

OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP 2019

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The OSCE is an unconventional international intergovernmental organization providing dialogue to 57 participating states. We say unconventional because it lacks a constitutional document such as an international treaty or charter that is one of the essential elements of any regular, conventional organization. It has been called the OSCE since 1994 when it was agreed at the OSCE Budapest Summit that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) should be renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Within the organization, however, the term participating states continues to be used rather than member states. Practically, this has consequences, particularly in relation to OSCE field missions, budgets, logistics but also personnel issues. Of course, it is also a political issue and there is a working group composed of some participating countries that examines the advantages and disadvantages of this legal status.¹

The OSCE is thus the successor to the CSCE, which was established in 1973 in Helsinki. The most famous and most important document that originated from within the Helsinki process is the Helsinki Final Act (CSCE Final Act), which includes the Decalogue of European Security (Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States). It is a consensus based document adopted by the countries in the Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Alliance. From the outset, the CSCE/OSCE was established as a means of achieving détente and mediation between the two blocs, but at the same time it was perceived by individual participating states through the prism of their own divergent interests. Since at least since 2014, the OSCE has been seen as

¹ More on the OSCE's status can be found in S. Brander, "Making a credible case for a legal personality for the OSCE," *OSCE Magazine*, March–April 2009. Available online: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/36184?download=true> (accessed on March 10, 2020) and in M. Steinbrueck-Platise, A. Peters, "Transformation of the OSCE legal status," *Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law & International Law (MPIL) Research Paper No. 2018-23*, September 13, 2018. Available online: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3248991> (accessed on March 10, 2020).

a crisis manager, but there has also been a perception that it needs to go back to its roots. The deep internal conflict between the participating countries, high degree of mistrust and absence of a strategic approach to the functioning of the organization have all left their mark on its practices. This merely confirms the rule that international organizations are only as strong as its members allow it to be.

To obtain a better picture of the OSCE, we need to consider the theoretical, and largely normative, aspects of the organization. In theory, the OSCE is security-community building organization. But what does that mean? A security community can be understood as a community of people who refuse to settle disputes by force, and the community forms when its future members agree not to accept war as a legitimate means of resolving disputes. There have been several approaches to security communities, but two intellectual strands come to the fore. The first one is the thinking of K. Deutsch and the second is the thinking of E. Adler and M. Barnett who further developed the ideas of K. Deutsch. K. Deutsch's approach was an attempt to contribute to the debate and subsequently to find ways of practicing the idea that "one day one may reject war" and that common social problems can and must be addressed through "peaceful change." Peaceful change is a means of solving societal problems, usually through institutionalized procedures and without resorting to the broad-spectrum use of physical force.²

For many years, especially in the last two decades of the last century, the OSCE was seen as the pioneer of a new, innovative approach to regional security, based on the principles of association and a holistic approach to complex security. This approach was based on a comprehensive, indivisible (one country's security cannot be abstracted from another's) and cooperative perception of security.³ Adler offers seven examples of how the OSCE helps create and shape the security community: 1. Assists in political consultation and bilateral as well as multilateral agreements between its participants; 2. Sets rather liberal standards applicable in individual countries and across the community. These standards are later used to evaluate the practice of democratic and human rights activities and in subsequent monitoring; 3. Seeks to prevent violent conflict before it occurs; 4. Helps to create peaceful dispute settlement practices in the OSCE area; 5. Helps to build mutual trust by giving priority to agreements on arms control, military transparency and cooperation; 6. It helps countries that have recently gained independence build democratic institutions and pursue market-oriented reforms. 7. It helps to rebuild legal institutions in post-conflict areas.⁴

We can see that there is a large gulf between what the OSCE should be and what it is in reality. If we look back to before the last decade of the twentieth century, however, we can see that this was not always the case. With the luxury of hindsight, we can say that much of the theory has informed the organization's practices: there was (more than) a minimum level of trust between countries and there were clear elements of cooperation in the field of security.⁵ Of course, even that period was not trouble-free,

² K. W. Deutsch, et al., *Political Community and the North American Area*. Princeton University Press, 1957.

³ E. Adler, M. Barnett, eds, *Security Communities* (Cambridge Studies in International Relations), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

⁴ Ibid. p. 135.

⁵ S. Goda, K. Bánaiová, "Európska bezpečnosť z pohľadu OBSE," [European security from OSCE point of view] *Politické vedy* Vol. 21, No. 1, 2018, pp. 176–92.

but compared to today, the situation was easier to predict and states tried to respect mutual agreements, principles and standards. The role of the chairmanship is not only to ensure continuity in the functioning of the organization, but also to give it the political impetus to improve. How did Slovakia and the Slovak Foreign Ministry handle this task?

PREPARATIONS

The Slovak Foreign Ministry had vague memories of 1992, when the OSCE was chaired by Czechoslovakia and J. Moravčík (the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia) was Chairperson-in-Office in the second half of the year. Of course, since then, the dynamics of international relations have changed dramatically. The decision to apply for the OSCE chairmanship came in 2016. At a meeting on November 23, 2016, minister M. Lajčák informed the other members of government of the ministry's intention to put forward Slovakia as candidate for the OSCE chairmanship. The reasoning behind the decision is unclear. It may have been based on the foreign policy priority of promoting Slovakia on the international stage, including within international institutions, and our efforts to be a more active player in international politics and security. Following our experience of the presidency of the EU Council, the OSCE presidency may have seemed feasible and certainly attractive. Only 16 days after the government meeting, on December 9, 2016, minister M. Lajčák, announced the decision, both to the public and to the OSCE Ministerial Council in Hamburg. Internationally, this was certainly a welcome decision. Ensuring the smooth functioning of the Troika mechanism (the changeover between past, present and future presidency countries) had been a problem for several years. As expected, there was no negative response and the participating countries and incumbent chairmanship country approved. The next step was to secure the financing for the chairmanship. The financial aspect cannot be underestimated as it is essential for setting priorities and goals related to staffing, logistics and organizational matters among other aspects of the chairmanship such as (co)funding the activities of the chairmanship country beyond its annual contributions to the organization for various projects, or extra budgetary spending.

On June 21, 2017, the government approved the budget for the preparations and organization of the OSCE chairmanship provisionally for 2017 and 2018. The 2019 budget would be set at a later stage. The 2017 and 2018 budgets were set because, although the chairmanship was to start on January 1, 2019, Slovakia was chairing the Forum for Security Cooperation from January 17, 2018, to March 14, 2018, and would be taking on the chairmanship of the OSCE Contact Group with the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation region on March 19, 2018, at the conference in Malaga, until October 26, 2018. Both these chairmanships were a means of sharing out the work under the Troika mechanism and were the first contact with the organizational and content side of the OSCE. Approximately €11.5 million was spent on Slovakia's OSCE chairmanship from 2017 to 2019, including expenditure of approximately €3.3 million on the OSCE Ministerial Council. The budget was rather modest compared to other presidencies.

Slovakia's first chairmanship activities officially started as early as 2018. Logically the preparations had to begin no later than 2017. As we saw above, the government

approved the chairmanship at the end of November 2016. It may seem that the presidency preparations were slightly late in beginning and that the reasons for Slovakia taking on this role were not clearly communicated (doubtless there would have been many reasons beyond visibility). However, viewed differently, one can argue we in fact started the preparations in good time and responsibly, as has often been echoed by administrative staff at the OSCE Secretariat. Italy, for instance, was the chairmanship country in 2018, and even by the beginning of its chairmanship, did not have clearly set priorities (mainly because of its domestic political crisis), so by comparison we started ahead of time.

Another factor that influenced our preparations was the fact that from September 2017 to September 2018 M. Lajčák, the upcoming OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, held the important post of President of the UN General Assembly. There is no doubt the UN agenda preparations for important meetings took up a lot of time.⁶ To some extent, preparations for the chairmanship took place “in the shadow” of work for the UN General Assembly. Last but not least, the decision-making process and the hierarchical nature of the Foreign Ministry meant that approval was required from the top (and of course the foreign minister was the OSCE chairperson-in-office). Despite this and thanks to the enthusiasm of some individuals, with the arrival of minister M. Lajčák, preparations began at speed. Visiting all 15 OSCE field missions proved an excellent step, which added weight to their work while sending a clear political signal from the Chairperson-in-Office M. Lajčák that he was interested in the state of affairs and planned to be fully involved in the chairmanship. Combined with his reputation abroad as a respected diplomat, this was a good starting point.

Personnel are perhaps as important as the financial side. Here, Slovakia faced another challenge as only a few individuals – in both the Foreign Ministry and expert community – understood the role of the OSCE and its internal functioning. During informal talks, there was skepticism towards the OSCE and its role generally, no doubt a result of the lack of knowledge about the organization. It had never been in the spotlight. Logically, it is not easy to work in a context where one knows little about the issue and when even what is known is not positive. In other words, ownership of the chairmanship was not fully accepted at various levels. This could be seen in the limited involvement of other key ministries that were supposed to help the Foreign Ministry with various aspects, such as the ministries of defense, economy, justice, home affairs and the environment.

Another important aspect was ensuring smooth communication between the headquarters in Bratislava and the Permanent Mission in Vienna. The Section for the OSCE Chairmanship of the Slovak Republic, containing the OSCE task force, was established directly under the minister’s office. Of course, it was also necessary to increase staffing levels at the Permanent Mission of the Slovak Republic to the OSCE in Vienna. Inter-

⁶ During the past 12 months, as Chairperson-in-Office M. Lajčák chaired more than 70 General Assembly meetings, delivered nearly 300 speeches, held more than 120 meetings with UN officials and more than 440 meetings with representatives from member states (including 26 presidents, 16 prime ministers, 8 vice prime ministers and more than 90 ministers or state secretaries). Ten high-level meetings and events were organized and more than 80 meetings held with outside stakeholders, civil society and other regional and international organizations. He participated in more than 60 interviews and media engagements and took 20 trips to 36 destinations (visiting 28 countries).

national staff with direct experience of the Secretariat, OSCE mission or chairmanship countries were seconded to the mission in Vienna. Those mainly involved in the OSCE chairmanship were Lukáš Parížek – State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Special Representative of the Minister for the Chairmanship of the Slovak Republic in the OSCE, Chairman of the informal working group on OSCE contribution scales; Oksana Tomová – Director General of the OSCE Chairmanship Section; Róbert Kirnág – Head of Task Force, Director of the Department for Political Security Issues; Ingrid Horvay – Director of Logistics, Communication and Budget; Radomír Boháč – Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic to the OSCE; Katarína Žáková – Ambassador, Deputy Permanent Representative; Juraj Kubla – Head of Economic-Environmental Dimension Issues; and Marek Varga – Head of Politico-Military Dimension Issues. It should be noted that Marcel Peško, a Slovak diplomat, was appointed Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center and his expertise and knowledge proved valuable to the chairmanship. At the height of the chairmanship, 26 people were working in Bratislava and 30 people in Vienna. Moreover, in both locations, students assisted as interns. But the figure is not large given the chairmanship needs, and one of the lessons learned is that we will need to increase our personnel capacities in the future.

It is worth noting that the SFPA team, which has a long-standing interest in OSCE issues, organized an expert seminar entitled “Considering Previous Experience, Discussing Slovak Priorities” on November 6, 2017. At the Brainstorming Meeting of the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, Civil Society, OSCE and the Center for OSCE Research Representatives, one of the most experienced OSCE experts, Dr. Wolfgang Zellner (then director of the Center for the OSCE Research, University of Hamburg) stated that lessons learned from past chairmanships show that success depends on early preparations, qualified staff and sufficient financial reserves. Prior to the Brainstorming Meeting, the SFPA and FES organized a public event entitled “OSCE in view of the (old) new challenges” on March 7, 2017, where the priorities of the German and Austrian OSCE chairmanships were presented and discussed in detail.

READY... STEADY...

Each chairmanship country presents its priorities for the general chairmanship and for the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions of the OSCE. These are mainly shaped by (apart from the aforementioned financial and personnel capacities) the OSCE's long-term agenda, the priorities of the chairmanship country's foreign (and partly domestic) policy, international relations and, in part, by consultations within the Troika.

Again, this presented a challenge for Slovakia. Our long-term foreign policy priorities did not include the frozen conflicts and field missions that form a large part of the OSCE agenda, nor did they include the military issues and elements of confidence and security building. Moreover, those issues that were relatively familiar are tackled slightly differently in the three OSCE dimensions. However, Slovak diplomacy tested the waters during the various consultations, including visits to the OSCE missions, and identified the needs on the ground. Similarly, enough experts were found within the

foreign and defense ministries and elsewhere who had the expertise or were able to adapt very quickly to the OSCE context. However, there was no wider more systematic expert discussion to identify the priorities of the chairmanship, partly owing to the lack of interest from the non-governmental and academic spheres. There was only one publication containing a proposal for the priorities of our chairmanship.⁷ As is customary, the chairperson-in-office chose his personal and special representatives on the international level. Sixteen dealt with the various priority issues, including conflict prevention and management, high-level negotiations, youth and security and preventing discrimination and promoting tolerance. The Slovak ones were Lukáš Parížek (for Slovakia's OSCE Chairmanship), Rudolf Michalka (for the South Caucasus), Vladimír Minárik (for the OSCE High Level Planning Group (Nagorno-Karabakh)) and Samuel Goda (for Youth and Security). The last three were nominated by Slovakia within the Troika under the Italian chairmanship.

As mentioned above, Slovakia also chaired the Forum for Security Cooperation and the Contact Group with the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation in 2018. Here the priorities of the Slovak chairmanship were to support the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution no. 1540 regarding the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; light and small arms; conventional ammunition storage and measures to strengthen confidence and security; security sector governance and reform; regional defense cooperation; and armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. The Slovak Republic also devoted considerable attention to the Structured Dialogue on existing and future security challenges and threats in the politico-military field with the potential to develop further cooperation among all OSCE participating states. The Contact Group with the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation focused on energy security, sustainable water management, promoting economic development at national and regional level, cyber security, the impact of climate change, youth radicalization and education, and security sector reform and governance.

On 19 July 2018, at the meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council at the Hofburg, Vienna, the state secretary of the Foreign Ministry Lukáš Parížek presented a wider range of Slovak priorities which were later expanded on and published. This proved a good strategic step. The framework priorities remained unchanged and served as the compass of the chairmanship under the motto *Slovakia 2019: for people, dialogue and stability*. The specific priorities of the Slovak chairmanship of the OSCE were as follows:

1. Preventing, mediating and mitigating conflict and focusing on the people it affects: an active approach to conflict prevention and mitigation, Ukraine and Ukraine Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), frozen conflicts, structured dialogue and confidence-building and security-building measures, security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) cooperation in the Western Balkans

⁷ K. Báňaiová, S. Goda, "Slovenská republika a OBSE: Začiatok diskusie o prioritách predsedníctva Slovenskej republiky v OBSE a o význame OBSE pre európsku bezpečnosť," [Slovak Republic in OSCE. The beginning of the debate on Slovakia's OSCE Chairmanship and the importance of the OSCE to European security] Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2016. Available online: <http://www.sfpa.sk/publication/slovenska-republika-a-obse-zaciatok-diskusie-o-prioritach-predsednictva-slovenskej-republiky-v-obse-a-o-vyzname-obse-pre-europsku-bezpecnost/> (accessed on March 10, 2020).

2. Providing for a safer future: preventing radicalization, promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, youth, cyber security, fourth industrial revolution
3. Effective multilateralism: cooperation of international organizations, strategic partnerships and implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), strategic approach to prioritizing OSCE activities, implementation of commitments.⁸

AND ... GO!

Focusing on these priorities was the right step. Armed conflicts in the OSCE area are a continuing problem. The Russian–Ukrainian conflict in eastern Ukraine, or in OSCE jargon, the conflict in and around Ukraine, is not only the latest and most serious crisis for the European security architecture, but also the bloodiest since the break-up of Yugoslavia. There was a point at which the death toll and the fate of the people in the Donbas area were just statistics and a geopolitical military mentality prevailed over a humanitarian one. That is why it was and still is important to focus people's attention on it and the negative consequences of conflicts. At the same time, reflecting on the challenges of the future can lead to the identification of areas, so-called islands of cooperation, where countries could and should cooperate more. It is one of the ways of overcoming mutual distrust and concentrating on common steps within the positive options, but also on the not-so-distant challenges. Last but not least, a well-functioning multilateralism is the only way we can overcome the challenges of today and tomorrow. Can one country stop the negative effects of climate change? Or stop the viral pandemic all alone? Joint action is the only way. This is one of Slovakia's foreign policy findings from working in the UN through M. Lajčák – the problems of this world are greater than those of Slovakia or Europe.

The OSCE's most important agenda since 2014 has been Ukraine. During our chairmanship, we assisted the newly elected President of Ukraine, V. Zelensky, in relation to the occupied territories. However, we could not do more in the Donbas region, as elections were expected and it was unclear what Zelensky's plan would be post-elections. This contributed to the stagnation that lasted at least four to five months. When undertaking the preparations, the Foreign Ministry was able to identify Nine Points for Ukraine, focused mainly on the humanitarian situation and improving passage through the several contact line points, demining, prisoner exchanges and improving the environment and health. Certain tangible results were achieved – the budget for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, disengagement of armed formations and equipment on both sides in the Stanitsya Luhanska, Petrivske and Zolote areas, reconstruction of one of the symbols of the conflict – the bridge at Stanitsya Luhanska (entry and exit point for pedestrians on the contact line between the areas controlled by Kyiv and those not), and ensuring continuity in human resources with the Head of OSCE SMM changing (E. Apakan replaced by Y.H. Cevik) and the Special Representative

⁸ "Program a priority," [Program and priorities] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2018. Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/zahranicna-politika/predsednictvo-slovenska-v-obse/program-a-priority> (accessed on March 10, 2020).

of the Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and Trilateral Contact Group (M. Sajdik replaced by H. Grau). The recently reconstructed bridge in Stanitsya Luhanska is a reminder of the conditions local people live under in the areas not controlled by Kyiv.

Similarly, negotiations continued in Moldova within the “5+2” format (set up in Bratislava in 2002) and the implementation status of the “Berlin plus package.” Unlike in previous years, internal political developments in the Republic of Moldova made it impossible to achieve more tangible results. This also shows that the role of the OSCE and the chair is not to settle the conflict, but to provide scope for negotiations, advice, expertise, information flows and good offices. The conflict can only be settled by the parties involved.

Regarding other regional priorities, such as Central Asia, the South Caucasus or the Western Balkans, the work of the chairmanship could be seen in the cooperation with the Slovak embassies in the countries concerned. The Central Asian region is of great importance because of its complicated present and past and because it is located at the crossroads of several civilizations. During his visits, M. Lajčák paid attention to the divergent needs of each country – from arms control, trade and water cooperation to human trafficking, good governance and environmental protection. In Georgia, Slovakia faced numerous challenges related to the closure of crossing points, the installation of obstacles and increased tensions along the administrative boundary lines in 2019. The Armenian Prime Minister and Azerbaijani President met face to face for the first time through the related Minsk Group, which deals with the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. In the Western Balkans, the chairmanship focused on assistance for building democratic institutions, youth regional connectivity and reconciliation across society. The challenges of human trafficking and violent extremism and radicalization that might lead to terrorism (VERLT) were a repeated theme. During all visits to the region, the Slovak chair encouraged the authorities to accelerate efforts to advance and implement reforms, particularly those related to the judiciary, corruption and the rule of law, organized crime, and electoral processes, and to make full use of the OSCE’s expert support and technical assistance.

In addition to regional priorities, we also worked proactively on sectoral priorities across all three dimensions – politico-military, economic and environmental, and human. Naturally, the regional and sectoral priorities were closely related. In addition to the field missions, high-level events, expert conferences, seminars and workshops are a proven means whereby the chairmanship can promote a priority or important topic. Throughout 2019, we focused on issues such as anti-Semitism, the fight against terrorism, cyber security, security sector reform, engagement of young people, the distribution of the contribution scales, freedom of assembly, the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination, and mediation. Slovakia resolved various problems relating to the third dimension and supervised the Implementation Meeting on the Human Dimension in Warsaw, the ODIHR’s flagship project, which is a platform for direct contact with civil society organizations.

The Economic and Environmental Forum in Prague was one of the successes in the second dimension. The OSCE-wide Youth Forum was held in Bratislava, attended by more than 130 delegates. Discussions focused on the #perspectives2030 flagship project, which calls for more cooperation in specific areas and presents young experts’ views on the future of cooperation and security in Europe. The Annual Security Review Conference was an important first dimension event. Thus, over the chairmanship year, Slovakia, with

the assistance of the OSCE Secretariat and other OSCE institutions (HCNM, ODIHR and RFOM), organized approximately 70 events – including visits, conferences and seminars relating to all three dimensions. Of course, for each event the content, diplomatic, logistics and communications had to be prepared as well. This of course throws new light on the number of people working in the Foreign Ministry section and the Vienna mission...

A particularly good outcome of the chairmanship was the negotiation of the contribution scales (percentage contributed financially by each country), thereby securing the OSCE budget and finances for the whole year. The ratio agreed in 2005 expired at the end of 2017 and the Italian chairmanship had failed to renegotiate it. That could have led to the OSCE finding itself unable to operate by the summer of 2019. The scales may seem more of an administrative problem – which is largely true – but the main problem behind the stalemate was primarily political for many countries. This outcome could be the springboard for negotiating the long-term scaling.

The chairmanship year culminated in the Ministerial Council, held in Bratislava on December 5–6th, at the Incheba Exhibition Center and attended by more than 1,600 delegates, executives, media and civil society organizations. The main outcome was the adoption of six final documents out of the approximately 20 submitted: Decision on the OSCE Chairmanship in the Years 2021 and 2022; Decision on Renaming the Contact Group with the Asian Partners for Co-operation and the Contact Group with the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation; Decision on Time and Place of the Next Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council; Commemorative Declaration on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security; Ministerial Statement on the Negotiations on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process in the “5+2” Format; and Document No. 2, Commemorative Declaration on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the OSCE Principles Governing Non-Proliferation and Fifteenth Anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540.⁹

Another output was the Bratislava Appeal, presented by M. Lajčák, joined by 40 participating countries. It recalls that the fundamental role of the OSCE is to provide a platform for dialogue, and highlights the fundamental principles contained in the Helsinki Final Act. In particular, the challenge lies in respecting these principles, making better practical use of the OSCE instruments, having the willingness to compromise and, in particular, overcome mistrust and political problems for the welfare not only of the organization but, in particular, of the people living in the OSCE region. Last but not least, the challenge calls for more effective multilateralism as the best tool to overcome current and future security challenges. There were also 14 accompanying events on the margins of the Ministerial Council on various topics reflecting Slovakia's priorities – the situation in Ukraine, ensuring women are involved in peace processes, humanitarian aid and youth and security. A Parallel Civil Society Conference was also held, which makes recommendations to the Ministerial Council every year.¹⁰

⁹ S. Liechtenstein, “The 26th OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Bratislava: A breakdown in co-operative security?” Security and Human Rights Monitor, December 17, 2019. Available online: <https://www.shrmonitor.org/the-26th-osce-ministerial-council-meeting-in-bratislava-a-breakdown-in-cooperative-security/> (accessed on March 15, 2020).

¹⁰ “OSCE receives recommendations from Parallel Civil Society Conference ahead of Ministerial Council in Milan,” OSCE, December 5, 2018. Available online: <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/405410> (accessed on March 10, 2020).

The coverage of the chairmanship by the Slovak media and communications team should not be overlooked. The social networks team regularly reported on the work of the chairperson-in-office, the chairmanship and other work ongoing within the OSCE. A Slovak media contingent traveled with M. Lajčák to cover his speeches abroad and conveyed interesting information to Slovak readers and viewers who would not have found out by other means. However, they did not attend many important domestic events and, with a few exceptions, there was little coverage that reflected more deeply on the OSCE, the general concept of security and cooperation. The OSCE is not the most appealing organization for the media to cover, but some aspects would certainly have ensured sufficient “clicks.”

IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

For one year, the Slovak Republic became the leader of the largest regional security organization in the world. Slovakia was at the very center of a 57-state organization operating in stormy unpredictable conditions. Despite the modest finances and staffing, however, much high-quality music and new tones were heard. Where the contribution scales and other smaller questions were concerned, we managed to show that where there is a will there is a way. We found that differences of opinion do not only occur along the divisions of the old Cold War blocs, but on many issues there is no consensus even within the so-called West. Many countries still pursue domestic policy goals at the multilateral level, often absurdly and nonsensically, at the expense of the compromise and spirit of the Helsinki Decalogue.

Compromise is perceived as a weakness, geopolitics and militant thinking play a key role, intellectual appeals and the voices of experts are not being heard, multilateralism is being captured by national politics and there is not enough political will to overcome mutual hostility. The OSCE is a mirror of international relations. But it was not always so. The OSCE was also a co-creator of regional security. And it can be again – it has the tools, experience and enthusiasm for it. But it needs a “greenlight”. What is the lesson here for the Slovak Republic? That even a small country can set an international agenda. The OSCE chairmanship took us deeper into the issues of frozen conflicts, arms control and non-proliferation, cooperative security and other aspects of the economic, environmental and human dimensions. The worst thing we could do would be to stop now. For the time, money and human resources invested in the chairmanship should bear interest through our systematic and proactive involvement in the OSCE. By financing and building up our own Slovak expert capacities both in the public and state sectors, and in the non-governmental and academic spheres. The main goal of these efforts should be to approximate as best we can the true spirit of a security community from Vladivostok to Vancouver, through the OSCE, which is the most well-constructed instrument for creating such a community.