arrangements**

59. The OSCE bodies working on conflicts need sufficient funds to make full use of their mandates and to maintain their ability to respond to (re-) emerging tensions and ensure security in the OSCE region. The personnel and budget of the Conflict Prevention Centre should be increased, to ensure that it disposes of analytical capacities to cover relevant developments throughout the OSCE area.
60. Currently, the OSCE is taking stock on the implementation of the MC Vilnius Decision 3/2011. In order for civil society to make a meaningful contribution, outcomes of the analysis should be made available to the public and discussions of its findings should take place, including with broader civil society.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://hatecrime.osce.org/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://specialenvoysyria.unmissions.org/civil-society-support-room>

61. The OSCE has multiple mechanisms of rapid response to crises and conflict situations. Some of them require modification, political will of participating States or creativity to be applied effectively, such as the Vienna Mechanism, the Moscow Mechanism, special monitoring missions, or the “consensus minus one” and the “consensus minus two” rules. In addition, new rapid response mechanisms should be established, including an emergency reaction procedure.
62. New cooperation formats between the OSCE and participating States without an OSCE field mission, especially when they are involved in a conflict situation, should be established in order to create a platform for cooperation and coordination between the OSCE, the state and civil society organisations. Budgets should be allocated for such cooperation formats and projects implemented within them.
63. Information on projects implemented by the OSCE in participating States, especially those involved in conflicts, should be made more transparent. An annual planning process for OSCE projects in participating States should be institutionalized, involving OSCE executive bodies, field operations, a participating State, civil society, and representatives of affected population, in order to develop an inclusive and coordinated action plan for OSCE projects on the local level.
64. OSCE conflict resolution processes and formats should be made accessible, and their work should become more transparent to civil society and affected communities.

#### **On early warning and conflict prevention**

65. The notion of a “human dimension crisis” should be introduced in the OSCE, leading to the establishment of emergency procedures and the creation of a coordination mechanism within the OSCE to exchange information among key actors, including civil society, to coordinate with other international organisations, and to take concrete decisions on relevant steps.
66. The conflict prevention approach by the CPC and field missions that links the short-term operational prevention with long-term structural prevention and addresses the root causes of conflicts in all three dimensions should be supported by participating States. Improvement in human security, democratisation, and creation of opportunities for better social and economic development are the best investment in conflict prevention, as they create pre-conditions for peaceful conflict transformation.
67. A stronger leadership role of the Chairpersonship is required when the first warning signs of an unfolding human dimension crisis and/or conflict are detected and a rapid response is needed. The Chairpersonship must make active use of the CPC’s early warning functions, supporting the Secretary General and the CPC to carry out their early warning mandate. In cases when the human dimension situation deteriorates and monitoring access to the country is limited or absent, a Chairpersonship action should be taken, including in the form of a Chairpersonship-commissioned report.
68. In states and regions where the OSCE has no field operations but where a potential of conflict revival exists, other OSCE instruments, such as fact-finding missions, should be actively used. When the OSCE is prevented by participating States from sending a monitoring mission, its bodies should be more actively engaged in distant monitoring and regularly use civil society documentation and testimonies of experts, witnesses, and victims in locations outside of the area. Creating a dedicated page at the OSCE website would also help, allowing people to upload information from wherever they are.
69. The Secretary General should more effectively use his/her mandate for early warning action on the basis of the MC Decision 3/2011, including by making more regular early warning reports to the Permanent Council to enable participating States to engage early on emerging trends. Early warning by the Secretary General should be implemented in a way that keeps the door open for constructive engagement.

70. Relevant OSCE bodies should establish information exchange on early warning with other inter-governmental organisations and actively use it.
71. A systematic mechanism for civil society to share relevant information with the CPC coordinated Network of Early Warning focal points and the CPC Situation/ Communication room (SitRoom) should be established. This could also be done in cooperation with other international organizations. The ODIHR hate crime reporting website for information collection might be used as a model.
72. If the CPC had more resources and if participating States agreed to it, more attention should be given to capacity-building for civil society organisations in terms of early warning/early action. The CPC and field operations should ensure that CSOs can act as first responders and insider peacebuilders.
73. The HCNM should commission a study on the implementation by participating States of the HCNM conflict prevention Guidelines and hold discussions of findings and recommendations of the study with participating States and civil society.
74. The ODIHR needs to have better rapid response/ standby capacity in order to deal with emergencies and crisis situations, such as for sending human dimension assessment missions. This includes relevant budgets for rapid response that could be used throughout the year.
75. Protection of civil society space should be treated as a matter of conflict prevention. The OSCE actors should consider repressive legislative and policy changes regarding civil society space as early warning signs of a human dimension crisis which may lead to the development of a conflict situation. The establishment of a mandate of a Special Representative on Civil Society might be an option in this regard.
76. Gender indicators of conflict revival, which are being elaborated by the CPC together with the Secretariat's Gender Unit, should be closely monitored as an important component of prevention.
77. Women's civil society groups should be consulted during the formulation of early warning systems. Specific channels for women to report information to the CPC and field operations should be established.
78. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media should develop mechanisms for monitoring propaganda, disinformation, and hate speech, in cooperation with civil society. Propagandistic outlets should be treated as such and not as bona fide mass media.
79. Civil society actors should take more responsibility for combating propaganda, disinformation, and hate speech.

#### **On crisis response and conflict resolution**

80. In all conflicts, civil society, including women's groups, should be included in negotiations on the peace process and the monitoring of implementation of agreements. The example of the Civil Society Support Room (CSSR) established in 2016 by the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria as a mechanism to consult with a broad and diverse range of civil society actors, should be studied.
81. The OSCE field presence in conflict zones should be substantially increased. The current number of monitors is woefully inadequate to monitor ceasefire and the security and human rights situation.
82. The OSCE should deploy new monitoring missions in the regions where the risks of violent conflicts are high, such as at the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and along the border of States in Central Asia with Afghanistan.
83. Access of OSCE monitoring missions to occupied territories and security for their work, including in the dark time of the day, should be provided by de facto authorities and States supporting them.

84. The OSCE should establish a principle that a State party to a conflict cannot act as a mediator in relevant negotiation formats and a peacekeeper.
85. The OSCE should develop gender sensitive mechanisms in preventing and mitigating the effects of armed conflict on women, as well as protection of women from violence during and after the conflict. OSCE actors should strengthen local and international women's voices in media reporting and in meaningful decision-making structures at all levels of negotiations.
86. The OSCE should develop more programmes on the security of journalists, human rights defenders and peacebuilders in conflict situations and support the work of the ODIHR and the RFoM in this field.

#### **On post-conflict transformation and peacebuilding**

87. The OSCE should develop a post-conflict transformation framework and strategy for each conflict region, based on social, political and other characteristics of the situation and engage civil society in drafting such strategies. They should include not only the building of democratic institutions, good governance and rule of law, but also cover broad post-conflict dialogue in the society, de-construction of stereotypes, combating propaganda, enhancing culture of remembrance and critical reflection, including through cultural activities, formal and informal educational programmes and projects.
88. The OSCE should develop and implement training programmes in post-conflict transformation for civil society actors. These programmes should be based on needs assessment and analysis of local context. There are countries where the OSCE can learn from local actors and involve recognised civil society representatives, such as specialists in dealing with the past/ transitional justice, on war crimes trials monitoring and documentation of past crimes as experts and trainers in such programmes.
89. The OSCE should develop a gender-sensitive approach to transitional justice and post-conflict transformation by including women NGOs in drafting programs, reports, trainings, assessment, etc.
90. The OSCE Documentation Centre is the institutional memory of the OSCE. It is important to develop broad programs/ projects that tap into and make use of this knowledge and facilitate learning from the OSCE's past in order to overcome today's mistrust and challenges.

#### **On the engagement with civil society**

91. It is crucial that civil society plays a more active role in conflict prevention, resolution, and transformation. The OSCE conflict prevention mechanisms should not limit their interaction to representatives of the academia but also engage with local and international CSOs. Active inclusion of human rights defenders, peacebuilders, women's groups, environmental activists, youth, and other civil society groups and representatives of affected population is critically important. In order to achieve this, there need to be regular and systematic communication mechanisms between relevant OSCE bodies and civil society – for situations in participating States both with and without field missions.
92. The CPC, the HCNM and field operations should regularly involve local and international civil society actors in joint analysis and the development of policies and regional/country strategies.
93. The meaning of civil society and its important role, including along the conflict cycle, needs to be mainstreamed in all OSCE institutions working in the three OSCE dimensions. This could be done, for example, through the creation of the position of a Special Representative on Civil Society as well as in the framework of the OSCE Peacebuilding Course for OSCE executive structures. The position of a Special Representative on Civil Society should be created to address the manifold challenges that civil society faces: (1) mainstream the meaning and role of civil society, in particular along the conflict cycle, within OSCE structures and the public, (2) help facilitate systematic communication and cooperation

between OSCE structures and civil society, including along the conflict cycle, and (3) raise awareness of and support the fight against shrinking civil society space as a matter of conflict prevention.

94. The OSCE and its participating States should work to prevent weakening and marginalisation of civil society in post-conflict and conflict areas and protect civil society groups and activists from accusations of treason, smear campaigns, criminal persecution by governments, and attacks by non-state actors.
95. The OSCE should develop guidelines on the security of peacebuilders, especially women activists working in peacebuilding, similar to the OSCE Guidelines on Security of Human Rights Defenders<sup>15</sup>.
96. Positive experiences of local and regional cross-divide civil society networks and platforms which work on conflicts and make positive contribution to dialogues and mediation processes should be studied and extrapolated to other conflict regions<sup>16</sup>, including experiences of the CivilMPlus Platform on the conflict in Donbas<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> OSCE Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/guidelines-on-the-protection-of-human-rights-defenders>

<sup>16</sup> For good recommendations on transmitting these best practices and scaling them up, see the UN/ World Bank report "Pathways to Peace": <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://civilmplus.org/>