Internal War

Perhaps the most significant issue in European security in the 1990s has been that of internal war, often, though not always, of an ethnic character. These conflicts emerged from an array of factors related to the collapse of the bipolar European system:

1. a legacy of historical animosities that had been suppressed by Soviet and communist rule;
2. instability, uncertainty and privation associated with political and economic transition;
3. insecurities for minority populations associated with the withdrawal of federal protections in the former Soviet Union (e.g. Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh;
4. the collapse of the prevailing communist ideology;
5. the efforts of elites threatened by processes of democratization to sustain their position through mobilization strategies centred on ethno-nationalism.

This was viewed as a generic threat to security throughout the former Warsaw Pact and former Soviet spaces in the early 1990s. Concern over the problem strongly informed much of the discussion of evolving roles of European and Euro-Atlantic institutions at the beginning of the decade, as these institutions attempted to redefine their missions in a post-bipolar security environment.[22]

Several aspects of the phenomenon of internal war were disturbing to these multilateral organizations:

1. an apparent pattern of ethnic cleansing, which constituted a clear violation of international and European humanitarian norms;
2. the danger of spillover of civil conflict into neighbouring states;
3. conflict-induced forced migration, which risked the destabilization of delicate ethnic balances in neighbouring states (spillover effects are considered below) as well as significant social costs to OSCE members farther removed from the zone of conflict.

With the passage of time, it has become clear that the phenomenon of civil conflict along ethnic or other regional lines is regionally concentrated in Southeastern Europe and the southern periphery of the former Soviet Union (from Moldova to Tajikistan), rather than afflicting the former Warsaw Pact and former Soviet spaces as a whole. Elsewhere, both internal (ethnic balances, the

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[22] NATO, "Strategic Concept" (November 7-8, 1991). http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c911107.a.htm; OSCE, "Charter of Paris for a New Europe" (Paris: OSCE, 1990); "Western European Union Council of Ministers Petersberg Declaration" Bonn, WEU, June 1992); "European Security: A Common Concept of the 27 WEU Countries" (Madrid: WEU, November 1995).