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## **EU and OSCE Cooperation in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Impacts and Limitations**

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### **Abstract**

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which began in 2014, has been a major challenge to regional and international security. In response, the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have been actively involved in efforts to promote peace, stability, and security in the region. In light of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, this paper examines the relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The EU and OSCE have been actively engaged in conflict resolution efforts, with a focus on diplomatic and economic sanctions against Russia. However, the intricate political and military dynamics at play as well as the wider geopolitical tensions between Russia and the West have limited the efficacy of these efforts. This paper aims to examine the impacts and limitations of EU and OSCE cooperation in addressing the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The research question that follows this paper is on how has the relationship between the EU and OSCE been impacted by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and what are the challenges and opportunities facing these organizations in their efforts to promote peace and stability in the region? Ultimately, the paper argues that a comprehensive and inclusive approach is needed to effectively address the conflict and promote sustainable peace and stability in the region.

**Keywords:** Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, European Union, Russia – Ukraine conflict, Special Monitoring Mission, SatCen

## Methodology

The focus of this paper will be precisely on the European Union (EU), and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) coordination in the Russia and Ukraine crisis since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. This paper aims to shed light on the relationship between the EU and OSCE to better understand the importance of their relationship and cooperation in the Russia-Ukraine conflict context. This study will reveal research gaps and what helps the effectiveness of their relationship by using qualitative research. Empirical legal research that involves extracting information from the text of reports about it, to find meanings, opinions, or the underlying reasons from it, to later analyze them and tell the real situation. This research involves EU and OSCE official documents like statements, declarations, reports, or any other type of document adopted by their decision-making bodies, as well as different journals or news reports.

Because of the actual criticism that OSCE is facing, this paper is primarily focused on OSCE. One of the biggest criticisms against the OSCE is that, as a result of a lack of political will and agreement among its member states, it has grown more and more ineffective in recent years (Lough, 2021), and is also considered too weak (Bladel, 2022, p. 20). Other article revealed that depending on how Moscow and the major Western states play their cards this time, the OSCE is in for a rough ride – or a slow death. (Liechtenstein, 2022) It's been one of the most criticized organization until now, in 2023.

OSCE in 2025 it goes 50 years in the making. The way this organization responds will determine its future. Right now, Moscow is blocking the 2024 budget and blocking the next chairmanship, which is to be held by Estonia. (Cornelius Friesendorf, 2022) So, it is an ongoing conflict that also needs to be analyzed from the perspective of coordination and cooperation with other international organizations. In this way, we can better understand its effectiveness and its role in international relations. To add more, most communication channels between Russia and the West are now strained and blocked, including the NATO–Russia Council and EU-Russia meetings (Dunay, 2022). There are also organizations like the UN Human Rights Council and the Council of Europe that have suspended Russia. So, this makes OSCE important because it is an organization that puts Russia at the table to dialogue and discuss matters with other states. Currently, it is the most inclusive security forum in Europe. (Dunay, 2022)

## Introduction

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is an intergovernmental organization that aims to promote stability, security, and cooperation among its 57 participating states. (Europe, 2023) OSCE has played a significant role in attempting to resolve the conflict between Russia and Ukraine since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, primarily through its Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). The SMM was in charge of monitoring and reporting on the security situation in eastern Ukraine. The SMM also had the mission to monitor the implementation of the Minsk agreements, a set of peace agreements signed in 2015 to resolve the conflict. SMM has faced numerous challenges, including security risks, limited access to certain areas, and difficulties in verifying ceasefire violations. (Petrů, 2021) The security situation in eastern Ukraine has remained volatile, with regular human rights violations, ceasefire violations, and military activity. (Nations, 2015) It has also faced difficulties in accessing some areas, particularly those controlled by separatist forces, which has limited its ability to monitor the situation on the ground. Overall, the OSCE's role in the conflict has been significant, but its efforts have not yet led to a lasting resolution. The conflict remains ongoing, and the OSCE continues to work to promote peace and stability in the region.

On the other hand, we have the European Union (EU), which is a political and economic union of 27 member states located primarily in Europe. It has been a key partner and supporter of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in its efforts to address the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Together with the OSCE, the EU works to prevent conflicts through early warning systems and conflict analysis. In order to identify opportunities for preventive action and to stop conflicts from getting worse, cooperation is crucial.

The European Union took part in the negotiations on the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, which established the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as the main forum for security cooperation in Europe. It has also signed the Charter of Paris for a New Europe (1990), which sets the goals for the OSCE and its participating states, and the Charter for European Security (1999). It was only in 2006 that the EU's participation in the OSCE was formalized in the organization's Rules of Procedure, which assigned it a seat next to the participating state that held the rotating EU Presidency. (Chairperson-in-Office, 2006)

The two organizations work together and collaborate on a variety of issues. The OSCE and the EU have a strong partnership in addressing a wide range of security challenges, including the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. They collaborate in a variety of ways, including joint projects and programs, regular dialogue and consultations, and coordinated efforts to

address specific security challenges. The role of the EU and OSCE in conflict resolution efforts is crucial, given their mandate to promote peace and security in the region. The EU and OSCE exchanged letters in 2018 at the level of the Secretary General, committing to strategically bolstering their institutional interaction as well as their operational cooperation in areas of shared interest across the three dimensions. (The EU enhances its operational cooperation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), 2018) More than two-thirds of the OSCE's primary budget is provided by EU Member States, and the EU and EU Member States also provide funding for a number of extra-budgetary projects carried out by the OSCE. (OSCE relations to EU, 2021) Which clearly shows the importance that the EU plays in helping the OSCE in its role and aims. In addition, the EU and OSCE have collaborated to address other security issues such as terrorism, cyber threats, and organized crime.

### **1. The role of the EU and OSCE in conflict resolution. To help and be helped**

The EU and the OSCE have played an important role in conflict resolution efforts in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Their efforts have focused on promoting a peaceful resolution to the conflict, reducing tensions, and promoting stability in the region. In response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, but also on the 2022 conflict, the EU has imposed economic sanctions on the country. (Commission, EU sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine, 2022) The sanctions are intended to put pressure on Russia to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty and to hold substantive talks in an effort to end the conflict peacefully. The EU, together with the OSCE, has actively participated in diplomatic efforts to end the conflict, including the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine and the Normandy format talks.

The most significant initiative to date to end the conflict is represented by the Minsk agreements, signed in 2015. The agreements, which were mediated by France and Germany with assistance from the EU and OSCE, had three main objectives: to establish a ceasefire; remove heavy weapons; and lay out a plan for political resolution. The Minsk agreements, which offer a framework for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, have also received support from the EU. The agreements have nevertheless been slowly and sporadically put into effect, with each side accusing the other of breaking the ceasefire and failing to advance political reforms. (EEAS, 2022) Consequently, the conflict has persisted, occasionally erupting in violence and the '22 war.

In order to address the conflict's underlying causes and foster peace, the EU and the OSCE have jointly launched a number of programs and projects. Programs focusing on human rights, media freedom, and economic and social development are among these initiatives. The EU's Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD) conducts conflict analysis as part of its work on conflict prevention and management. (Service, Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), 2023) The OSCE also conducts conflict analysis through its Conflict Prevention Centre. The EU's European External Action Service (EEAS) and the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre both provide mediation and facilitation services to parties in conflict. The EU's IcSP provides funding for programs aimed at promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. (Commission, Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), 2023) Similarly, the OSCE has a range of programs and initiatives aimed at promoting good governance and human rights, including the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities. But, because the EU and the OSCE take different stances on conflict resolution, their interaction may be constrained. For instance, the OSCE places more emphasis on dialogue and negotiation, while the EU frequently emphasizes diplomatic and economic pressure.

In conclusion, the EU and the OSCE have significantly contributed to a peaceful end to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Sanctions, financial and technical support, monitoring and verification, dialogue facilitation, and support for human rights have all been part of their efforts. The EU was more capable of shaping the OSCE crisis response when it adapted well to the constraints of the external opportunity structure and block dynamics and responded to them pragmatically in collaboration with its member states that took discreet leadership. (Šimáková, 2016, p. 34)

Based on its comprehensive security toolbox, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has emerged as the only regional organization capable of acting effectively toward conflict resolution and establishing a meaningful presence on the ground, as evidenced by the annexation of Crimea. (Šimáková, 2016, p. 32) Despite the difficulties and restrictions, they encounter, OSCE-EU work has helped to ease tensions and advance stability in the region. Even after facing restrictions on their access and activities in some areas, both the OSCE and EU have continued to work in the area of international security in the region.

### **1.1 OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM)**

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine was an unarmed civilian mission, that started its activities in March 2014 and discontinued its operations in March 2022. (OSCE-Where-we-are, 2023) The EU provides

significant financial and technical support to the OSCE field operations, including the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). The SMM plays a critical role in monitoring and verifying the implementation of the ceasefire and other aspects of the conflict, which is essential for building trust and confidence between the parties. In the 2022 final report, SMM reported based on the observations of 93,902 ceasefire violations, 1,133 explosions attributable to fire forms, 1,892 weapons in violation of withdrawal lines, etc. (SMM-Ukraine, 2022) In addition, the OSCE's ability to establish a meaningful presence on the ground has allowed it to play a unique role in promoting stability and preventing the escalation of conflicts.

The SMM uses a variety of methods to collect and analyze data, including on-site observations, interviews with witnesses, and analysis of open-source information. The number of violations in relation to the time periods that occurred is what raises questions about these statistics. If there are 93,902 ceasefire violations in 2021 (based on the final report from 2022), there are only 134,767 in 2020, and there are 299,633 in 2019. (SMM-Ukraine, 2022) As a result, in 2019, the number was concerning enough to raise the possibility of war, and over the course of the following two years, the situation seemed to be improving. At first glance, it appears that things were gradually getting better, but as we all know, in 2022, Russia and Ukraine went to war. How effective are these monitoring efforts, to put this in the perspective of SMM statistical analysis? Or is it sufficient to have violation cases to then suspect a future war at any time? However, it is important to note that the number of reported violations does not necessarily reflect the full extent of the conflict or the risk of war. There could be other factors, such as political tensions, military buildup, or other indicators that suggest a potential for escalation. The effectiveness of these efforts depends on many factors, including the willingness of the parties to the conflict to cooperate with the monitoring mission and adhere to the terms of the ceasefire agreements.

In summary, the number of ceasefire violations reported by the SMM can provide some insight into the security situation in Ukraine, but it is only one indicator among many. It is important to consider other factors, such as political tensions and military buildup, when assessing the risk of war. The effectiveness of the monitoring efforts depends on many factors, and it is an ongoing challenge to ensure that monitoring is accurate and timely. It's all a very complex case study.

The position of Russia created the situation necessary to implement the closure of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Even though the 2022 chairmanship holder stressed that,

*“The Polish Chairmanship will continue to engage with participating states in order to explore alternatives for the OSCE’s future role in Ukraine.”* (Press-Release, 2022)

This reaction is a clear indication that the OSCE is currently feeling powerless due to its reliance on consensus. And this naturally raises concerns about its functionality and effectiveness. The closure of the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine is certainly a setback for the OSCE's efforts to promote peace and security in the region. The fact that the OSCE Chairmanship is exploring alternatives for the organization's future role in Ukraine suggests that the organization is aware of the challenges it faces and is looking for ways to adapt and respond.

As of early 2022, the EU had contributed over 80 million euros to the SMM, making it one of the largest donors to the mission. (EU Statements at the General Council Meeting, 2022) This financial support has helped to sustain the work of the SMM and enhance its capacity to carry out its mandate in a challenging and volatile environment. A strong sign of the fact that the EU and the OSCE are on this path to help and be helped for the sake of maintaining international security.

## **1.2 European Union Satellite Centre (SatCen)**

SatCen, as an agency of the European Union established in 2002, helps OSCE and other organizations by providing services based on space assets and collateral data, including satellite imagery and aerial imagery, and it contributes to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). (Council Decision (CFSP), 2019) It works by providing decision-makers with early warning of potential crises as well as global situational awareness. The importance of cooperation with the OSCE lies in the fact that it is a Europe-wide organization with a transatlantic connection and is at the heart of the European security order. (Strategy, 2016)

Because of the sensitivity of the documents related to the conflict in Ukraine, it's impossible to find directly any data or the documents and information that SatCen has given to OSCE. What is found is not only mentioned in the OSCE reports and updates on its monitoring of the situation in Ukraine but also in one jointly published report of the OSCE and SatCen. (SatCen, 2014) Satellite imagery is critical in assisting the SMM in gaining a clearer picture of the security and humanitarian situation in areas where the Ukrainian government has no control and monitors are difficult to deploy. (FPI, 2018) This tool from the EU has been a crucial help for the OSCE to monitor the Ukraine situation through SMM since 2015. But how can this EU tool help if SMM is no longer operational? As a result, the current situation demonstrates that cooperation between organizations is sometimes closely related to the power they possess. Furthermore, even if the SMM is

no longer operational, it is possible that a new mission or monitoring mechanism may be established in the future, in which case SatCen's services could once again be used to support the monitoring efforts.

The OSCE's inability to make decisions because it relies on state consensus renders the EU's assistance ineffective in that case. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has affected the relationship between the EU and OSCE to help each other, and it can be clearly analyzed by the changes in their collaboration and the challenges they face in addressing the conflict. The complexity of this situation mostly affects the future of the OSCE. And of course, the OSCE's changed circumstances highlight the need for a more specific EU strategy in the OSCE.

## **2. Challenges to improving OSCE effectiveness**

The OSCE is a key regional security organization, and the conflict in Ukraine has put its ability to promote peace and stability in the region to the test. Cooperation with other international organizations, the organization's role in negotiating and implementing peace treaties, and the impact of the conflict on its finances and resources are all factors that can influence the OSCE's effectiveness in resolving the conflict. That's why analyzing the relationship between the OSCE and the EU, which have both taken an active role in promoting regional stability and security, is important and relevant to the current situation.

While the cooperation between the EU and the OSCE has been important in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, there are several factors that have limited their cooperation. Challenges on improving OSCE effectiveness, related to its relation with EU, are to be seen in many aspects. First, because the EU and the OSCE have different strategic priorities and interests, their ability to work together on particular conflict-related issues may be constrained. For instance, some EU members may be less willing to take a tough stance against Moscow because of their closer economic ties to Russia.

Secondly, the conflict has become very politicized, and attempts to resolve it by the EU and OSCE have run into political roadblocks. For instance, if we go back in time, political opposition in Russia and Ukraine has prevented the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. A Russian political analyst, Dmitri Trenin, argued that the Minsk agreements had become a "stalemate" because of the political opposition in Russia and Ukraine. (Trenin, 2020) Even the formerly appointed Special Representative of the OSCE for the Minsk Agreements (2015–2019) cited a lack of political will in favor of putting the agreements into effect. (OCHA, 2023) The conflict has created security challenges for both the EU and the OSCE.

There are different kinds of tools that can be used by the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. They already have played important roles in efforts to prevent the escalation of the conflict and find a peaceful resolution, but this needs to continue. On the one hand the EU could strengthen its economic sanctions on Russia by imposing more targeted measures. On the other hand, together they could engage in a more direct and constructive dialogue with Russia to try to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, especially the OSCE, which has the power to put Russia on the table with other states. The EU and OSCE can use their diplomatic channels to engage with both sides and facilitate negotiations in this way.

They could also work with other important international actors, such as the United Nations (UN), to increase pressure on Russia to engage in constructive negotiations and find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. For instance, the EU and OSCE emphasized the need for international support to address the conflict in a joint statement released in March 2021 and urged the UN to take a more active role in promoting a peaceful resolution. The statement read:

*“We call on the UN to step up support for the Minsk agreements, encourage their implementation, and help facilitate a thorough, lasting, and peaceful resolution of the conflict.”* (Service, Joint statement by EU High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell and OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde, 2021)

Regarding the constraints, it is obvious that the EU and OSCE have various interests and priorities, which can make it difficult to create a coordinated and efficient strategy for resolving conflicts. Additionally, their ability to resolve the intricate and protracted conflict between Russia and Ukraine may be hampered by the limited resources they have available to them. Because of the geopolitical tension present, the EU and OSCE may not be as effective in achieving their goals of promoting global peace and security. The EU's economic and diplomatic sanctions have had some effect from the perspective of current events, but it is noticeable that they have not been sufficient to change Russia's behavior or to end the conflict.

The OSCE operates within a constrained legal framework because it lacks a binding treaty or charter that outlines its specific legal rights and obligations. It may find it difficult to effectively influence international relations and advance peace, stability, and security in the region due to these constraints and the organization's reliance on consensus. In 2025, it will have been 50 years in the making, and long-term success can sometimes be seen as a positive indicator of continuity, but on the other hand, it can also point to the need for reforms. Since the future always brings new international security challenges, the OSCE must also adapt to these challenges. Given the

changing nature of security threats and the shifting political landscape, some reforms may be necessary for the good of this organization.

The last thing to mention, and the most important challenge for the future, is the ongoing conflict. The conflict in Ukraine is an ongoing rollercoaster, and it remains a significant challenge for the EU and the OSCE. A conflict that is also directly affecting OSCE because, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Moscow is blocking the 2024 budget and the next chairmanship of OSCE. Despite these challenges, the EU and the OSCE remain committed to working together to promote a peaceful and stable resolution to the conflict.

## **Conclusion**

Russia's violation of international law has challenged the European security order, and this creates a necessity for collaboration and cooperation between organizations. The European Union has taken an active role in promoting regional stability and security, and has collaborated closely with the OSCE in promoting a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The EU has provided political and economic support to Ukraine, as well as sanctions against Russia and humanitarian assistance to all those affected by the conflict. The EU and OSCE's ability to support one another in the Russia and Ukraine conflict has clearly been impacted, and this is evident in the ways that their cooperation has changed and, in the difficulties, they have in resolving the conflict. We can mention here SatCen, a tool that cannot be used anymore for the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (after discontinuing its operations). The OSCE's reliance on state consensus to make decisions renders the EU's assistance ineffective when the OSCE is unable to act. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has affected the relationship between the EU and OSCE, highlighting the need for a more specific EU strategy in the OSCE. Also, the SMM has made important contributions to conflict resolution efforts in Ukraine. Its monitoring and reporting have provided critical information to policymakers and helped to de-escalate tensions in some instances. So, it is important to find a road to resolve this impediment of SMM functioning. It is important for the international community to continue supporting the SMM's efforts and to work towards a comprehensive and inclusive approach to conflict resolution, not only in Ukraine.

The biggest challenge that OSCE alone faces is that it operates on a basis of consensus, which means that every decision must be agreed upon by all participating states. Russia and Ukraine clearly have different views, so it's clear the complexity that follows the situation. Also, it's important that the EU and OSCE create new communication channels in order to promote peace and stability in the region by using different tools like sanctions,

international pressure, diplomatic efforts, etc. The fact that the EU and the OSCE are working together in this effort is indeed a positive sign that these organizations recognize the importance of cooperation and coordination in addressing complex security challenges. By pooling their resources and expertise, the EU and the OSCE can enhance the effectiveness of their respective efforts and contribute to the maintenance of international security in the region. While there are challenges facing these organizations in promoting peace and stability in the region, there are also opportunities for them to enhance their efforts through a more coordinated and inclusive approach to conflict resolution. Overall, their efforts have been limited by a range of factors. Addressing these limitations will be crucial in developing a more effective and sustainable approach to promoting peace and stability in the region.

The relationship between the EU and OSCE plays an important role in protecting the OSCE's good reputation and effectiveness. However, the only conditioning that results from these organizations is their influence or legal power on the global arena, which seems to be an obstacle for OSCE's future. However, it is important to remember that the OSCE is just one of many actors involved in efforts to promote peace and security in Ukraine, and there are other mechanisms and organizations that can play a role in this process as well. The ongoing conflict has highlighted the need for a more coordinated and integrated approach that involves all stakeholders, including Russia, Ukraine, and other regional actors. Overall, while the road ahead for the OSCE may be difficult, its past successes and its ongoing efforts provide reasons to be optimistic about its future as a key player in promoting peace, security, and cooperation in Europe and beyond.

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