

III-E. Profile of OSCE

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1. Overview

The **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** is the world's largest regional security organisation, fostering comprehensive and co-operative security among 56 States from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

As part of its comprehensive approach to security, the OSCE is concerned with economic and environmental matters, recognizing that co-operation in these areas can contribute to peace, prosperity and stability.

The OSCE promotes a continuous dialogue through regular meetings of its permanent bodies in Vienna such as the Permanent Council, the Economic and Environmental Sub-Committee. Economic and Environmental Officers operate on the ground in the OSCE Field Presences in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Through its work, OSCE offers a forum for political negotiations and decision-making in the fields of early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation.

2. Environment and Security Activities

The OSCE aims at securing peace and stability by enhancing the sustainable use of natural resources, by fostering the sound management of hazardous waste and by promoting environmental awareness, participation in decision making and public access to information.

The OSCE's environmental initiatives raise the awareness of environmental risks and their impact on security. By enabling environmental co-operation, the OSCE helps to improve sustainable resource management. Its programmes for regional water management and strategies deal with pollution effects caused by toxic and radioactive waste.

In 2002, the OSCE joined forces with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other UN agencies and NGOs to promote environmental management as a strategy for reducing insecurity in South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Work related to the environment is the focus of Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA).¹

¹ See Secretariat – Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities at: <http://www.osce.org/eea/>

a. Promoting Environmental Awareness

Education and raising awareness are viewed as fundamental tools in changing patterns of social and economic behaviour as it affects the environment by integrating environmental concerns and the concept of sustainable development into people's conscience.

OSCE's Aarhus Activities ²

The OSCE has advocated the ratification and implementation of the Aarhus Convention by its participating States since 1999, organizing awareness raising campaigns, national and regional seminars and supporting the establishment, registration and operation of environmental NGOs.

By establishing Aarhus Centres in various OSCE participating countries, designed to provide a bridge between governments and civil society, OCEEA complements existing official establishments.

Education for Sustainable Development and Environment as a Tool for Cooperation and Peace Building

The OCEEA supports the development and implementation of the UNECE strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and several activities related to environmental education implemented by OSCE field missions.

Together with the Regional Environmental Centre (REC), the OCEEA is adapting the Green Pack programme, ³ already successfully implemented by the REC in several Central European countries, to the conditions and needs in the CIS and the Balkans. The goal is to encourage children to become empowered citizens ready to act as drivers for sustainable development. Given the mandate of the OSCE, specific emphasis will be put on the environment as a tool for cooperation and peace building.

b. Hazardous Waste

Some parts of the OSCE region are heavily industrialised but lack adequate environmental safeguards, resulting in serious environmental degradation and impacting negatively on health.

Major industrial "hot spots" close to urban areas pose severe threats to health. Land degradation through over-use of pesticides and fertilizers, radio-active or chemical waste leads to loss of livelihoods and migration.

Direct legacies of previous conflicts such as land mines, and unexploded ordinances cause death, injuries and foreclosure of land. All these issues are among the many problems that the OCEEA deals with.

The OCEEA through the ENVSEC Initiative supports the Mission in Armenia to eliminate Rocket Fuel Components (Melange), by providing assistance to the initial stage of the project.

² For more information see: "Factsheet on the OSCE and the Aarhus Convention" at: http://www.osce.org/eea/item_11_15634.html and the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy at: <http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>

³ See Green Pack: A Multi-media educational resource pack at <http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/GreenPack/Default.html>

In the Ferghana valley, tackling the effective management of uranium industry waste and chemical hazards to prevent health and environmental detriment are the main priorities identified under the ENVSEC Initiative.⁴

Finally, in Kazakhstan, an information campaign on radiological safety in towns adjacent to the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site has been concluded.

c. Water and Security

Among environmental factors, water resources - including their scarcity, distribution and quality aspects - have been recognized as a potential factor that can lead to political pressures.

OSCE participating States concerned by the potential threats posed by unsustainable water uses, yet aware of the opportunities offered by water management for building confidence and fostering greater co-operation, decided to choose the sustainable use and the protection of the quality of water as topic of the Tenth OSCE Economic Forum held in May 2002.

Following the recommendations of the Economic Forum, the OCEEA developed a series of activities in the following river basins:⁵

Central Asia - Chu-Talas basin

Assisting Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in setting up an interstate water commission on the Chu and Talas rivers

Southern Caucasus - Kura-Araks basin

Re-establishing regional water-monitoring systems and databases

Eastern Europe - Dniester river

Supporting regional co-operation on the management of the Dniester basin

South-Eastern Europe - Sava river

Developing a network of local actors on water resource management and supporting the establishment of a permanent Sava commission.

d. ENVSEC Initiative

The ENVSEC Initiative, a partnership between NATO, OSCE, UNDP and UNEP, is the primary vehicle through which the OSCE carries out its environmental security work. The OSCE engages in a wide range of activities related to early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict. Part of its comprehensive approach to security, the OSCE addresses the linkages between economic and environmental concerns and the linkages necessary to ensure peace, prosperity and stability. Relevant OSCE activities include: promoting the sustainable use of natural resources: fostering the sound

⁴ The legacy left by twenty years of intensive uranium mining near Mailuu-Suu in Kyrgyzstan threatens to become an ecological disaster in Central Asia. The OSCE Centre in Bishkek is encouraging international co-operation in finding a solution. For more information, see "Finding a Solution for Uranium Waste in Kyrgyzstan" at: http://www.osce.org/eea/item_2_181.html

⁵ For more information on these river basin initiatives see: <http://www.osce.org/eea/13469.html>

management of hazardous waste; promoting environmental awareness, participation in decision making and public access to information.

OSCE leads on number of projects in the context of the ENVSEC Initiative in the regions of Central Asia, Caucasus and Eastern Europe.⁶

e. 2007 the Fifteenth Economic Forum

In 2007 the Fifteenth Economic Forum⁷ of the OSCE will be “Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable development in the OSCE area: Land degradation, soil contamination and water management”. The forum will be held in Vienna from 22 to 23 January and in Prague from 21 to 23 May.

The 2007 OSCE Spanish Chairmanship⁸ indicated that the proposal of this theme is based on a number of factors, including:

- The increasing relevance of environmental factors in determining the security of both states and individuals and as vectors for international co-operation;
- The increasing attention paid to these issues on the international scene and therefore the opportunity to establish and strengthen useful partnerships with other actors;
- The need to follow-up and build on the results of previous Economic Fora dealing with issues linked to the proposed topic;
- The opportunity to harmonise the theme of the Economic Forum with the theme of the Review of Commitments as set out in the Maastricht Strategy (UNECE would be asked to present a review of commitments in the environmental field at the Economic Forum 2007; the UNECE would also work on a comprehensive report for the Ministerial Conference Environment for Europe 2007 to be held in Belgrade during the fall);
- The applicability of the theme to a large number of participating States, East and West of Vienna;
- The possibility to meaningfully engage the OSCE Partners for Co-operation and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation.

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⁶ See: <http://www.osce.org/eea/13468.html>

⁷ See: http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2006/07/19850_en.pdf

⁸ See: http://www.envirosecurity.org/ges/GFSPdocuments/002_Economic_Forum-1.pdf