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The evolving role of the OSCE in the shaping of european security*

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This article analyses the role of the CSCE/OSCE in the shaping of European security. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act put forward a broad understanding of security, implying economic, societal and other non-traditional dimensions of security, which was an innovation at the time, and promoted the idea of comprehensive security. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union were understood then as an opportunity for promoting the "Common European home" principles as put forward by Gorbachev. This new context conferred a renewed sense of belonging to the "wide Europe" with no dividing walls. However, European security evolved differently; with different understandings and perceptions about the "other" taking shape, and creating lines of dissension in the articulation of an inclusive security order sought by the OSCE. The article argues the OSCE had difficulties in adjusting to the new postCold War security context, providing a mixed assessment of the organisation's role in European security. This is so due to several factors, including the working rules of the organisation, the role and positioning of Russia within and towards the OSCE, and the drawing of the European security architecture around NATO and what this means to the OSCE as a piece in the European security puzzle.

Keywords: CSCE/OSCE, European security, comprehensive security, Russia, Ukraine.

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The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was established by the Helsinki Final Act (1975) in the context of the Cold War providing a space for dialogue aiming at bridging the East-West divide. At the time, this founding document put forward a broad understanding of security, implying economic, societal and other non-traditional dimensions of security, which was an innovation, and promoted the idea of comprehensive security. However, this did not mean the Soviet Union and the Western bloc shared a common vision on European security. In fact, whereas the Soviet Union was focused on the borders' regime, the West had a more forward looking vision, centred on human rights and fundamental liberties as part of a political-security framework [1]. Entin and Zagorski refer to a "balance of opposing expectations" as a result of these different underlying motives [2, p. 16]. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union were understood then as an opportunity for the Conferences to give place to a more institutionalised structure, as agreed at the 1990 Paris Summit. The Soviet Union cherished the vision of a Europe without divisions [3], which became engrained in Gorbachev's "common European home". As part of the process of readjustment to the post-Cold War, in January 1995, the CSCE became the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

This article analyses the role of the CSCE/OSCE in the shaping of European security, looking at what were (have been) its main contributions and limitations. The confidence in the building of a "Common European home" as Gorbachev envisaged it conferred a renewed sense of belonging to this "wide Europe" with no dividing walls. However, the way the European security architecture evolved was not in the direction of integration, instead different understandings and perceptions about the "other" soon resurfaced. The CSCE/OSCE did not manage to bridge the emerging differences, but kept its dialogue function, promoting a "multilateralisation of European security" [4] and has been several times named as a possible vehicle for recapping European security in a more inclusive format. Russia became critical of the way the European security architecture evolved, understanding Moscow was excluded from main decision-making processes, particularly regarding the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The enlargements of both NATO and the European Union (EU), changing the borders of these organisations to reach closer to Russia's borders, added to misperceptions.

The article argues the OSCE contributed to the end of the Cold War, but had difficulties in adjusting to the new-post Cold War security context, therefore providing for a mixed assessment of the organisation's role in European security. The idea of the "Common European Home" and of achieving a strong security community, very close to OSCE ideals, did not take shape, and the organisation's role in providing for European security revealed limited. This is so due to several factors, including the working rules of the organisation, the role and positioning of Russia within and towards the OSCE, and the drawing of the European security architecture around NATO and what this means to the OSCE as a piece in the European security puzzle.

The article starts by briefly analysing the Cold War context in which the CSCE was established, and then looking at how the Conferences/Organisation evolved along time, readjusting to the post-Cold War setting. It highlights the OSCE's understanding of security, in its innovative conceptualisation, and its role in promoting security in its different dimensions, the main limitations it faced in the post-Cold War design of the European security architecture, and the possibilities it entails in a complex context for West-Russia relations, somehow potentially rehabilitating the facilitator role it played in the Cold War

context. In its reading of an OSCE mixed record in the provision of security, the article looks at OSCE's involvement in Ukraine and how this conferred on the organisation an enhanced role regarding monitoring and potentially stabilisation measures through its Special Monitoring Mission [5], established in 2014. This could signal a relevant role in a difficult context, and thus, have implication in European security matters, despite acknowledged limitations. The current context of tension between Ukraine, Russia and the west again tests the organisation's ability to provide more than room for diplomatic exchange.

From CSCE to OSCE: flexible and adjusting

Stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok, with a membership of 57 states and small resources, the OSCE's main zones of operation have been in the countries of former Yugoslavia and the states that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. After 1990 events took a very different course from what was desired. Within the new republics of the former Soviet Union, economic, social, political and/or historical factors contributed to tensions which, in particular in the Republics of Moldova, Georgia, Tajikistan and the Nagorno-Karabakh territory, have escalated into armed conflict. Within the Russian Federation, the North Caucasus and particularly Chechnya became also a source of violence. Although these violent conflicts have not resulted as much from external aggression but more from endogenous factors, they have had and have a disruptive effect in the CSCE/OSCE area. Known as "protracted conflicts" or "frozen conflicts" [6–8], the cases of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Donbass, with different intensity and particular political-legal contours, reproduce Russian influence in the former Soviet space, through its support to the local leaderships [[9]; 10]. The heterogeneous nature of the new republics swiftly became clear, making of the wider Europe area a patchwork of diversity in economic terms, regarding political allegiances, and reflecting structurally different conditions in these different new states. The active involvement of the CSCE/OSCE in the post-Soviet space and the promotion of its different but interrelated areas of activity became part of the progressive development of the new republics, reflecting its comprehensive agenda. Certainly, these developments followed different rhythms. And Russia kept playing a fundamental role, as its agreement was detrimental to the very OSCE's involvement in the area [11, p. 68].

The OSCE's expanded agenda — linking the organisation's three dimensions (political-military; economic, scientific and environmental; and human) in a combined approach — is present at the decision-making level, in the activities of its main institutions, such as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, as well as in the mandates of its field offices. The latter have, in fact, become the fundamental instruments for the implementation of OSCE commitments, through increased contacts between the different OSCE Missions, which enhances the level of sharing of good practices and facilitates the development of alternative approaches to common problems [12]. It is "the connected nature of these dimensions [political-military, economic and environmental, and human] rather than the dimensions on their own which constitutes the major competitive strength of the OSCE and that needs to be reflected in [its] activities" [13, p. 130]. Through the promotion of its founding principles, the OSCE

has slowly but gradually been fostering the instrumental internalisation of its procedures in its area of actuation. At the same time — through its practices — it is providing concrete examples to member states on security promotion through flexible approaches, which has been contributing to the affirmation of its distinctive international identity. According to Mosser [14] from a "distinct combination of modern and postmodern characteristics in both its composition and its activities" the OSCE created an "embedded security" enshrined in its normative constitutive principles. It looks like building on its main strength as a normative actor, and promoting regional cooperation should remain high on the OSCE agenda — the same lines of reasoning that fostered cooperation at times of Cold War rivalry seem to prevail as core lines of actuation of the organisation in current times. This very particular identity and normative conceptualisation has been a distinguishing feature of the organisation.

Regular meetings, including meetings to review agreed procedures, allow for coordination of activities and evaluation of the level of implementation of OSCE principles. These are grounded in the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent documents, with particular relevance to the European Security Charter adopted in 1999 [15, p. 193–194]. As part of its commitments, "The Charter will contribute to the formation of a common and indivisible security space. It will advance the creation of an OSCE area free of dividing lines and zones with different levels of security" [16], trying in this way to keep alive the then already moribund "common European home" idea. The Charter identifies challenges to security and paves the way for the introduction of concrete mechanisms to reinforce the organisation's ability to act in the prevention and management of violence, as well as reinforces its vision on the protection of human rights, anti-discriminatory policies and the holding of free and fair elections, among other — i. e. the document restates fundamental guiding principles in an updated context. With regard to the innovative aspects the OSCE introduced in its actuation, the principle of intervention concerning the human dimension and military aspects is particularly relevant. Moreover, the possibility of sending short-term and fact-finding missions, or establishing longer term field presences in order to better respond to existing problems revealed overall positive. This instrument has allowed for better recognition of local problems and to closer contacts with stakeholders, allowing a proactive approach. This has not been without difficulties, certainly.

The wording of mandates and the material and human resources available constitute serious limitations to the missions' actuation, despite the acknowledged advantages of their deployment [17; 18]. Moreover, by this time Russia became more assertive in its dealings with the OSCE in face of criticism about Chechnya, considered as interference in Russian internal affairs. Increasingly throughout time Moscow became weary of the wide involvement of the organisation in the post-Soviet space. Exchanges in the context of the 2008 Georgia war, are illustrative [19]. Election monitoring became also a good example of clashes between Russian authorities and the organisation. For example, in 2007 Putin criticised the OSCE's decisions on the electoral process in Russia accusing the organisation of paying lip service to United Sates interests [20; 21; 22, p. 118]. The OSCE was accused of concentrating its field presences "East of Vienna" and focusing on "the human dimension — at the expense of security (hard and soft), as well as economic and ecological issues which, allegedly, were increasingly neglected by the [organisation]" [2, p. 14]. These criticisms might be framed already in distinct readings about the organisation's reach and

contribution to European security, understood by Russia as case selective and undermining the comprehensive conceptualisation of security it sought to promote.

OSCE decisions have a non-legally binding nature and the organisation depends on meagre financial means. [23] As a result, the capacities of the OSCE are limited with direct impact in its policies/actions. This depreciation has been evident regarding the member states positioning within and towards the organisation demonstrating the commitment these have towards it. For example, the low-key representation that some countries (in particular European countries and the United States) send to the OSCE's most important meetings — such as the annual Ministerial Council meeting — signals the reduced importance which some member states attach to the organisation. Concerning field operations and headquarters decisions, these are many times too vague and general in terms of formulation, and reveal sometimes disarticulation between headquarters and the field. The requirement for decision-making by consensus together with the politically-binding nature of the commitments endorsed by all participating members underscore the tendency towards vagueness and political unwillingness, which hinders the implementation of the organisation's objectives. The political and non-legally binding nature of its decisions, adopted on the basis of the principle of consensus, on the one hand may reveal weaknesses in the difficulties in negotiating consensual decisions; but on the other hand, their adoption is of substantial moral value [12]. Furthermore, the political nature of the OSCE allows discussion of sensitive issues that could otherwise be avoided. Likewise, its presence on the ground in some of the former Soviet republics is facilitated by its political nature and the non-inclusion of coercive means, such as the possibility of recourse to sanctions or embargoes as a way of penalising non-implementation. The presence of the OSCE in Chechnya, between 1995 and 1998, with the Russian Federation consent was a clear example.

Also relevant in this regard is the conflicting perceptions about the OSCE among the public and state-elites that might result from assessments of its activities based not on its mandate, but on what it is understood that the OSCE should be doing. Communicating clearly the contents and goals of the mandates is fundamental to avoid misinterpretation — for example, border monitoring has been confused with humanitarian assistance by some local populations that were expecting to receive assistance. This means the very own presence of the OSCE in the field and the way it is communicated matters [24]. Political elites should perceive this presence as contributing to stability-building, but there have been cases where the OSCE field missions or field presences have been described as signalling instability and therefore having the negative impact of diverting investments and projecting a distorted image of the situation in the country. These issues of perceived relevance and contribution of the OSCE locally require a well-balanced approach in the management of the daily affairs of the organisation's field deployments. These are challenges the OSCE faces in its daily actuation that are most relevant regarding its assessment and legitimacy [25; 26]. And these challenges also reveal the dual nature of many of the OSCE defining characteristics, where readings about opportunity and limits become clear, as analysed.

Drawing on the common principles of democracy and legality, economic freedom and socio-political development, the OSCE seeks to contribute to the promotion of stability in its area. The interconnection of all these dimensions, from political, military and humanitarian aspects to economic, environmental or scientific issues has contrib-

uted to the development of integrated responses to problems, seeking to overcome institutional hurdles and promote a transformative agenda. However, the ideal for which the OSCE struggles, a Europe at peace and united under common values and principles, is still far away.

Conceptualising security in the context of the OSCE

Since the establishment of the CSCE with the 1975 Final Act signature, the notion of security within the institutional, policy, and discursive framework of the CSCE/OSCE has been defined in broad terms, concerning not only military aspects — the traditional realist-centred understanding that prevailed throughout the Cold War — but also political, economic, environmental and social aspects. This broader understanding of security, which has been advanced in post-Cold War Europe [27], demonstrates the OSCE's innovative approach already at the time of the Helsinki consultations. The OSCE has since been pursuing a comprehensive, indivisible and cooperative approach to security. This comprehensive approach "relates the maintenance of peace to the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It links economic and environmental solidarity and cooperation with peaceful interstate relations" [28, p. 10]. Security in the OSCE area reflects shared notions about democratisation and stability-building through the initiation of cooperation as a first step towards the establishment of a security community. At the same time, the issue of security is perceived as transformative not only regarding specific issue-areas, but also regarding different decision-making actors and involving (inter)national governmental and non-governmental agents.

The OSCE model follows a set of norms and values which underpin the promotion of security within the OSCE space by promoting the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; activating confidence-building measures and transparency in civil-military relations; and stimulating sustainable economic development and environmental protection. These principles apply equally to all members and define the OSCE's comprehensive, indivisible and cooperative understanding of security. In other words, it is *"comprehensive"* (it links classic security elements to economic, environmental, cultural, and human rights factors), *"indivisible"* (one state's security is inseparable from that of other states), and *"cooperative"* (security is based on confidence and cooperation, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the work of mutually reinforcing multilateral institutions) [29, p. 119–120].

The OSCE approach to security builds on the definition of security community as "a group [that] has become integrated, where integration is defined as the attainment of a sense of community, accompanied by formal or informal institutions or practices, sufficiently strong and widespread to assure peaceful change among members" [20, p. 5]. Adler and Barnett have advanced this understanding by defining a security community as "a transnational region comprised of sovereign states whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change" [29, p. 30]. In this way, the OSCE's understanding of security is informed by the promotion of rules and norms [31, p. 491], which seek to "lay the foundation for a liberal transnational collective understanding in the area from Vancouver to Vladivostok" [29, p. 121]. This normative approach has underpinned the CSCE/OSCE's work since its inception as evidenced by its efforts at creating a sense of community, fostering dialogue between East and West and generating support for nascent civil

societies [29, p. 121]. The Soviet Union promoted the then CSCE as a forum for creating "an effective system of collective security" [32, p. 102]. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the OSCE member states are politically committed to the organisation's principles, this does not mean that members uphold these norms equally and universally.

Thus, by "helping to devise, diffuse, and institutionalise the concept of comprehensive, indivisible, and cooperative security, the OSCE has set in motion a learning process that is inducing governments and military establishments to replace deterrence, let alone the use of military power, with reassurance and trust building measures, as means of achieving security objectives. This redefinition of security has been necessary for the development of mutual trust and a growing sense of mutual identification in the OSCE region" [29, p. 148]. The idea of a "common European home" reasoned well with this take on security, by aiming at an inclusive political and security framework after the Cold War division. The term meant however different things at different times. In a speech in 1990, Gorbachev formulated the question and gave the answer: "What is our vision of the process of establishing all-European structures, the first outline for a European home? We favour an active and prompt continuation of the Vienna negotiations with the participation of all 34 states which, alongside further cuts in their armed forces and changes in the structure of these, could proceed to the elaboration of new and comprehensive confidence-building measures" [33]. And in the years before, in 1987 in Prague, 1988 in Belgrade and 1989 in Strasbourg, Gorbachev gave consistency to the architecture of this home: the Helsinki order regarding the borders regime would be at the foundation of the house; the first floor would be built around collective security, disarmament and the dismissal of military blocs; the second floor would deal with peaceful settlement of conflicts, and the upper two floors would entail pan-European economic and trade cooperation, and a cultural community [34, p. 39]. "For Gorbachev, European security and European integration were not instruments but the ultimate goal of Soviet foreign policy. A Common European Home would be based on universal human values, collective security, and economic integration. It included a vision of a continent without borders, where people and ideas could move freely. Gorbachev wished to turn the CSCE framework into the main structure of European security, by contrast to his predecessors, who had regarded the emphasis of the CSCE on human rights critically, although they attached great value to the 'Pan-European process', as they called it. At the same time, both NATO and the Warsaw Pact would gradually be dissolved, while the role of the USSR as a great European power would grow" [35].

Gorbachev was not the first to use the expression "common European home", before him Andrei Gromyko had used it in a meeting with French President Pompidou discussing about the relevance of having the CSCE, and later in 1981 Soviet leader Brezhnev used it in a visit to Bonn. It took different shapes, as a public relations campaign, as part of securing potential allies in the context of strategic disarmament, and as part of a globalist approach to international affairs [36]. The label was also understood as a way of diminishing the burden of Soviet involvement in Eastern Europe in face of internal difficulties, whereas accessing much needed Western investment [37]. Differently, Milan Svec (1988) defined this discourse as legitimising the extended presence of Soviet troops in Eastern Europe assisting in the process of keeping these governments close to Moscow, as the agenda was Western friendly [38, p. 322]. Some understood the concept as attempting at avoiding a failing balance between European integration and keeping Soviet influence in

its area; Gorbachev himself defined the concept as combining "necessity with opportunity" (1987). Some even considered that the concept was empty as the Soviet Union would not have a room in the European home [38, p. 341]. The understanding that the Soviet Union was part of wide Europe was easily shared, but the idea of building of a pan-European system of collective security was not. Even in the Soviet Union some talked about alternative houses, as references to a "Eurasian house" demonstrate [38, p. 341]. These readings of the concept of "common European home" show the points of disagreement where the implementation of the idea of a pan-European collective security system would bump into difficulties.

One of the main challenges in the crafting of the new European security order was the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact while the Atlantic Alliance reinvented itself. The latter engaged in new tasks, enlarged its membership, and retained its role as the security pillar of Euro-Atlantic security, whereas the former dissolved. This contributed to the centrality of NATO in European security affairs, sidelined the OSCE and generated suspicion in Russia. The way these developments took shape intertwine with Russian politics. References to the CSCE in the 1993 Russian Military Doctrine, mentioned 13 times [39, p. 382], suggest the organisation "was seen as almost a panacea for all the problems facing Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union" [39, p. 382]. This was a time when Russia's security approach internally focused on threats arising from economic decline, uncertainty and societal problems, and externally focused on joint responses to challenges with the West, including challenges related to non-military security [40, p. 278; 41, p. 433]. This changed by the end of the 1990s and became clearer with Vladimir Putin in power.

The OSCE in the European security architecture

The European security architecture after the Cold War has been mainly built around NATO. The OSCE's role became marginal and the EU despite taking on increasing responsibilities in security and defence does not match the role of NATO. Coordination between both organisations is in place, acknowledging that they have to gain from cooperation. The debate has not been exhausted, but practice has been showing an understanding of cooperation that is shared [42]. EU and NATO enlargements have furthered the security community to the West, and Russia has been criticising both organisations for moving their external borders closer to its own border, which in the case of NATO is understood as a threat [43]. The perception of the EU and NATO creating a dichotomised order of inclusion/exclusion has prevailed in Russian discourse and underlines Moscow's understanding that security in Europe is not possible without Russia [44]. Back in 1994, at the time of the Budapest Summit, when the CSCE was renamed Organisation, the atmosphere between Russia and the West was already severing — to which the Chechen war greatly contributed, — with then Russian President Yeltsin using the concept of "Cold Peace" to refer to the fact that even before overcoming the Cold War legacy, relations were already getting difficult, and underlining in this context the role of the OSCE in delineating a roadmap for the creation of a comprehensive European security system [39, p. 383]. In 2009 Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov remarked at the opening of the OSCE Annual Security Review Conference, "we differ on the methods of obtaining European unity. It would have sufficed to consequently institutionalise the OSCE and to turn it into a full-fledged regional organisation under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. This means that

the OSCE would address the whole spectrum of problems in the Euro-Atlantic area. First and foremost, based on legal obligations, it would provide for an open collective security system in the region. Unfortunately, our western partners embarked on a different way that foresaw not only the preservation but, also, the enlargement of NATO" [45, p. 17]. This development has been resisted by Russia.

To Moscow the fact that the OSCE "has been pushed off the stage" and is not much present in the public debate in Brussels [46, p. 25; 47, p. 542], reinforces the idea that the organisation has also been sidelined from major security decisions in Europe. Thus, Russia started to look at alternatives, and established the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), and engaged more closely with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) seeking for a more balanced architecture. The CSTO, created in 2002 as an update of the Collective Security Treaty of 1992, is a military alliance committed to collective defence in case of external aggression. It coordinates efforts in the fight against terrorism, illegal trafficking and transnational crime, binding together resources from the six member states, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. However, its record has been limited, and despite the presence in its official narrative of an anti-NATO tone, it has not become a counter-weight to the Atlantic Alliance [48; 49]. The SCO was established in June 2001 following the earlier Shanghai Five Group, and counts with eight members, namely China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It seeks to promote cooperation and coordination on anti-terrorism and other external threats, as well as promoting an encompassing economic agenda. The membership of Russia and China in this organisation has elicited different analysis as this became a relevant forum for coordination of policies, as much as it is relevant with regard to regional competition between these two actors. But most relevant for this argument is the fact that the SCO has been named the "alliance of the East" or "NATO of the East", while this labelling has not effectively translated into concrete opposition to the Atlantic Alliance, apart from discourse [50–52].

Several Russian actions, such as Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, to name the most evident, reflect Russian willingness to make a strong statement about European security and interference in what it describes as its preferential area of actuation. "We shall provide an adequate and well-measured response to NATO's expansion towards Russia's borders, and we shall take note of [the West] setting up a global missile defence architecture and building up its arsenals of precision-guided weapons" [53]. This harsh discourse became part of the state of affairs in West-Russia relations. The sanctions agreed in 2014, in the context of the war in Ukraine, are a good illustration in this regard. Medvedev's proposal for a European Security Treaty [54], referred by some as Helsinki II or Helsinki Plus [55, p. 46; 56], is part of the Russian crafting of alternative configurations for European security. The proposal highlighted the relevance of cooperative security principles, as those signed back in the Helsinki's Final Act in 1975, while understanding the OSCE's many limitations and therefore the need to think about a new format. The core idea of the proposal was to bring Russia into the decision-making and shaping of European security. The proposal had several iterations but did not lead to any concrete results, besides signalling Russian discontent with the current state of affairs. The OSCE was again conveyed as part of proposals for defining a new security architecture in the framework of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project [57], which was set up to rethink the OSCE and security in Europe in a strained context where relations with Russia

kept difficult. The discussion of the Panel revealed old concerns and accusations in a new format. "In summary, at the end of twenty-five years, there are three broad perspectives:

The West: The central problem is not the rules but that Russia breaks them; it continues to behave as if its security can be assured only by dominating its neighbours.

Russia: Instead of creating a common security system there was a Western takeover. Russia was given the Versailles treatment and has responded accordingly.

States in-between: Many of these states wish to integrate with the West; these and others see themselves at risk as Russia develops a more aggressive policy in the region" [58].

The conclusions were not fully endorsed by Karaganov, the Russian representative around the table, who described the text as "basically an old Western [paper] in substance, in logic and in recommendations" [58], though it was acknowledged that the exercise provided good ground for discussing fundamental issues regarding European security. The OSCE went back to its past role of facilitating dialogue in a strained context. The document states at some point that "It is urgent to set in motion a robust political and diplomatic process to overcome the present crisis. The vision of a 'common European home' may be more remote today than it appeared two decades ago, but we still occupy a common space and need to find ways of living together in it" [58].

In the context of the 2014 Ukraine crisis the OSCE gained, nevertheless, new impetus [59] (see also on OSCE security governance related to the Ukraine crisis [60]). The Special Monitoring Mission is a civilian unarmed mission that monitors and reports on the situation in Ukraine, and is mandated to collect information and report on developments on the security context, particularly monitoring incidents on the ground. [61] It deployed the first observers in 24 hours and in fact "this was a civilian mission in a war zone", with the OSCE becoming the "the eyes and ears of the international community" [62, p. 5]. Despite the contribution of the OSCE, it faces many obstacles, particularly arising from limited resources, including technical equipment, and limited access to territories not under the control of the Ukrainian government. The Constitutional reforms and the election process as foreseen in the Minsk II agreement have encountered different interpretations and not seen much progress, the distribution of humanitarian assistance has been problematic and the monitoring of the withdrawal of heavy weapons difficult to implement [63]. The role of Russia in this process is fundamental, and the issue revisits one of the core aspects of OSCE activities — the involvement of Russia and how this impacts in the organisation's ability to implement its mandates. The recent escalation in tensions along the border of Ukraine, and the Russian recognition of independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions on February 21, 2022 [64], further add to readings about the OSCE limits in providing for security. The meetings conveyed under its auspices are welcomed as a forum where the parties talk from an equal footing, but the divergent interpretations about the 'indivisibility of security' and the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, along with the broader strategic dialogue on European security, much centred on the role of NATO, mean dialogue is stalled. "'When relations are good or most of the member states are like-minded, the organization works well. When relations are bad and there are major disagreements among members, that same organization will not function'. [citation from former OSCE head of mission from the US] For the OSCE to serve as a useful platform for discussions, Russian officials and Western counterparts will need to come to Vienna with the belief that it is possible to bridge their divergent positions, and they must have an idea of where common ground might be found" [65].

The OSCE's bridging role and security community rationale seem to be hampered by fundamental differences among its members on how the European security architecture should look like. These different interpretations, that became very clear with the most recent increase in tension in Ukraine-Russia-West relations constitute a major obstacle to any mediation success story promoted by the OSCE. Some even add as criticism the fact the organisation has been restricting its role to that of "the external observer and monitor, undermining its value for the participating states" [66]. This is not, though, a new story. Andrei Zagorski [67] has made it clear back in 2015 that "The frustrating experience of the last eleven years of fruitless discussions has only resulted in a deepening OSCE fatigue. Most recent attempts to revitalize political dialogue within the Organization, such as the Corfu process in 2010, the V2V debates in 2011, and the Helsinki+40 discussions, have failed to break this inertia. Although the OSCE's active engagement in mitigating the Ukraine crisis has brought the Organization back into the limelight of European politics, it has not made the task of revitalizing the Organization easier while linking any progress along the OSCE agenda to the regulation of the crisis", which has also proved to be difficult. Then the Minsk process under the auspices of the OSCE along with the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine were recognised by all parties as part of an important stability-building process. For Russia this involvement was fundamental in that it assisted in maintaining the *status quo*, meaning that it could avoid other kind of arrangements Russia would consider against its interests, whereas still allowing its involvement in "multilateral European affairs" [67, p. 26]. Moreover, as it would be difficult for NATO or the CSTO, for example, to get a more active role in this context, the OSCE could fill an important role by getting to the ground. Nevertheless, although it might monitor events, report on these and even promote confidence-building measures, the political willingness to settle divergences is not within its reach. This became most clear with the events of the past months in and around Ukraine. Its role within the European security architecture might have become more pressing, but this does not mean the OSCE gained new centrality. The European security order that was drawn after the end of the Cold War is still dictating the place for the OSCE in the security architecture.

Concluding remarks

This article analysed the role of the OSCE in the European security architecture and how the idea of the "common European home" which was close to the OSCE ideals soon proved to be difficult to implement, particularly with regard to the creation of a pan-European collective security arrangement. The comprehensive conceptualisation of security revealed limits regarding its enactment. The OSCE was a relevant institution at the time of the Cold War, with obvious limitations according to the context at the time, and assisted in the transition process after the ending of the bipolar rivalry, but clearly faced difficulties in its adjustment to the post-Cold War security context. As analysed, some of the OSCE advantages are also the main hindering factors to its work. The working rules of the organisation, including decision-making by consensus and norms on intervention, not allowing decision making to move forward at instances and generating disparate interpretations; the role and positioning of Russia within and towards the OSCE, as a strong supporter and as a suspicious member; and the drawing of the European security architecture around NATO meaning that the OSCE was sidelined as a principal actor from European security

affairs, all contributed to constrain its contribution to European security. Nevertheless, its encompassing approach to security, and its build-bridging and dialogue facilitating role, have allowed the OSCE a particular space in the security architecture, not as a central piece in this, but still as a relevant actor particularly in difficult contexts. The Ukraine crisis proved this role, and despite the failure of the "European common home" project, or of this envisaged reinforced security community, the idea of a more integrated Europe in security terms is still lingering in the organisation's principles and activities. How the current deep crisis between Russia, Ukraine and the West will affect this is to be seen.

The OSCE has clearly a mixed record in the provision of security, very much limited by the prevalence of NATO and Russian distrust, but which has nevertheless been providing a forum for discussion of security issues, as well as actively contributing through its field presences to stability-building, despite the obstacles it has been facing in contexts such as that of Ukraine. This does not mean we should assess the OSCE's contribution from the viewpoint of what other organisations or actors do not want or are not willing to take on, but instead that it still has a role and contribution in the complex security scenario that characterises current wide Europe, and that is one of competition more than of integration, one of violence more than of peace. In fact, "With views of the post-Cold War European security order at loggerheads, relations came to be dominated by a logic of competition and distrust, in contrast to the cooperative atmosphere of the late Gorbachev years. In this context some words obtained substantially new meanings and often became an instrument for defence rather than cooperation" [68]. This is the space where the OSCE might manoeuvre politically to consubstantiate new meanings on the legacies of the "common European home", recovering its old role as a security-innovator and eventually contribute to breaking the new divisions that have arisen in European security. However, how to do this will require a huge diplomatic effort.

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