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**THE ROLE OF THE CONFLICT PREVENTION CENTER
IN THE SECURITY SYSTEM OF THE CSCE**

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1. Introduction

One of the main objectives of the decisions taken at the last CSCE Helsinki Summit (9-10 July 1992) was the strengthening and updating of the instruments and mechanisms for conflict prevention and crisis management. In fact, in the months prior to the summit, there was a growing awareness of the need for a rethinking of the very foundations of the security system set up by the CSCE.

During the period of East-West confrontation, the main concern was the danger of a surprise attack or large-scale offensive launched by one alliance against another along internationally recognized borders. The arms control system and the confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) developed within the CSCE were essentially conceived to counter this specific kind of threat, typical of the bipolar system. With the dissolution of the two blocs, this threat has disappeared.

In the meantime, the traditional concept of "international conflict"--meaning a conflict among states or groups of states--underlying most of the methods of conflict prevention of international institutions, has become largely obsolete. This is particularly true of the system of CSBMs operating within the CSCE framework and implemented by the Conflict Prevention Center (CPC). This system was created essentially to prevent military border attacks--in particular, large-scale surprise and offensive attacks, to reduce the risk of accidental war and to deter the possible use of military force for coercion or intimidation. The more or less explicit theory on which the CSBM system is based underlines the role that misunderstandings, misperceptions and the lack of correct information can play in provoking or fuelling conflicts. This explains the importance given to an efficient communications network and to military transparency.

It is evident that this grid of conceptual assumptions can be applied to a rather limited number of potential conflicts in post-Cold War Europe. In fact, the system of CSBMs contained in the Vienna Document 1990 and the Vienna Document 1992 proved to be totally useless in preventing the new conflicts that have broken out in Europe--conflicts that have been triggered mostly by internal tensions within states. Yet, the danger remains that some of these conflicts, although geographically limited today--often within the borders of a single state--could extend to involve a growing number of states. Given that, it would be wrong to consider the present system of CSBMs totally antiquated and ineffectual: it can still have considerable efficacy in preventing conflicts between states.

The ambitious programme approved in Helsinki is aimed at creating a new global system of conflict prevention and management based on a plurality of instruments and institutions. In this new system, the CPC has been given a role that seems limited but also multidirectional. Indeed, the name itself, "Conflict Prevention Center", does not correspond to the actual functions of the institution. On the one hand, it has been assigned duties that go beyond mere conflict prevention; on the other, important functions that are an integral part of that activity have been attributed

to other CSCE institutions. In view of coming meetings, especially the Review Conference to be held in Budapest from 10 October to 2 December 1994, the debate on the future role of the CPC seems more open than ever. In order to achieve the rationalization of the CSCE institutional structure which is increasingly considered an urgent priority and which will hopefully be begun in Budapest, one of the problems that must be dealt with is a more coherent and efficient distribution of conflict prevention and management tasks among CSCE organs.

2. CPC Structure and Tasks

2.1 The Origins of the CPC

The CSBM system was the first operational instrument for conflict prevention adopted by the CSCE. But the first two "generations" of CSBMs, approved in Helsinki (1975) and Stockholm (1986), respectively, did not provide for any kind of permanent multilateral mechanism for consultation and verification. Even the Stockholm regime was, in fact, implemented exclusively on a bilateral level.

The idea of creating a CSCE organ specifically charged with promoting security through permanent conflict prevention activity was first put forward at the opening of the Vienna CSBM negotiations (March 1989) by four Warsaw Pact countries: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic and Hungary. The new organ was to operate as a center for information and consultation with the main aim of reducing the risks of surprise attack. The frame of reference for the proposal was therefore still East-West confrontation. But most of the countries considered the proposal premature or unrealistic, given the uncertainties regarding the developments in the European security environment.

Only after the political upheaval in the Central and Eastern European countries in 1989 and the opening up of unprecedented prospects for cooperation in the field of security, did a more comprehensive and effective debate on the institutionalization of the CSCE start to take shape. In late 1989 and early 1990, various European governments advanced ideas and proposals aimed at creating a pan-European security system through the institutionalization of the CSCE**1. This was also behind the July 1990 proposal by the German delegation to the CSBM negotiations to create a CSCE center for management of crises determined by the violation of CSCE principles (whether military or concerning human rights). In addition to supervising the implementation of the CSBM system, the new center was to engage in systematic and peaceful settlement of disputes. But the traditionally more pro-Atlantic Western governments--above all the US and the UK--were concerned that the role of NATO could be "diluted" in an institutional context which they considered too broad and not sufficiently consolidated to be reliable. In particular, these countries were decidedly opposed to making the new Conflict Prevention Center responsible for anything more than supervision of the CSBM system. The German proposal was, however, supported by Central and Eastern European countries, including the USSR, which welcomed an initiative that could help to fill the "security vacuum" opening up in the eastern part of the continent. Therefore, while the majority of Western countries wanted to limit the nascent Conflict Prevention Center to the essentially technical task of assessment of respect of the arms control agreements, another group of countries advocated that it be given a more political role that would set it at the center of the new CSCE security system**2.

2.2. The Paris Summit and the Vienna Documents on CSBMs

The decisions on the role of the CPC in the new CSCE institutional context adopted at the Paris Summit were the result of a compromise between these two positions. The CPC was charged with assisting the Council of Foreign Ministers in reducing the risk of conflict. In particular, it was decided that in an "initial stage of its activity", the CPC would carry out this task by providing the necessary support for the implementation of the CSBM regime set up by the Vienna Document 1990. In order to satisfy those advocating a broader role for the CPC, the Council of Ministers was given the faculty to extend the competences of the new organ in the future. Explicit reference was also made, in particular, to further tasks that could be attributed to the CPC in the field of conciliation and settlement of disputes**3.

The CPC, which is located in Vienna, is made up of two organs: the Consultative Committee (CC) and the Secretariat.

The CC is composed of representatives of all the States participating in the CSCE. As set down in the Charter of Paris and the two documents on CSBMs, it carries out a number of different tasks:

a) It provides the forum for discussion and clarification of information exchanged under the CSBM system.

Apart from minor disputes about data provided by some countries, the crucial problem that has emerged in this field is the difficulty in creating an effective system of standardization allowing for harmonization and comparison of information, especially with reference to military budgets. It is important to note that the CPC's role in the annual exchange of information provided for by the CSBM regime has gained increasing importance following the improvements introduced in the sector by the Vienna Document 1992. One of the most interesting proposals currently being discussed is the extension of the exchange of information to new areas such as the sale and transfer of arms.

b) It holds the annual assessment meetings of the CSBMs.

The first of these meetings, held from 11 to 15 November 1991, was unanimously considered a success. At the second meeting, held from 8 to 11 November 1992, several proposals and suggestions were put forward for a further strengthening and improvement of the CSBM regime. In particular, there was agreement on the need to make some CSBMs, such as the mechanism regarding unusual military activities (see *infra*) and multilateral inspections, operative during times of crisis as well. Emphasis was also put on the importance of coordinating the CSBM regime with the other instruments for the prevention of conflicts created in Helsinki. Finally, the idea was tabled of applying CSBMs--both those already in force and those to be created in the future--not only to crises between states, but also to crises within states. These ideas were studied more thoroughly at the third assessment meeting held on 4/5 May 1993, in which many states insisted on the need for integration of the various CSCE measures available for dealing with emergency situations.

c) It prepares seminars on military doctrine and other possible seminars.

Two CSCE seminars on military doctrine were held in Vienna, from 16 January to 5 February 1990 and from 8 to 18 October 1991, respectively. The latter was organized by the CPC. However, with the progress made in political and

diplomatic relations between the former adversaries after the Cold War, this type of meeting had lost much of its effectiveness. Thus, it was decided to drop the series of seminars on military doctrine and to turn to more practical topics. The result has been an intensification of CPC seminars, with participation extended to experts not belonging to national bureaucracies and discussion broadened to encompass issues not directly linked to the specific competences of the Center, such as arms conversion, the role of the armed forces in contemporary society and the full integration of recently admitted countries into the CSCE.

d) It is responsible for the communication network linking the capitals of the CSCE participating States.

The communications network came into operation on 1 November 1991, but numerous difficulties arose in trying to integrate all countries. At the Helsinki Summit, the CC was charged with assessing the progress made and proposing solutions for the technical problems still to be solved. The experiment involving automatic exchange of military data and information began in mid-December 1992. Yet, by June 1993 only 31 countries (plus the CPC and the Secretariat) were linked to the communications network.

e) It holds the meetings of the participating States which may be convened under the mechanism on unusual military activities (UMA).

The unsuccessful attempts to use the UMA mechanism for dealing with the Yugoslav crisis revealed its very limited usefulness in actual crisis prevention **4. The rule of consensus tends to make it absolutely ineffective. It was obvious, therefore, that countries would turn to the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) which, especially after the introduction of the "consensus minus one" rule adopted at the Prague Council, is better equipped to intervene effectively in emergency situations. In fact, the emergency mechanism created in Berlin seems to have seriously undermined the usefulness of the UMA mechanism. As already mentioned, most people seem to be in favour of merging the two mechanisms in the framework of an overall rationalization of all measures subsequently created to deal with emergency situations**5.

The functions of the CPC Secretariat are essentially of an administrative nature. It carries out the tasks assigned to it by the CC to which it is responsible. As an executive organ, the Secretariat cannot take initiative. At Paris, the Secretariat was put in charge of setting up a data bank and publishing a yearbook based on the information exchanged pursuant to the provisions of the CSBM regime. While informal agreement was reached on the data bank (it has still not been concretely set up, however), the idea of the yearbook was rejected because of the opposition of numerous states to the publication of data considered highly confidential.

2.3. Subsequent Ministerial Decisions

In approving the La Valletta final document at the Berlin Council meeting, the Foreign Ministers decided to designate the CPC as the nominating institution for the Mechanism for peaceful settlement of disputes worked out in the Maltese capital. Thus, the suggestion contained in the Charter of Paris to extend the competences of the CPC to the field of settlement of disputes was translated into the assignment of a totally marginal task.

A series of provisions aimed at strengthening the CPC's functions and work methods were actually set down in the Prague Document on Further Development of

CSCE Institutions and Structures, approved at the 30/31 January 1992 meeting of the Council. In particular, the document sanctioned a broader role for the CC as a forum for consultation on security questions. Participant States were granted the right to call the attention of the CC to all "security issues with politico-military implications"⁶.

The Prague Document also took initial steps to extend the competences of the CC to the support of possible crisis management operations. It established that it is to serve as a forum "for cooperation in the implementation of decisions on crisis management taken by the Council or by the CSO acting as its agent"⁷. This new measure was part of an effort to define the institutional relationship between the CPC's Consultative Committee and the CSO more precisely. Indeed, various potential reasons for rivalry between the two organs--both composed of representatives of all the participant countries--had emerged in the months prior to the meeting. The evident danger was an overlapping or mixing up of competences that could complicate the decision-making process of the CSCE, weakening its ability to undertake timely initiatives, especially in the field of management of emergency situations. This problem was solved in Prague, with a decision endorsing the institutional primacy of the CSO--a decision that was to be confirmed and further strengthened at the Helsinki Summit. In particular, it was established that the CC is to carry out all supplementary tasks assigned to it by the CSO. The CC, in turn, has the right to call the attention of the CSO to situations that it feels deserves discussion in the vicarious organ of the Council.

The steps taken to get around the cumbersome dualism between the CPC's Consultative Committee and the CSO, by transforming the former into a kind of operative arm of the latter--at least for certain functions--were undoubtedly among the most important decisions taken at the Prague Council. It must be pointed out, however, that the Prague Council did not eliminate all basic ambiguities concerning the role of the CPC; indeed, some were actually accentuated. In fact, as mentioned previously, the Council wanted to give the CC a stronger role as a forum for consultation on security issues, while it *de facto* sanctioned the hierarchical superiority of the CSO in this field.

The Prague Document also promoted the reorganization of the CPC's work methods to make them more suited to its new functions. To that end, it provided the CC with the faculty to establish subsidiary work organs to which to assign specific tasks.

2.4. The Helsinki Summit

As already observed, the main objective of the plan approved at the Helsinki Summit is to set up--through the creation of new institutional instruments and the updating of existing ones--a global system for early warning, conflict prevention and crisis management.

Of particular importance are the new provisions aimed at establishing a comprehensive link between conflict prevention and control of respect for human rights obligations. These have led to the multiplication--surely not without its drawbacks--of mechanisms and instruments for conflict prevention. Those that are to be implemented by the CPC represent only one part of an extremely complex and multi-faceted system involving many other organs. For example, the Helsinki Final

Document defines the new High Commissioner on National Minorities as "an instrument of conflict prevention at the earliest possible stage"⁸. As has been observed, the competences of the High Commissioner actually fall more into the security domain than into that of human rights⁹. Thus, the respective competences of the High Commissioner and the CPC have yet to be clearly defined. The same kind of vague functional differentiation also exists between the CPC and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). According to the Helsinki Document, the latter should be considered an instrument that may "contribute to early warning in the prevention of conflicts", in particular, through implementation of the Human Rights Mechanism¹⁰.

The range of activities carried out by the CPC has also been further enlarged. The most important new sector in which the CPC has been given a significant role to play is peacekeeping. The CSO may request the CC to advise "which peacekeeping activities might be most appropriate to the situation"¹¹. The recommendations worked out by the CC will then be considered by the CSO in its final decision. Furthermore, once operations have been decided upon, the CC will prepare the mandate and define the practical details and the requirements for personnel and other resources. In the course of the preparatory negotiations for the Helsinki Summit, much discussion centered around whether and what functions should be given to the CPC in the operational chain of command. It was decided that the Chairman-in-office in charge of the operational guidance of each operation will be assisted by an *ad hoc* group set up by the CPC. The *ad hoc* group, headed by the Chairman-in-office, has the specific duty to provide "overall operational support" for the mission and to control its progress continuously¹².

It must be pointed out that these CPC functions are still largely hypothetical. The conditions to which implementation of CSCE peacekeeping missions has been made subject--consent of the parties, exclusion of enforcement action, existence of an effective and durable ceasefire, etc.--have made them highly improbable.

Among the most controversial topics debated by the participant States in view of the Helsinki Summit was the kind of relationship to be established between the CPC and the Forum for Security-Cooperation. A few states still fond of the idea of turning the CPC into the hub of the CSCE security system urged that it be given responsibility for the management of new negotiations on arms control and CSBMs. This proposal was rejected. The United States, in particular, opposed it with determination, claiming that the CPC must continue to deal only with the implementation of arms control measures and must not be turned into a negotiating forum. Once again, fundamental differences in views concerning the role of the CPC became evident. Agreement was reached, however, on the fact that the CPC's Consultative Committee is to form one of the pillars of the Forum. Thus, the Helsinki Document based the structure of the Forum on two organs: the Special Committee, responsible for negotiations on arms control and CSBMs and for so-called "goal-oriented dialogue", and the CPC's Consultative Committee, charged with working out new conflict prevention techniques. The fact remains that of the three functions assigned to the Forum--negotiation of arms control, goal-oriented dialogue and development of conflict prevention techniques--the last, the one assigned to the CC, is the most indefinite. As a part of the Forum, the CC has also been charged with the task of promoting cooperation in the field of verification of arms control agreements.

2.5. After Helsinki

Particularly reinforced by the institutional restructuring of the CSCE decided upon at Helsinki were the executive and coordinating organs--the CSO and the Chairman-in-office--and the instruments and mechanisms aimed at ensuring a closer and more comprehensive link between the security and the human dimensions. Consequently, the CPC suffered a certain loss in weight, which was confirmed by subsequent decisions adopted by the CSO regarding the budgets of the various institutions**13.

After Helsinki, CSCE missions--both *ad hoc* and long-duration--multiplied in the various hot spots on the continent. On the whole, the CPC's contribution to the organization and implementation of these missions was rather limited. The main missions were in fact organized and managed by the Chairman-in-office, the ODIHR (on the basis of the human dimension mechanism) and the High Commissioner. The most significant action undertaken by the CPC was related to the situation in Kosovo**14. The mission in Georgia was also decided by the CSO on recommendation from the CC (as well as on the basis of the report by the personal representative of the Chairman-in-office)**15. The CSO later decided to assign to the CPC's Secretariat the financial management of the two missions mentioned and of the monitoring mission in Macedonia**16.

As already stated, no peacekeeping mission in the strict sense of the term has been carried out to date, even though some long-duration missions seems to have taken on that function. Since Helsinki, the CSO has done no more than start an examination of the CSCE's concrete potential in this field. The CPC has contributed to this effort by organizing a seminar specifically dedicated to peacekeeping problems (7-9 June 1993). No final document was approved at the seminar, confirming the CSCE's current difficulties in progressing in this sector.

Extremely important for the future role of the CPC are the actions taken in view of a rationalization and further strengthening of the CSCE's institutional structure. At the Stockholm meeting (14-15 December 1992), the Council decided, among other things, to initiate a process that should result in the granting of an "internationally recognized status" to the Secretariat in Prague, the CPC and the ODIHR. In an earlier meeting of the CSO, the CPC had presented a document which described--on the basis of the indications provided by the Stockholm Council--some actions aimed at strengthening the CPC's ability "to provide operational support for CSCE preventive diplomacy missions and peacekeeping activities"**17. To that end, an operative section composed of experts nominated by the Center's director has been set up within the CPC**18.

3. Concluding remarks

The foregoing analysis shows that the CPC has from the beginning been poised precariously between a political function--consultation among the representatives of all participant States on situations of crisis and potential conflict in Europe--and a more strictly technical-operative one--support of the actions undertaken for conflict prevention and crisis management.

The process of institutional restructuring carried out after the Paris Summit has led to a progressive decline in the importance of the former function in favour of the latter. At the same time, the mechanisms and instruments for conflict prevention and crisis management for which other CSCE organs are responsible have multiplied,

often in a disorderly way.

It should be added that the general development of the European institutional security system tends to leave little room for the CSCE. Some of the competences of the CPC, in particular, especially those of a political nature, tend to be increasingly covered by the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), created by the Rome NATO Summit on 7/8 November 1991. This problem of overlapping of roles has been accentuated by the extension of the NACC's competences to military problems.

In light of these considerations, the future of the CPC seems uncertain. It is, of course, linked to the direction that the overall institutional structure of the CSCE will take. To date, the increase in the number of organs and instruments has not translated, or rather has translated only marginally, into an actual strengthening of the organization's operational capabilities. The practical initiatives pursued since Helsinki have also revealed the urgent need for a rationalization of the organization's institutional structure.

In any event, it will be difficult to eschew action towards functional reorganization and simplification of the CSCE's institutional structure at the coming Review Conference in Budapest. And as a part of this process, the ambiguities relative to the role of the CPC will have to be solved. The dominant orientation seems to be towards the gradual transformation of this organ into a kind of technical agency serving the CSO. The CPC could, for example, provide technical support for the various missions organized in the CSCE framework. But another possibility cannot be ruled out, especially if the line in favour of a drastic reduction of the CSCE structure were to prevail: the CPC could be eliminated altogether and its competences transferred to other organs. Either way, what is essential is that the blatant contradiction between the CSCE's institutional structure which tends towards uncontrollable proliferation and its still extremely limited operational capabilities be solved. If it were to persist, it could gradually erode the broad political consensus that the CSCE has enjoyed to date and which is vital for its future.

NOTES

(1) See V. Mastny (ed.), *The Helsinki Process and the Reintegration of Europe, 1986-1991. Analysis and Documentation*, New York: New York University Press, 1992, pp. 201-209.

(2) For further information on the origin of the CPC see V.-Y. Ghebali, «Une institution européenne nouvelle: le Centre de la Csce pour la prévention des conflits en Europe», in *Le Trimestre du Monde*, 1ère trimestre 1991, pp. 123-129; V.-Y. Ghebali, «The Csce Conflict Prevention Center», in *International Defense Review*, vol. 24, No. 3, 1991, p. 219.

(3) *Supplementary Document to Give Effect to Certain Provisions Contained in the Charter of Paris for a New Europe*, section I, F.

(4) See H. Vetchera, «Die KSZE-Krisenmechanismen und Ihr Einsatz in der Jugoslawien-Krise», in *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, vol. 5, 1991, pp. 405-414; R. Weitz, «The Csce and the Yugoslav Conflict», in *RFL-RL Research Report*, 31 gen. 1992, pp. 24-26; R. Zaagman, «The Csce and the Yugoslav Crisis», in

Helsinki Monitor, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1992, pp. 41-50.

(5) The CC also co-ordinates the exchange of information concerning hazardous incidents of a military nature.

(6) *Prague Document on Further Development of CSCE Institutions and Structures*, section VII, par. 27.

(7) *Ibidem*, par. 28.

(8) *Helsinki Decisions*, chapter II, par. 2.

(9) See A. Bloed, «Helsinki II: The Challenges of Change», *Helsinki Monitor*, vol. 3, No. 3, 1992, p. 48.

(10) *Helsinki Decisions*, chapter VI, par. 6.

(11) *Ibidem*, chapter III, par. 27.

(12) *Ibidem*, chapter III, par. 40.

(13) See *Csce/16-Cso/Dec.13*, 18 September 1992; *Csce/17-Cso/Dec.1*, 6 November 1992.

(14) See *11 Cso/Journal No. 3*, 20 May 1992; *16 Cso/Journal No. 3*, 18 September 1992.

(15) See *17 Cso/Journal No. 2*, Annex 2, 7 Nov. 1992.

(16) See *19 Cso/Journal No. 2*, 3 February 1993.

(17) *Summary of Conclusions of the Stockholm Council Meeting*, section 7.

(18) See *19 Cso/Journal No. 2*, Annex 2, 3 February 1993.