

Research Project, OSCE Academy, Bishkek

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***Inter-institutional interaction in perspective: The
EU and the OSCE conflict prevention approaches
in Central Asia.***

Time frame: January – May 2010

1. Statement of the problem

Since the end of the cold war, the pan-European institutions have been adjusting to the new context, expanding their membership and their mandates to new policy areas. The European Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe are two central institutions of this regional order (along with NATO and the Council of Europe). Although their nature and scope are different, both organisations focus on soft power approaches and non-military means to address security issues, privileging cooperative and comprehensive approaches. They qualify as important pillars in the pan-European regional security order, and therefore the quality of their inter-institutional interaction is a necessary condition for stability and peace to endure in this geographical space. There are important examples of both organisations cooperating in conflict prevention and crisis management operations in the Balkans and the South Caucasus, and it is therefore relevant to inquire about the nature of their interaction in Central Asia, which has traditionally been regarded as the niche of the OSCE. As the EU developed its strategy for Central Asia (2007) and became engaged in issues of regional peace and stability, the potential for overlapping and “interblocking” increases, creating problems not only for the institutions themselves, but also in the effectiveness of their work in the region. **This proposal deals with the inter-institutional relations between the EU and the OSCE, in the field of conflict prevention/preventive diplomacy in Central Asia. Taking water management as a potential source of conflict in the region, the proposal enquires about two central aspects: What nature does the current EU-OSCE inter-institutional interaction has on conflict prevention issues? And how does that play out in water management issues between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan?**

2. Review of research literature

Inter-institutional interactions remain largely understudied, making strong theoretical frameworks unavailable (Oberthür and Gehring, 2003). Traditional approaches to International Organisations and their roles in international affairs have often pictured them as arenas for inter-state bargain (Mearsheimer, 1994) or alternatively as comprising a certain level of “actorness” in the international system (Barnett and Finnmore, 1999; March and Olsen, 1998). By recognising that interaction between

organisations goes beyond the advancement of member states interests, it is then possible to look at how institutions mutually-shape each other's views, identities and approaches. This research project takes this view point and recognises that beyond the competition and occasional cooperation pursued by states inside organisations, some level of autonomy develops making institutions capable of transcending such dynamics and to pursue different pathways.

Established in the post-cold war context, the notion of “interlocking institutions” was put forward in the Rome Declaration of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), in 1991, and sought to combine the work of NATO, the CSCE, the European Community, the Western European Union and the Council of Europe, in an interlocking security architecture (Aybet, 2000) that would assure stability in Europe, but also the permanence of the hegemonic post-cold war order (Ikenberry, 2001). Although conceptually the idea of coordinating the work of these mutually reinforcing institutions in the consolidation of a liberal democratic order in the pan-European space seemed to make sense, this purpose encountered many difficulties. The emergence of compatibility and coordination problems led some to question the nature of this interaction and argue that it might had become “interblocking” rather “interlocking institutions” (Kintis, 1996/98; Weisbrode, 2009). Institutional jealousy and apprehension, as well as the development of different security cultures have made interaction harder and less fruitful, leading to duplication of efforts, mismanagement of resources and contradicting approaches. However, cooperation between institutions in the pan-European space has not been exclusively negative and there have been examples of mutual support and commitment to common purposes which make the study of these interactions all the more urgent and necessary.

This research proposal departs from the theoretical findings of Peter van Ham (Ham, 2009) to elaborate on the nature of interaction and effects in terms of outcome. Van Ham analysed the interaction between the EU and the OSCE from a historical-institutional perspective in order to establish a causal pathway and mechanisms of influence, interacting in the process. For analytical reasons he looked at the EU as the source institution and the OSCE as the target institution, and took processes of “knowledge” transfer, in the form of ideas, reports, information exchange in these institutional settings and (political) “commitments” agreed by member states of both organisations as the two central mechanisms of influence. His conclusions showed that,

although the OSCE's approaches to security have influenced the EU's conceptualisation as an emergent security actor, this influence has been at times reversed. This means that the EU has increasingly seen itself as a model for others to emulate and has tried to coordinate its member states' preferences and stances in other institutional settings, namely the OSCE (Ham, 2009: 133). The EU has acted as a leading source institution in shaping OSCE perspectives and policies, using processes of persuasion and learning (acting through knowledge) as well as the previous political commitments agreed by the EU member states within the EU, which are later transferred to the OSCE institutional space. This situation gave rise to new dynamic processes of interaction between the two actors, sometimes leading to coordination, others to competition.

This proposal sets out to assess whether this pathway is still true as regards conflict prevention/preventive diplomacy, an area where the OSCE has a long experience, particularly in Central Asia, since the EU has been absent from the region until recently. This will allow a better understanding of the process of preferences' shaping, as well as of other processes affecting the interaction of both organisations, such as identity formation. The outcome for inter-institutional interaction might entail not only patterns of cooperation and/or competition, but subtler processes of hierarchisation, flexibilisation, and marginalisation. Ingo Peters (Peters, 2003) underlines this nuanced perception as a useful tool when assessing interaction among the institutions dealing with security in Europe.

The project takes conflict prevention as the area of analysis in the process of interaction between the EU and the OSCE. This choice relates to the fact that both organisations share a security rational in their work and sponsor similar approaches to security privileging comprehensive and cooperative views of security relations among states. This should indicate that cooperation and coordination of approaches between these two institutions would be a natural choice. However, although the OSCE has since its inception assumed conflict prevention as a central part of its identity and objectives (Cohen, 1999), only after the end of the cold-war did the EU take on more specific foreign and security policy functions (Smith, 2004; Smith, 2003). This process coincided with the re-structuring of the pan-European security architecture and with the need to allocate new functions to existing organisations, inherited from the cold-war. Moreover, while the OSCE has maintained a strong presence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the EU has only recently through the European neighbourhood Policy and the

Strategy for Central Asia engaged more closely with these regions. These differences suggest that there might be space for the EU to learn from the OSCE experience, although further research might reveal different conclusions.

Finally the project takes on water management as a potential source of conflict and narrows the research object. The inclusion of water management as a potential security aspect makes sense from the perspective of the expansion of the security studies beyond military security to include human security, namely resource management and environmental security as central aspects in the security of individuals and affecting inter and intra-state relations. Water management has been repeatedly recognised as a source of tension in Central Asia, considering the intricate geographical balances in the region (Horsman, 2001; International Crisis Group, 2002). Regional states have been unable to institutionalise a framework of cooperation which can establish a permanent dispute settlement mechanism, preferring to address issues of water management on a bilateral basis. However, both the OSCE and the EU have recognised that the most effective way to assure peaceful cooperation would be to include international actors which could mediate regional disputes. There is therefore room for coordination between the two institutions in regional issues of great importance for peace and stability.

3. Preparatory work

This researcher has conducted extensive research on the European Union and its growing role as a security actor in the wider European space, following the establishment of the European Neighbourhood Policy, in 2003, namely in the South Caucasus context. It became clear that the EU was facing difficulties to justify the necessity and legitimacy to act in the region through conditionality, particularly since membership issues were removed from the Neighbourhood initiative. Moreover, as far as conflict prevention and crisis management is concerned, EU-OSCE relations have become an object of contention, particularly in Georgia, raising questions about the role of member states and their interests in guiding institutional performance, as well as the impact of ideas in institutional behaviour, namely the impact of the idea of pertaining to the Western institutions.

This researcher has also conducted interviews with OSCE staff both in the Caucasus and in Bishkek, focused on the relations with the EU. This was a first impression on

how the staffs in both organisations regard the role of the other and what expectations are in place. It became therefore an issue of interest to deepen research on this interaction, particularly so in a context where security concerns are less linked to military issues, allowing for innovative approaches to security.

4. Aim of the research project

Mapping inter-institutional interaction within the pan-European security order has become a political urgency over the last years. The concept of interlocking institutions, as we have seen, provided a justification not only to the maintenance of the existing institutional landscape, especially regarding NATO, but also to the redrawing of mandates and membership. The European Communities approved the Maastricht Treaty establishing the European Union, with a clear mandate on foreign policy, NATO approved a new Strategic Concept in London 1990, The Charter of Paris for a “new Europe” was signed at the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, soon to become the OSCE) and the Council of Europe enlarged its membership to include all the countries from the Atlantic to the Caspian. This set the stage for increased cooperation within these institutional settings, but it also created the potential for overlap and suspicion as to the goals advanced by this institutional web. After a period of cooperation with the west, the Russian Federation has been particularly critical of NATO (and EU) advances to its sphere of interests and has been particularly active in blocking the OSCE’s performance. It has been critical of what it perceives as a pro-Western stance of the organisation in crisis management and the overall political dimension and in protest has cut funding and blocked the extension of field missions as part of a broader call for a comprehensive revision of the current security order.

As a response to these challenges, the current Greek Chairmanship of the OSCE has initiated the so-called “Corfu Process”, in an attempt to streamline efforts among all member states of the OSCE to reach a new consensus. Politically, there is great relevance in assessing the ongoing problems of coordination, as well as good practices existing on the ground between two crucial organisations such as the EU, which is expanding its geographical reach, and the OSCE, which has a long experience on the ground and a much more inclusive membership base. This is also crucial at a time when international resources to tackle security issues have been restrained by the global financial crisis, making a rational and efficient use of resources a central urgency for

those contributing to these organisations. For the developing states in Central Asia, this carries the risk of reduced assistance in issues that are vital to their stability, prosperity and to regional peace. Therefore, both politically and socially, coordination between the European Union, a new-comer into the region and the OSCE, a long-term partner of Central Asia, are crucial challenges for all those involved.

Besides the focus on inter-institutional interaction, the project deals with the issue of environmental degradation as an increasing challenge to security. This approach is in line not only with the enlarged concept of security which took root after the end of the bipolar confrontation, but also with the OSCE's and the EU's comprehensive view on security. Water, in particular, has long been an issue of dispute in Central Asia, linking not only different states to a common problem, but also creating tension between communities with states. The OSCE has taken the lead organising a conference in 2000 that would bring together riparian states in a multilateral framework of dialogue, which however found little resonance in the region. Ever since, water has remained a central issue in the OSCE's conflict prevention and early warning activities in the region. As for the EU, water has also stand as a priority in its strategy for Central Asia, with innovative approaches. Therefore, as both organisations focus on water as a potential source of tension and security risks in the region, it is relevant to address their interaction in such issues.

Academically-wise, the under-developed field of study of inter-institutional interactions has missed the opportunity to feed into the ongoing political debate on the topic, as mentioned above. This proposal is an attempt to make a small contribution to this debate, building on the few existing in-depth studies, and hoping to shed light on the previous findings.

5. Project outline and tentative timeframe

The departure point to this project is the consolidation of the theoretical underpinnings. This implies the establishment of a well-defined research question and analytical framework, which can allow this research to feed into previous works on inter-institutional interaction. Some time will be therefore dedicated to reading and designing the theoretical framework of analysis. This initial period will also be used to clarify the OSCE's and the EU's approach to institutional interaction among each other in conflict prevention/preventive diplomacy and their views on water management, as these are the

issues to be analysed. Once a consolidated framework and hypothesis are established, the next step is to gather new empirical information. This will be achieved by conducting semi-structured and open interviews, seeking both to establish factual information and perception-based patterns. This allows the incorporation of the human variable in the process of interaction among institutions. Desirably, interviews will be conducted in Bishkek, with the European Union and OSCE staff, in charge of conflict prevention and water management issues, as well as inter-institutional coordination. Interviews with the relevant ministries, in Kyrgyzstan are a possibility, in order to assess the perceived impact of both organisations' policies in terms of cooperation with local actors. Should there be enough time and resources, conducting interviews with EU and OSCE staff in Dushanbe and Tashkent is also relevant. However, the possibility of conducting them by telephone is the most viable option.

January / March 2010 – consolidation of the theoretical and analytical framework; definition of hypothesis for the empirical research.

March/ May 2010 – field research, interviews, empirical data collection. Hypothesis testing and first findings.

Deliverables: Working paper and in house seminar

6. Selective research bibliography

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