



in co-operation with



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic



COUNTERING FRAGMENTATION AND POLARIZATION: RE-CREATING A CLIMATE FOR STABILITY IN EUROPE

Prague, 18-19 May 2017

Concept Note

Rationale

The international security environment is marked by growing divisions and uncertainty unprecedented for decades. The norms and principles underpinning the international order are contested. There are signs that the open global economic system might be unravelling and protectionism may return. Multilateralism seems to be in retreat, with its key institutions being questioned and at risk of being weakened. A result could be a more fragmented and polarized multipolar world.

The situation in Europe follows these global trends. The continuing crisis in and around Ukraine has put pillars of the European post-war security order into question and renewed geopolitical confrontation on the continent. Populist, nationalist and xenophobic movements are on the rise in many countries, challenging fundamental OSCE values and norms and undermining efforts to create a common security space in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian region. Deteriorating military predictability and trust, terrorism, growing threats in the cyber domain, continuing flows of refugees and migrants to Europe's shores and a volatile economic situation in some European countries only exacerbate these risks. Upcoming elections in several key countries later this year may fundamentally change the political landscape of Europe with far-reaching long-term consequences.

Against this backdrop, Europe and the world are facing security challenges of increasing complexity and interconnectedness that cannot be solved without mutual co-operation and joint action. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), as the world's largest regional security organization, plays a crucial role in these efforts. Discussions at the OSCE Security Days conference in Berlin in June 2016 highlighted a growing realization that despite mutual divisions and differences, current challenges to European as well as global security require co-operation and the OSCE participating States should seek a convergence of interests whenever possible. While growing uncertainty and

fragmentation, which have only accelerated in recent months, make such efforts increasingly difficult, the only way to move forward is by continuing to find areas for engagement. At the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Hamburg in December 2016, the OSCE participating States launched a process of structured dialogue on the current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area that should serve as a basis for a way forward. Although rebuilding trust and restoring co-operative security in the OSCE area appear extremely difficult in the short term, there is no alternative but to reengage in constructive dialogue and pragmatic co-operation in order to preserve and safeguard the fundamental pillars of a stable and peaceful security environment in Europe.

Objectives and expected outcomes

This OSCE Security Days event aims to contribute to a dialogue on how to create a stable and resilient security environment in Europe at a time of growing global uncertainty and unpredictability. It will allow for a discussion of key challenges and trends in the development of the security environment in the OSCE area and their implications for regional security and stability. The event is expected to generate concrete ideas and recommendations for countering increasing fragmentation and polarization of the security environment in Europe, returning to constructive dialogue and pragmatic co-operation, and strengthening trust and confidence among the OSCE participating States. It will complement ongoing discussions within the OSCE and its outcomes will feed into these processes, including the Informal working group on structured dialogue on the current and future challenges and risks to security in the OSCE area.

Format

The event is organized in co-operation with the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic** and the **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung**. Speakers will include senior officials from governments and international organizations, prominent members of civil society and the private sector, and leading experts from academia and the media. The event will begin with an **opening session on 18 May 2017** and continue with a **full-day conference on 19 May 2017**. It will be open to public (prior registration mandatory) and conducted in English. Journalists are welcome to attend.

About the OSCE and OSCE Security Days

With 57 participating States in Europe, Central Asia and North America, the OSCE is the world's largest regional security organization. The OSCE has a comprehensive approach to security that encompasses politico-military, economic and environmental, and human aspects that is reflected throughout the work of the Organization.

OSCE Security Days have served as a unique platform for enhancing the security dialogue in the OSCE area since the initiative was launched in 2012. Security Days events aim to deepen understanding of common security challenges and generate possible solutions by stimulating informal, interactive and forward-looking debate among prominent experts from international organizations, governments, think tanks, academia, civil society, youth, and the media. Previous Security Days have focused on topics such as migration, climate change, radicalization and violent extremism, conventional arms control, water security, and the women, peace and security agenda.

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Preliminary Topical Agenda

THURSDAY, 18 MAY 2017

Opening session – *Distorted reality: Security implications of post-truth politics*

Political debates in many OSCE countries, including long-standing democracies, are nowadays increasingly framed by appeals to emotions disconnected from real facts. Many populists across Europe try to exploit grievances and insecurities of the electorate by twisting the facts or using outright lies. While this is not an entirely new phenomenon in politics, the spread of disinformation and myths in the digital era has reached an unprecedented pace and scale with the potential to significantly influence public opinion and political decision-making. This has substantial implications for politics in general and for security and stability in particular.

- What dangers does the phenomenon of “post-truth politics” pose for international security and stability?
- How can the resilience of societies to resist and counter disinformation and myths be strengthened?
- How can governments and state institutions respond to this challenge without undermining fundamental democratic principles like the freedom of expression?

FRIDAY, 19 MAY 2017

Opening

Welcome address

High-level session – *The state of European security today and prospects for the future*

The end of the Cold War was considered by many as the dawn of a new era of freedom, peace and unity in Europe. In the following years, however, it became clear that this was still an aspiration rather than reality. Today’s security environment in Europe is marked by uncertainty about the future and growing fragmentation and polarization. At the same time, both Europe and the world are facing security challenges of increasing complexity and interconnectedness that cannot be solved by any one country or organization alone.

- What are the main security challenges and risks Europe faces today?
- How can these risks be reduced? How can further deterioration of the security situation in Europe be prevented?
- What steps should be taken to put security and co-operation in Europe on a more stable basis?

Session I – *Parallel fears: Overcoming divergent threat perceptions*

The crisis in and around Ukraine has undermined fundamental principles of European security and renewed geopolitical confrontation on the continent. However, unlike in the past, the state of European security is no longer defined by two opposing blocs with contradicting ideologies. There are many more stakeholders and mutual relations are more complex, interconnected and interdependent than ever before. Current disagreements do not follow ideological lines and there is hardly any economic rationality behind them. Growing mistrust and confrontation in the OSCE region thus seem to be driven mainly by diametrically opposed security concerns and threat perceptions across the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimensions. This has negative repercussions for security and co-operation, particularly in countries that became independent with the dissolution of the Soviet Union but have not joined any integration model. They are left stranded in the middle of the renewed competition, with their security and economic status often contested.

- How can better mutual understanding of divergent security concerns and threat perceptions among the OSCE participating States be achieved?
- How can differences in security concerns and threat perceptions be reconciled? How can the perceived need of some actors to choose one side over the other be overcome?
- What steps should be taken to decrease mutual mistrust?
- What economic and security arrangements represent a viable option for those OSCE participating States whose economic and security status is not clearly defined?

Session II – *Breaking a vicious circle: Countering fragmentation within and between societies*

Divisions are growing between countries and regions as well as within our societies. A growing sense of unpredictability and uncertainty feeds prejudices and fears of the future, which leads to a polarized and confrontational environment that undermines stability and co-operation. This in turn deepens the sense of insecurity, creating a vicious cycle. At the same time, the complexity and interconnectedness of current security challenges require more co-operation and collaboration than ever before. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult in today's polarized and fragmented security environment.

- How can these negative tendencies be countered?
- How can further fragmentation and polarization of politics be prevented?
- How can partnerships and coalitions be strengthened and deepened despite growing divisions?

Session III – *The future of European security: How to create a climate for stability?*

Rules and principles that have been pillars of European security for decades are now being contested. The legitimacy of the liberal international order is being challenged and the world seems to be turning from multilateralism to multipolarism. Mistrust and confrontation have replaced dialogue and co-operation, deepening divisions and undermining stability and security. Many actors are searching for ways to reduce risks, remedy confrontational relations and return to co-operation in Europe. This appears difficult, even as the need to

preserve and safeguard a stable and peaceful security environment in Europe is becoming increasingly urgent.

- What are the main pillars of a stable security environment in the OSCE region?
- How can the current situation be prevented from deteriorating further?
- What steps should be taken to ensure a stable security environment, strengthen co-operative approaches and avoid zero-sum thinking with negative repercussions for the OSCE region?
- How can the Structured Dialogue Process launched at the 2016 OSCE Ministerial Council provide stepping stones for a more stable and co-operative security environment in Europe?