

Relevance

Developments in 1993 were marked by a continued lack of progress toward more stability in the CSCE area. Shooting wars were ongoing in the Balkans, Transcaucasia and Tajikistan. Ethnic tension continued to increase the danger of further conflicts. Fragile emerging democracies were faced with fundamental challenges incompatible with basic CSCE values. And human rights violations continued unabated.

The above comes not from a critic of the CSCE but from its own Secretary General, in his annual report. Given the turmoil in the CSCE area, have all Canada's efforts come to naught?

The CSCE's success in conflict prevention is difficult to gauge: in cases where the CSCE has been active, one does not know whether lack of war is due to the CSCE's intervention or whether war would never have broken out in the first place. The CSCE did not prevent conflict in ex-Yugoslavia, but it is unrealistic to expect that it could or should have. The CSCE conflict prevention institutions were hardly in place when the war broke out, and the CSCE was never given an opportunity to manage the conflict, a task that was appropriated by the EC and later the UN. Even in ex-Yugoslavia, the CSCE has had a small beneficial effect, with its sanctions assistance and "spillover" missions. In Kosovo, the mission probably saved lives by acting as a restraint on Serb militiamen and on Albanians who might have become more violent had they not had the CSCE to turn to. However, the long-term Kosovo mission was undermined by the decision to suspend Serbia-Montenegro from the CSCE, which caused Serbia to get rid of the mission.

Outside the Balkans, mission success has varied depending on the extent to which disputing parties have been amenable to outside influence and on the amount of political support accorded the mission by Vienna and capitals. Dealing typically with deep-rooted tensions and labouring under vague or overly ambitious mandates, missions have nonetheless been able to act as ombudsmen and go-betweens in often byzantine disputes, and have provided a source of advice about issues as basic as constitution-writing and the application of human rights. Indeed, one of the CSCE's greatest triumphs was encouraging the modification of Estonian citizenship and language laws. Hardly the stuff to pacify Europe, but an achievement that eases human suffering and may forestall the emergence of conflict down the road. The missions have put an international spotlight on potentially nasty corners of Europe, meant that situations that could have deteriorated did not do so, and led to very small steps forward. The HCNM has also worked very well, as a low-key independent figure, in negotiating minority questions.

The Canadian-commissioned study of the effectiveness of missions, conducted in early 1994, concluded that all missions studied had exercised a restraining influence on contending groups, although only in rare instances were they able, in spite of efforts, to move in the direction of conflict resolution. Two test cases are unfolding right now, in Nagorno-Karabakh (the "Minsk process") and Georgia (Ossetia), where the CSCE has been given the responsibility for dealing with active conflicts.

Missions are likely to lose their credibility if they stay for a long time and there is little discernable improvement in the situation. Only now is the CSCE starting to look seriously at the issue of follow-up to mission recommendations, something that gets closer to