

Confidence-building measures in Eurasian Conflicts: New Roles for the OSCE's Economic and Environmental Dimension in Easing East-West Tensions¹

Abstract

Western-Russian relations are inarguably at their worst of the post-Cold War era. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) remains a key international forum for multilateral engagement. Part of the OSCE's uniqueness is its formation around three dimensions of security, which constitute its comprehensive security. One of those, the Economic and Environmental (EED), is the most overlooked yet, as this paper demonstrates, is the one currently possessing greatest capacity for easing some tensions. Through, first, an analysis of the place of EED in the OSCE, and thus between the West and Russia, the article establishes potentialities for cooperation. It then, however, determines the lack of support, most notably among Western governments, rather than post-Soviet, and the place of EED activities in post-Soviet states. The article then identifies unexpected but very real forms of cooperation in the EED in two protracted post-Soviet conflicts, which can establish trust between parties with the potential to expand confidence-building further. The article concludes by calling for further use of the EED, in a time when

¹ This article developed from invited participation to the collaborative project *OSCE Confidence Building in the Economic and Environmental Dimension*, for which the present authors wrote a separate, contributing research paper entitled 'Confidence-Building Measures in Inter-State Conflicts: New Roles for the Economic and Environmental Dimension: Towards a Framework for Integrating Competitive Narratives into CBMs: from Russian-Western Relations to Post-Soviet Conflicts'. Funding for research and participation was provided by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Vienna, and the authors thank the organisers of meetings in Birmingham and Vienna for the opportunities to present and for feedback received. The separate, collaborative publication is available at: <https://www.fes-vienna.org/e/new-report-osce-confidence-building-in-the-economic-and-environmental-dimension/>.

it remains underestimated yet of unexpected – and essential – value for confidence-building.

The Economic and Environmental Dimension (EED) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is overlooked, misunderstood or neglected. It should not be any of these. Better yet, as is well-known but little operationalised, the OSCE is a world-innovator in comprehensive security, being based on the inseparability of the previously compartmentalised dimensions of security: the political-military, economic and environmental, and human.

This article seeks not wishfully but substantively to argue for EED's contribution to confidence building mechanisms (CBMs). It does so with reference to conflict and cooperation narratives in post-Soviet protracted conflicts and their added capacity to improve even Western-Russian relations. The acknowledgement of positive cooperation narratives is lacking in the OSCE space in, even when, as this article demonstrates, examples exist.

Indeed, the EED is meant to have significant potential for CBMs and conflict transformation, use of which would be a double-win for the Organization. Calls for the EED to serve as confidence-building have long existed.² By first identifying the place of the EED in OSCE thinking, the article first makes the case for the utility and achievability of value-neutral narratives in the EED and specifically for CBMs. It then assesses how well – or not – EED is represented in samples of national Foreign Ministry statements by participating States

² Academic literature on the OSCE EED, let alone on its actual relation to CBMs, is necessarily slender and the present contribution intends to show existing connections that have emerged recently through initiatives in conflicts. For an overview dated from the late 1990s, see Rob Zaagman, 'OSCE Conflict Prevention and the Economic and Environmental Dimension', *Helsinki Monitor* Vol. 10, No. 4 (1999), pp. 40-48. An insightful policy study, although tellingly dated from as far back as 2002, remains Frank Evers, *Building Co-operation between OSCE Field Missions and Partner Institutions in the Economic and Environmental Dimension* (Hamburg: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg CORE Working Paper 11, 2002).

(pSs),³ and then in the mandates of OSCE field missions. That exercise reveals the uneven reference to EED per se, let alone to its CBM capacities, which calls for better commitment by Western and post-2004 EU member-states, while giving opportunity for the commitments by post-Soviet states to be harnessed. The article then identifies areas of actual and potential (further) cooperation in the EED domain across borders and in conflict zones, from the Transnistria-Moldovan and Abkhaz-Georgian conflicts. Because the contention of the article is that actual cases of confidence-building from the EED and the potential for more is overlooked, additional research was undertaken by interviewing office-holders inside the OSCE and engaging with it from other IOs, including the European External Action Service. The conclusion offers both analytical and policy suggestions for the EED in conflict narratives in the fraught space that is the OSCE.

The Promotion of CBMs in the OSCE's EED

The OSCE's now-57 pSs have agreed through their initial signing of the Helsinki Final Act (HFA) of 1975, and those values' reiteration in Summit Declarations at Paris in 1990, Istanbul in 1999 and Astana in 2010, that the OSCE is a security community built on shared values. They benefit from gains in the First, Political-Military, Dimension with such current priorities as anti-terrorism, and anti-radicalisation, and more traditional activities, such as weapons destruction.⁴ At the same time, they are committed to upholding a very broad, common set of minority and human rights and democratisation principles, known as the Third or Human Dimension (HD). That generated some of the Organization's greatest internal strife, when starting in 2003 post-Soviet states came to see the HD as a mechanism to foment domestic

³ Due to the OSCE operating on the basis of political commitments from states rather than from legal agreements, States participate rather than belong, giving rise to the somewhat clumsy abbreviation of participating States (pSs).

⁴ The Russian Federation's withdrawal in 2007 from the Conventions Force in Europe Treaty of 1990 weakened the role of the Political-Military Dimension. In 2015 Moscow also withdrew from meetings of the Treaty's Joint Consultative Group, its last connection to this important component of the first dimension.

unrest. The EED as the Second Dimension, with much potential for apolitical, functional win-win activities, is either neglected or suffers from tensions in the First or Third. This is even when a leading analyst wrote in 2002 that the OSCE's 'EED has established itself as an integral part of a now institutionalized organization' and that that Dimension's own institutionalization has been 'basically completed'.⁵

The Hamburg Ministerial Council (MC) Declaration of 2016 highlighted existing capacities in the EED, and gave new impetus to 'connectivity' that would bolster key aspects of the Dimension 'through transport and trade facilitation, including through measures at different levels of government, can enhance economic co-operation that is mutually beneficial and contribute to good-neighbourly relations, confidence-building and trust in the OSCE area.'⁶

The 'connectivity' of 2016 is by definition novel, and therefore untested, and deserving of some scepticism. An EU official with responsibilities for engagement with the OSCE noted in 2017 how little connectivity existed in the Second Dimension, even suggesting that it was more applicable to the Military-Political Dimension.⁷

Additionally, when recognising the EED's potential, including for confidence building, observers note that many other, better-financed institutions crowd out the OSCE.⁸ In the climate of high tensions between Russia and the West, the OSCE's own objective of 'connectivity' among pSs and between its dimensions, or put differently, through its comprehensive approach, makes the EED more important.

⁵ Evers, *Building Co-operation*, p. 8 and p, 10.

⁶ Decision No. 4/16 'Strengthening Good Governance and Promoting Connectivity', 9 December 2016, available at: <http://www.osce.org/cio/289316?download=true>.

⁷ Telephone interview with EU official, Brussels, 26 June 2017.

⁸ '...given the many specialized international – and to some extent financially powerful – organizations and institutions or "clubs" that are active in these areas, the role which the OSCE should play in the economic and environmental dimension remains unclear.' Kurt P. Tudyka, 'Whither the Second Basket? Evolution of the Economic and Environmental Dimension of the OSCE', *Security Community* (Issue 2/2015).

The EU considers the ‘connectivity’ of the OSCE CiO Decision in Hamburg to include the development of infrastructure in the post-Soviet space, and that doing so is apolitical. However, trade remains subject to geopolitical discussion, and thus evidently is far more sensitive.⁹ Indeed, the EU’s Eastern Partnership and the intention of creating trade regimes with all six countries has become intensively politicised and which Moscow sees as a challenge to its Eurasian Economic Union. Trade relations of course have become fundamentally political after EU and US (and other countries’) sanctions and embargoes against Russian financial and energy interests in response to the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and then diplomatic expulsions for the apparent Russian use of a nerve agent in Salisbury, England. That the UK did not seek EU sanctions against Russia at a March 2018 EU summit consequently left Western-Russian economic relations unaffected, despite the ensuing diplomatic expulsions.

Western-Russian cooperation – such as for safe destruction of nuclear waste – has been funded by other organizations. The EBRD gave €165 million to remove, ship and destroy Soviet/Russian naval nuclear waste from Andreyeva Bay.¹⁰ In a bi-national level, the Russian government accepted British assistance to raise the sunken Russian submarine *The Kursk*.¹¹ That was, of course, back in 2010.

By contrast, the German Chairman-in-Office (CiO) of 2016 convened a 1000-person conference in Berlin, which German Foreign Minister and OSCE CiO Franz-Walter Steinmeier explained was

to engage in an experiment: an experiment because we want to talk about political visions at a time of severe political discord, an experiment because we want to

⁹ Based on a telephone interview with the EEAS, 26 June 2017.

¹⁰ Keith Perry, ‘First shipment of spent nuclear fuel leaves Andreeva Bay’, EBRD, 27 June 2007, available at: <http://www.ebrd.com/news/2017/first-shipment-of-spent-nuclear-fuel-leaves-andreeva-bay.html>

¹¹ ‘Stranded sub: Russians accept British offer of help’, *The Guardian* [online], 16 Aug 2000, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/aug/16/russia.kursk1>.

talk about concrete co-operation at a time when violent conflicts in our common area are claiming lives almost every day, and an experiment because we want to talk about trade and business at a time when many people believe that our vision of a common area of security and stability will never come to pass.¹²

EED sectoral projects, such as transboundary water cooperation, river commission management and waste management are core projects, but they lack wider support because of other on-ground specialist organizations, such as the UN Development Programme, which implement such initiatives. Although the OSCE promotes EED projects publicly (on websites, at meetings), economic cooperation remains often as abstract discussions about projects. As a result, sectoral projects, including those such as border monitoring missions, remain about 80 percent financed by extra-budgetary contributions, that is, by additional voluntary contributions from pSs.¹³ Such funding, particularly in HD activities, provoked post-Soviet claims of political conditionality, or even of regime change, and funding for connectivity needs to be cautious to avoid the same charges. The EED's apolitical, functional starting point should give cooperation better chances.

These practices present two implications for the EED: first, certain pSs especially and perhaps unexpectedly, Western governments, as the article later determines, downplay the added value and in some cases even the existence of the EED. Such oversight limits from the outset the EED's potential, and then its potential capacity for enhancing trust in the other two dimensions. Indeed, various OSCE officials charged with EED remind the pSs of precisely that.¹⁴ Second, the OSCE's presence in field offices allows engagement with local

¹² Cited in Ursula Froese, 'An OSCE Experiment in Connectivity', *Security Community* No. 2 (2016), p. 4.

¹³ Based on an interview with the EU Delegation to the International Organisations in Vienna, 1 July 2017.

¹⁴ The publication of *OSCE Economic and Environmental Dimension Commitments Reference Manual 2017* (Vienna: Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, 2017), and at 358 pages, speaks to that.

communities.¹⁵ Through increased cooperation with other IOs and NGOs on the ground they act as force multipliers. Indeed, the OSCE seeks to cooperate with other actors to these positive and efficient ends.

Securing consensus on how to promote and deploy the EED remains the essential starting point towards guaranteeing its successful usage and implementation. The article consequently seeks to determine how well the EED is understood and (not) promoted within the OSCE system by pSs themselves, and in field missions, and identifies areas of such cooperation in the most difficult of geopolitical circumstances, which could be expanded further.¹⁶ Of additional note is that the EU generally strongly supports OSCE initiatives, and the signing of Association Agreements (AAs) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with Georgia and Moldova (and Ukraine) provides additional potent incentivisation for conflict transformation, as will be discussed.

The Ideals and Realities of the OSCE's EED

Although the EED has been neglected in policy and in academic study, the OSCE has nevertheless gained expertise in this dimension and has undertaken projects in practice that have given the Organization distinction from other actors.¹⁷ Some of this is detailed elsewhere and it is worth noting some initiatives in the past to intensify EED activities in the post-Soviet space. One such was the effort of the Dutch CiO in 2003 to transfer funds from OSCE-intensive activities in the Balkans to Central Asia, specifically in the EED.¹⁸

¹⁵ An interview conducted for the present study with the EU Delegation noted the positive societal responses to OSCE outreach. Brussels, 1 July 2017.

¹⁶ A recent analysis and also normative call for coordination among the OSCE and other IOs and IFIs is in Rick Fawn, *International Organizations and Internal Conditionality: Making Norms Matter* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Synergies between the EU, especially its Association Agreements, and the OSCE are also addressed in the article's conclusion.

¹⁷ We are grateful for the insights and encouragement of one of the anonymous referees on this point.

¹⁸ A. Nitzsche, 'Fresh Funding Boosts Economic - Environmental Work in Central Asia', OSCE Newsletter 10: 3 (April 2003), pp. 7-9, cited in Alexander Warkotsch, 'The OSCE as an agent of socialisation? International norm dynamics and political change in Central Asia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 59:5 (2007), pp. 832.

A recent starting point of OSCE efforts to make the EED a strong(er) pillar are visible in the aforementioned Decision 4/16 of the Hamburg Ministerial Council of December 2016: ‘Strengthening Good Governance and Promoting Connectivity’. The importance of trade and transport facilitation is, however, deeply anchored in previous documents and the centrality of it has been recognised early on. The EED already benefits from structured, formalised interactions. The annual Economic and Environmental Forum convened annually in September in Prague, is preceded by a Preparatory Meeting, organized at the OSCE headquarters in Vienna, and then at least a second one, held in the capital of the country holding the OSCE Chairmanship.¹⁹ The 26th EEF concluded that ‘Co-operation on economic and environmental topics contributed to confidence-building, strengthening stability and improving living conditions in conflict regions, although it provided no details.²⁰ Providing them, and especially from conflict regions in the OSCE space, is intended as one of the article’s contributions. The HFA of 1975 already then provided ground to encourage developments in the EED. Indeed, as a recent commentary noted, the HFA gave ‘commercial exchange ... a prominent place already’.²¹ The Hamburg MC resulting in all pSs agreeing a statement that observed the EED’s substantial history and also reaffirming commitment to earlier statements.²² The EEF is one of the several means by which war-torn Afghanistan, an OSCE partner (but not participating) State is integrated into the Organization’s activities.²³

¹⁹ See ‘Economic and Environmental Forum’, at: <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/eeforum>.

²⁰ 25th economic and Environmental Forum, *Greening the Economy and Building Partnerships for Security in the OSCE Region*, Concluding Meeting, 6-8 September 2017, Consolidated Summary, p. 6, available at: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/369581?download=true>.

²¹ Cited in Froese, ‘OSCE Experiment’, p. 4.

²² ‘Decision No. 4/16, Strengthening Good Governance and Promoting Connectivity’, MC.DEC/4/16, 9 December 2016. The Ministerial-Council decision made reference to the Document of the Bonn Conference on Economic Co-operation in Europe adopted in 1990, the OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension adopted in Maastricht in 2003, the OSCE Border Security and Management Concept adopted in Ljubljana in 2005, Ministerial Council Decision No. 11/06 on future transport dialogue in the OSCE adopted in Brussels in 2006, Ministerial Council Decision No. 11/11 on strengthening transport dialogue in the OSCE adopted in Vilnius in 2011.

²³ See more broadly Alice Ackermann, ‘The OSCE and transnational security challenges’, *Security and Human Rights* no. 3 (2009), p. 240.

Recent interviews with EU officials expressed hope for the prospects of ‘connectivity’ in Central Asia, given the relatively low degree of intra- and inter-conflict, and the need to increase trade connections and transport routes given Soviet-era centralisation of infrastructure towards the Russian core.²⁴ That legacy and the fact of unresolved conflicts in the post-Soviet space present enormous challenges for the OSCE’s connectivity.²⁵ Yet, the OSCE addresses this challenge, as the *OSCE Guide on Non-military Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)* indicates:

the EED – because of its intrinsic functionalist dimensions – offers great potential, but remains highly neglected. The principle and potential of EED – including specifically as confidence-building – is firmly established in OSCE thinking.

The *Guide* continues that ‘Economic CBMs can bind States and communities together through economic co-operation and thereby remove barriers of mistrust Issues in the environmental field can have the advantage of being seen as non-sensitive and thus politically safe’.²⁶

The following section analyses how the EED is promoted, and not, by pSs and in field mission mandates. Thereafter, the article establishes linkage between the EED and post-Soviet protracted conflicts to demonstrate the EED’s potential in some of the most difficult situations in the OSCE area and between the West and Russia. Before doing so, it is beneficial to note cases where the EED, or initiatives related to it, have occurred in the post-Soviet space.

²⁴ The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, *Trade Integration in the CIS: Alternate Options, Economic Effects and Policy Implications for Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine*, (Vienna, 2012), available at: <https://wiiw.ac.at/trade-integration-in-the-cis-alternate-options-economic-effects-and-policy-implications-for-belarus-kazakhstan-russia-and-ukraine-pj-33.html>.

²⁵ Based on an interview with the EEAS, 26 June 2017.

²⁶ *OSCE Guide on Non-military Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)* (Vienna: 2010), pp. 9-10.

This occasionally happens, if selectively and geographically-specifically. A Report for the General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly asserted: Energy and the environment are closely interlinked, as is clear from a series of actions that the OSCE is pursuing in regions like Siberia and Central Asia, in part as a way of preventing conflicts.

Additionally, the report observes,

Transnational water basins are the most significant sphere in which this new form of co-operation is unfolding. The OSCE area's most important water basins span the territories of multiple States. The OSCE has consequently started up major cross-border co-operation programmes to manage water networks in Central Asia and Siberia, oriented above all towards prevention and environmental risk management through early warning systems.

The Report further observes:

OSCE co-operation is being undertaken to avoid irreparable disasters such as the ones that befell the Caspian and Aral Seas to protect Lake Baikal and its complex hydrological and environmental system.²⁷

These initiatives are among post-Soviet states, rather than more widely in the OSCE space, but the principle and the precedent auspiciously remain. The proceedings of the OSCE's 24th

²⁷ Report for the General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, *Enhancing Mutual Trust and Co-operation for Peace and Prosperity in the OSCE Region*, 5-9 July 2016, available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwODhbFzbrEYaGJWWlhEck41UWc/view>.

EEF repeatedly call for the EED to ‘be used as a catalyst for cooperation and confidence building while including the activities of the field operations’.²⁸

Even so, individual pSs – that is, both their Foreign Ministry and OSCE Permanent Delegation sites – say very little of the EED. We look at a sample in turn, with an eye to getting EED itself, and then its CBM potential, deeper into the OSCE discourse. In other words, the legitimately positive narrative should be publicised and then use to encourage further initiatives. That, however, requires the full and proactive commitment of pSs.

How do participating States present and prioritise the EED?

A sampling of pS websites suggests that the EED earns very limited attention, quite apart from its CBM potential also being recognised. The assessment was conducted by dividing the pSs into three groups: Western established democracies; newer democracies in the EU and NATO; and post-Soviet states. The logic is to detect divergent approaches to the EED, and how language and rhetorical commitment could help to bridge political divides. Many pSs in each category do not have separate websites for their permanent delegation to the OSCE or on their MFA sites, but a sample of at least three countries from each category offers indicative trends.

Western established democracies

²⁸ Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, *24th Economic and Environmental Forum: Strengthening stability and security through co-operation on good governance* (Vienna, 2016), p. 11.

In a rather brief lead page, US State Department declares that the OSCE (still referring to as having 56 pSs) is ‘encouraging open and transparent economies’.²⁹ However, a further search finds rather positive elaboration about the EED:

The United States will remain an active participant in this continuing conversation, one that includes civil society, academic experts, government officials, and business representatives, to discuss opportunities to strengthen security and good governance through a greener economy and stronger partnerships.³⁰

This type of support could and should be made more prominent, and be reiterated by other Western pSs. Regarding the EED, the United Kingdom’s Foreign Office site referred, by contrast, only to the CSCE’s Paris Charter – from a 1990 – for having ‘recorded a commitment to economic liberty and free market economics.’³¹ The UK’s Permanent Delegation to the OSCE gives substantive paragraphs to the Political-Military and the Human Dimensions. The EED, however, receives the solitary descriptive sentence: ‘The OSCE also covers a range of economic and environmental issues.’³²

Canada, calling itself a leading supporter of the OSCE, nevertheless mentions only ‘sustainable development’.³³ That is more than another human-security promoting power such as Norway, which writes that the OSCE ‘offers a forum for political negotiations and

²⁹ ‘OSCE’, <https://www.state.gov/p/eur/rt/osce/>, first accessed 28 June 2017; still as at 8 June 2018.

³⁰ <https://osce.usmission.gov/closing-session-second-preparatory-meeting-25th-osce-economic-environmental-forum-astana-kazakhstan/>, last accessed 28 June 2017.

³¹ [UK] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Research Analysts Note, ‘What is the OSCE? The CSCE and OSCE from 1975 to 2014’, available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/479115/RA_Newsletter_Nov_2015_The_CSCE_and_the_OSCE_1975-2014.pdf.

³² The UK Delegation to the OSCE, <https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/organization-for-security-and-co-operation-in-europe>, first accessed 3 July 2017 and the same at 25 April 2018.

³³ Available at:

http://www.international.gc.ca/osce/index.aspx?lang=eng&_ga=2.260595592.445902013.1498886915-825194574.1498886915.

decision-making in the fields of early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation, and puts the political will of its participating states into practice through its network of field missions.’ Nothing of the EED is implied.³⁴ Ireland’s ‘priorities at the OSCE coincide with those of the EU. In addition it attaches significant weight to strengthening and safeguarding the work of the OSCE in the Human Dimension. EED is similarly absent, or at best implicitly mentioned.³⁵ Having taken ‘Western’ examples, how do a sample number of post-communist EU member-states and then post-Soviet states treat the EED?

Post-communist EU and NATO member-states

Post-communist states that entered NATO and the EU from 1999 onwards tend to be highly supportive of the OSCE not only because of its inclusive membership but also because of the support that the HFA gave to its communist-era dissidents. Even so, among this group declaratory support for the EED is modest. The Czech Republic offers no specific examples but appropriately equates all three dimensions and also calls for their equal respect:

The Czech Republic actively supports the work of the OSCE within its comprehensive security concept throughout all three dimensions: the politico-military, the economic and environmental and the human dimension [and] encourages the fulfilment of respective commitments in these dimensions by all OSCE participating States.³⁶

³⁴ ‘About the OSCE’, <https://www.norway.no/en/missions/osce/norway-and-the-osce/about-the-osce/>, last accessed 25 April 2018.

³⁵ ‘Ireland’s priorities at the OSCE and the Mission’s role’, <https://www.dfa.ie/osce/ireland-at-the-osce/ireland-at-the-osce/>, last accessed 25 April 2018.

³⁶ ‘The Czech Republic in the OSCE’, available at: http://www.mzv.cz/mission.vienna/en/organisations_covered_by_the_permanent/osce/czech_republic_in_the_osce/index.html, last accessed 29 June 2017.

Poland places itself among ‘the most active participants of the dialogue in the OSCE.’ However, unlike the Czech Republic, it makes no reference to the dimensions, let alone encouragement for the EED. Rather, it refers only to political-military functions, calling the Organisation ‘a forum for political negotiations and decision-making in the fields of early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation’.³⁷ Romania similarly ignores the EED, while giving detailed attention to the political-military. Its Permanent Mission ‘advances the Romanian foreign policy objectives of preventing conflict, promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the OSCE area [and] encourages open and transparent political, social and media reforms’. It then mentions roles regarding the CFE and Open Skies Treaty, all first dimension matters.³⁸ The omission is perhaps particularly curious considering that Romania’s 2001 CiO gave accent to the EED, and specifically also as a means of conflict prevention.³⁹

Although Central European states remain supporters of the OSCE, some post-Soviet states demonstrate far greater commitment to and use of the EED. That irony should be useful for the OSCE and for CBMs.

Post-Soviet states

Where established and newer democracies ignore or minimise the EED, several post-Soviet governments afford it positive attention. Belarus, takes some credit for advancing the EED,

³⁷ ‘Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’, available at: http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/foreign_policy/security_policy/osce/, first accessed 29 June 2017, and same as of 8 June 2018.

³⁸ ‘The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’, <http://mpviena.mae.ro/en/node/683>, last accessed 25 April 2018.

³⁹ For example: ‘Our demarche has been a search for rendering the OSCE EED activities more effective, with a view to strengthening the Organization’s early warning and conflict prevention capacity.’, Address by Mr. Daniel Daianu, National Coordinator for the Economic and Environmental Dimension of the OSCE Romania / OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office UNECE/OSCE International Conference “The Role of the Economic Dimension in Conflict Prevention in Europe” OSCE CiO/Romania, available at: <https://www.osce.org/eea/42080?download=true>, [unpaginated but at p. 10].

pronouncing that its representation saw through the drafting and adoption at the 2003 Dutch MC steered the OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension. It also notes that the ‘Permanent Representative of Belarus to the OSCE acted as Coordinator for the Corfu debates [of 2009-10] on economic and environmental security challenges.’⁴⁰ Such statements do not prove a country to be an OSCE enthusiast, but they give some relatively significant prominence to the EED and a means thereby to encourage more.

Armenia offers a matter-of-fact statement of equality of the three dimensions, explaining that the OSCE provides ‘comprehensive approaches to security which [sic] issues ranging from the politico-military and economic-environmental aspects to the human dimension.’⁴¹ The Economic-Environmental remains present. Ukraine went further, noting of its ‘successful Chairmanship’ of the OSCE in 2013, including that it ‘managed to ensure the consensus among 57 participating States on ... enhancing OSCE efforts in energy and environment’.⁴²

Post-Soviet states, criticised in the OSCE for non-observance of HD commitments, might support the EED as a surrogate for other OSCE commitments. That remains advantageous for the OSCE, as this article later argues; such commitment locks the post-Soviet pSs into the OSCE system. The observation here of the divergent support for the EED among pSs is also a call for established democracies to do better. How OSCE Field Missions deal with the EED is another relevant dimension for considering its potential.

How do OSCE Field Mission Mandates Address the EED?

⁴⁰ ‘Cooperation with the OSCE’, available at: <http://austria.mfa.gov.by/en/osce/cooperation/>, last accessed 29 June 2017.

⁴¹ ‘Armenia – OSCE’, available at: <http://osce.mfa.am/en/bilateral/>, last accessed 27 June 2017.

⁴² ‘Ukraine and International Organisations / Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe / About OSCE’, at <http://vienna.mfa.gov.ua/en/ukraine-io/osce/about>, last accessed 27 April 2018.

Assessing Field Mission (FM) attention to the EED is difficult because of the pressure by several pSs to sheer mandates of the HD or even to close missions, due to their presence being seen as ‘stigmas’.⁴³ Even Latvia and Estonia viewed OSCE presences similarly, and had FMs closed in 2001, in advance of the conclusion of their EU accession negotiations. The OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Baku, Azerbaijan, was terminated, and with but a single month’s notice, at the end of 2015, itself already a presence downgraded from that of an Office since 2014. Even the few, and relatively-speaking, ‘liberal’ post-Soviet states have sought FM mandates to be downgraded. Kyrgyzstan, which had received an expanded mandate, staffing and budget increase by international consensus following the country’s political and ethnic upheavals in 2010. Though seemingly friendly to the OSCE, Kyrgyzstan then succeeded in having its OSCE presence demoted to a Programme Office, and had terminated the field office in the south of country. Nevertheless, the OSCE’s presence Kyrgyzstan retains a very substantial, multifaceted EED, while its activities in the HD have been reduced.

Brief content analysis conducted for this article of the Vienna-based OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre’s February 2016 Survey of OSCE Field Operations generated (excluding context-irrelevant usages) these tasks:

Human rights	27
Economic	19
environmental	19
media (freedom of, reporting on)	12
elections	7

⁴³ Frank Evers, ‘OSCE field activities: verbal encouragement, factual cutback’, *Security and Human Rights*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2011), p. 344.

The frequency of the EED, based on this content count, falls well below one Human Dimension indicator, human rights promotion, but significantly above two others, media and elections. The EED therefore, in terms of prominence in OSCE Field mandates, ranks significantly.

And where Human Dimension activities have been attacked by post-Soviet government very positive comments are found regarding the EED. Thus the Russian Permanent Representative to the OSCE declared supportively of the Organization's Project Coordination Office in Uzbekistan:

The Co-ordinator's efforts in the economic and environmental dimension with a view to developing national mechanisms to assess the risk of money laundering and the financing of terrorism, promoting a 'green' economy and assisting the Uzbek Government in combating corruption are worthy of acknowledgement.⁴⁴

Positive endorsements of EED activities from post-Soviet pSs may be distractions from the HD. But here the fight against terrorism, which has enjoyed consensus among pSs, is linked directly to the EED, such as collaborative efforts to track and stop illegal economic activities that finance terrorism.

All this suggests that more practical engagement between the Organisation and pSs and across the East-West political divide could be attempted. In geographic areas ripe for cross-border EED initiatives, many rest at the level of seminars rather than action. By that is meant the perception that the OSCE manages to convene multiple in-country expert meetings

⁴⁴ 'Statement by Alexander Lukashevich, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, at the 1149th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council. In response to the report by the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan 8 June 2017', available at: <http://osce.mid.ru/web/osce-en/-/alexander-lukashevich-in-response-to-the-report-by-the-osce-project-co-ordinator-in-uzbekistan-8-june-2017?inheritRedirect=true&redirect=%2Fweb%2Fosce-en>.

and training sessions, while being unable to address matters of practical substance. Thus the Organization could announce that its Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine delivered, in conjunction with the OSCE Office for Economic and Environmental Activities, ‘a joint training workshop on radiological control and prevention of environmental crimes for environmental inspectors, border guards and customs officers’ A promising development, but that was one conducted in 2013.⁴⁵

Unlike pSs, which can decide how much or little they emphasise the EED, the FM mandates are agreed between the host country and the Organisation, and that in turn is a result of consensus. EED activities have been and largely remain a significant part of those remits, and often with a transboundary or even regional dimension, EED actuality and potential in field mission mandates can be mobilised further.

Better still, EED initiatives could be harnessed to improve fractious relations among pSs by making positive narratives of cooperation. The article turns next to how that can and is being done, and regarding some of the most contentious and intractable issues in the OSCE space: in post-Soviet conflict zones. The article suggests that if real results from the EED and as a confidence-building are possible in these worst-case scenarios, then prospects may be for more positive narratives between East and West.

Narratives of post-Soviet Conflicts and the OSCE’s EED

The link between post-Soviet conflicts and IOs has been that the latter received a mandate to address them through improving the living standards of the population and introducing some sort of understanding, including apologies (in the ideal case) between the conflict parties.

Competing, usually exclusivist, narratives exist on each conflict side. Narratives are

⁴⁵ ‘Enhancing environmental border protection in Ukraine’, 15 November 2013, available at: <http://www.osce.org/ukraine/108422>.

understood here as ‘compelling storylines which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn’.⁴⁶ This approach assumes that the intractability of conflict itself is often deeply rooted in the ‘stories that people use to understand and describe aspects of their lives’.⁴⁷ However, narratives can easily be misused and manipulated – even in favourable circumstance the range of narratives is limited.

These narratives are usually rooted in the divergent perceptions of the sources of conflict. They have contributed to the low point of trust between Russia and the West. Positive examples arising from the use of the EED, however, could ease some of this distrust and help rebuild trust through apolitical, functional cooperation. CBMs are most useful for bringing conflict parties together for discussing CBMs in different areas, as cooperation in ecology, law enforcement and human rights. Because of the focus on the conflict dimension of post-Soviet conflicts, as even some OSCE officials privately feel, CBMs have received unduly little attention.⁴⁸ That is a lost opportunity. And that may be additionally so, in view of the EU’s conclusion of the AAs and DCFTAs with Georgia and Moldova (and Ukraine). The Agreements with Moldova and Georgia make specific reference to conflict resolution (whereas the counterpart agreements with Ukraine do not).⁴⁹ That absence should signal already the marked difference in EU expectation for the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova, to which the article returns.

The article turns to two post-Soviet conflicts that have not only affected relations within the former Soviet space but also wider Western-Russian, and in which the different degrees of capacity of the EED in both local and wider conflict transformation will be identified.

⁴⁶ Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, Adelphi Papers 379 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006), p. 22.

⁴⁷ Colin Robson, *Real World Research* 3rd edition (Oxford: Wiley, 2011), p. 374.

⁴⁸ Telephone interview with OSCE official, 5 July 2017.

⁴⁹ See analysis in for example, European Parliamentary Research Service, *Association agreements between the EU and Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine: European Implementation Assessment* (June 2018), p. 19.

Inter-state potential: Moldova, Ukraine and the OSCE's EED CBMs in the Transnistrian conflict⁵⁰

The breakaway region of Transnistria, or the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR) has been outside the control of the Soviet successor state of Moldova after fighting in 1992. The conflict has seen various peace efforts⁵¹ but remains unresolved.⁵²

This conflict, however, does not have a pronounced ethno-linguistic dimension, even if the population of a half-million in PMR are predominantly Slavophones who look to Moscow rather than to Moldavan/Romanian-speaking Chisinau as their geocultural anchor.⁵³

Both parties have established trade arrangements, including with neighbouring countries.

Although these may be in the grey economy, they nevertheless represent cooperation.⁵⁴ The

OSCE has officially brought together various civil society groups for management of their

⁵⁰ For the purpose of impartiality, the term Transnistria is used. The OSCE, however, employs Transdnistria, a 'compromise' term, also to show neutrality; Dniester is the Russian terminology and appears less frequently in international journals than the Romanian spelling.

⁵¹ Ryan Kennedy, 'The Limits of Soft Balancing: The Frozen Conflict in Transnistria and the Challenge to the EU and NATO Strategy', *Journal of Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27:3, (2016), 512-37; Claus Neukirch, 'Moldovan Headaches The Republic of Moldova 120 days after the 2001 Parliamentary Elections', Working Paper #3, *CORE*, (Hamburg: IFSH, 2001) and 'National Minorities in the Republic of Moldova - Some Lessons Learned, Some Not?' *Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe*, 2:3 (1999), pp. 45-63; John O'Loughlin, Vladimir Kolossov, and Andrei Tchepalyga, 'National Construction, Territorial Separatism, and Post-Soviet Geopolitics in the Transdnistrier Moldovan Republic', *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, 38 (1998), 332-58; Oleh Protsyk, 'Moldova's Dilemmas in Democratizing and Reintegrating Transnistria', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 53:4 (July/August 2006), pp. 29-41; Stefan Troebst 'Moldovan Transnistrian Republic: From Conflict Driven State-Building to State Driven Nation-Building', *European Yearbook for Minority Issues* (ECMI, 2002/03); Andrew Williams, 'Conflict Resolution after the Cold War: The Case of Moldova', *Review of International Studies*, 25:1 (January 1999), 71-96; Gottfried Hanne, 'The Role And Activities of the OSCE Mission to Moldova In The Process Of Transdnistrian Conflict Resolution', in *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, #3 *ECMI*, (2002); ICG, *Moldova: No Quick Fix*, #147 (12 August 2003); and ICG, *Moldova's Uncertain Future*, #175 (17 August 2006).

⁵² Considerable literature exists on the conflict and on negotiating efforts, such as Stanislav Secieru, 'The Transnistrian conflict: new opportunities and old obstacles for trust building (2009–2010)', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2011), pp. 241-63.

⁵³ Similarly, relatively considerable literature is available on the impact of the conflict on both Transnistria's and Moldova's manoeuvring between the West and Russia, see Cristian Cantir and Ryan Kennedy, 'Balancing on the Shoulders of Giants: Moldova's Foreign Policy toward Russia and the European Union', *Foreign Policy Analysis* Vol. 11, No. 4 (October 2015), pp. 397–416; and Igor Istomin and Irina Bolgova, 'Transnistrian strategy in the context of Russian–Ukrainian relations: the rise and failure of "dual alignment"', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* Vol. 16, No. 1 (2016), pp. 169-94.

⁵⁴ See more broadly, Charles King, 'The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States', *World Politics* Vol. 53, No. 4 (July 2001), pp. 524-52.

common ecosystem, localised issues results from climate change.⁵⁵ The OSCE has continuously promoted youth education about the Nistru River ecosystem and water management. The OSCE's objective was to make younger generations conscious of their shared environmental future and to teach actionable techniques of sustainable development. The summer school also functioned as important CBM in itself, by assembling 70 students from both conflict parties.

The OSCE leads with an example on the environment and enabled, in cooperation with the umbrella network Eco-Tiras (representing 50 NGOs), discussions on the Dniester/Nistru basin. The organisation hosted a two-day 'confidence-building measures' conference in late October in Tiraspol, which is already a success in itself, with high numbers participating, and being convened eight times in the last decade. The meetings, on actual environmental initiatives, have also retained participation from Moldova, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine, and with joint activities undertaken by both the left (Transdnistria) and right banks of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

From the OSCE's perspective, inter-state environmental cooperation works well, including the project 'Enabling Transboundary Co-operation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Dniester River Basin', implemented by the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, assisted by the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the UNDP/UNECE. The reason behind focusing on Transnistria as 'in-between' Moldova and Ukraine is, according to Moldova's Deputy

⁵⁵ OSCE Mission to Moldova, Press Releases, 'OSCE Summer School brings together students from both banks of Dniester/Nistru river to learn about local ecosystem' (21 July 2014), <http://www.osce.org/moldova/121484>; 'OSCE supports community-based disaster risk reduction in Moldova' (2 March 2015), <http://www.osce.org/moldova/143391>; 'OSCE Mission to Moldova brings together experts from both banks to facilitate environmental co-operation' (11 March 2016), <http://www.osce.org/moldova/226886>; 'OSCE and UNECE support progress towards climate change adaptation in the Dniester River basin' (27 March 2017), <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/307741>.

Prime Minister of Agriculture, Ion Apostol, the pure functionality that arises from Dniester providing drinking water for ‘significant parts of Moldova’s and Ukraine’s population’.⁵⁶

Although initially developed for Moldova-Transnistrian relations, the regional dimension of cooperation, including in the EED, also holds potential for the deeper involvement of Ukraine. While Ukrainian-Russian relations remain hostile since 2014, a low-level functional inclusion of Ukraine in this initiative could benefit all parties.⁵⁷ Little doubt exists that business interests have sustained the Transnistrian conflict, and allow Russia an additional foothold. As one regional report boldly noted, ‘Taking advantage of the lack of vision and [the] corruptibility of Moldovan elites, including at the highest political level, Russia has strengthened its influence in Moldova, building economic schemes through which the separatist regime in the Transnistrian region was financed including by Moldovans money.’⁵⁸ Furthermore, Moscow has also incentivised a mechanism, by which Transdnistria receives free gas and which can be seen as a form of ‘budgetary CBM’.⁵⁹

The positive effect of this Moldovan-Ukrainian transboundary cooperation is the expansion of conflict resolution tools. Considering that the OSCE’s Liaison Office in Tiraspol, Transnistria was closed in the 1990s, convening such a conference in the Transnistrian capital is also an achievement.⁶⁰ The success of location is also evidenced in the fact that in 2011, and before the 2012 resumption of the 5+2 negotiating format, a OSCE conference on environmental activities with experts and NGOs from both river sides was convened in the town of Adul lui Voda. In those unfavourable circumstances, the meeting

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Telephone interview with Oleksiy Melnyk, Co-Director, Foreign Relations and International Security Programmes, Razumkov Centre, 1 July 2017.

⁵⁸ Victor Parlicov, Tudor Soitu, Sergiu Tofilat ‘Energy and Politics: The Price for Impunity in Moldova’, Policy Paper, *The Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS), Viitorul*, April 2017, p.6.

⁵⁹ Telephone interview with expert, 25 June 2017.

⁶⁰ See Maria Raquel Freire, *Conflict and Security in the Former Soviet Union: The Role of the OSCE*, 2003, Routledge ; William H. Hill, *Russia, the Near Abroad, and the West: Lessons from the Moldova-Transdnistria Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); and Tozun Bahcheli, Barry Bartmann, and Henry Srebrnik (eds), *De facto states: The Quest for Sovereignty* (London: Routledge, 2004),.

itself could be considered a success. The OSCE Head of Mission Philip Remler stated in 2011, ‘Environmental issues affect everyone, no matter which side of the river they live on.’⁶¹

The leading German development agency (GIZ) has additionally conducted projects on water management. All organisations presented efforts on activities related to the river basin, which has proved as an excellent source to support CBMs for both sides to benefit conflict resolution.⁶² Of course, the legal frameworks are issues that need further collaboration.’⁶³ The 2016-2018 GIZ project ‘Inter-municipal water management along the Dniester’ highlights the importance of securing the Dniester/Nistru as a major drinking water reservoir for both regions. GIZ intimates the apolitical, functional benefits of this water management initiative that stretches across the conflict divide: ‘The wastewater discharged from the dilapidated and inefficient infrastructure on both banks contaminates the river, the self-cleaning capacity of which is weakening due to the structure of the riverbed and the poor oxygen balance.’ Such common gains are often overlooked in other efforts at conflict transformation. Improvements in sanitation and broader inter-municipal cooperation can be regarded as highly successful, and with practical results that could follow, and then rightly be included in a new narrative of cooperation between the conflict parties.⁶⁴

This perspective is confirmed by the aforementioned co-director of the in Kiev-based Razumkov Centre, who said that joint cooperation between Moldova and Ukraine, and an unrecognised Transnistria is growing, even if conflict transformation requires change in Russia’s position.⁶⁵ Ukrainian-Moldovan cooperation is not an obstacle and even in official terms, their mutual interests are complementary. They both seek conflict resolution and also

⁶¹ OSCE, ‘OSCE Mission to Moldova promotes environmental co-operation across the Dniestr/Nistru River’, 29 March 2011, <https://www.osce.org/moldova/76243>.

⁶² OSCE, ‘OSCE and partner organizations launch new project to support implementation of the Dniester River Basin Treaty’, 18 December 2017, available at: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/363191>.

⁶³ OSCE, ‘OSCE Mission to Moldova promotes environmental co-operation across the Dniestr/Nistru River’, 29 March 2011, available at <https://www.osce.org/moldova/76243>.

⁶⁴ GIZ Moldova, ‘Inter-municipal water management along the Dniester River’, <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/42103.html>, last accessed 20 June 2018.

⁶⁵ Interview with Melynk.

wish to continue work with ‘package’ agreements, economic (cross-border) cooperation, and deal with issues on self-identification of ethnic minorities.⁶⁶ Cross-border cooperation is illustrated in the above example, which is an important sign for the functioning and implementation of the EED. Similarly to Ukraine, Romania as a neighbour to Moldova’s West has pressed hard to encourage regional integration. This means that cooperation exists also here between Moldova and Romania,⁶⁷ is yet disregarded for the purpose of focusing on the Transnistrian conflict. Another example of former cooperation between Ukraine and Moldova was the successful mission of the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM), established in 2005, which was a pertinent CBM forerunner through the measures that arose from ‘customs, trade, transport and trans-boundary management’.⁶⁸ The results of cooperation are potentially considerable and could inspire more in the OSCE space. Promoting environmental cooperation fits with EU strategies and can be promoted by it more intensively in the OSCE space. Other EED CBMs also exist in the vexing conflict that pits Russia and Abkhazia against the West and Georgia.

From Ecological threats to CBM Narratives: Russia, Georgia and Abkhazia

Russia’s recognition of Abkhazia (and South Ossetia) following its 2008 war with Georgia exacerbated relations not only with Georgia but also with the West. Georgia considered the Russian-recognised regions to be Occupied Territories under the October 2008 Law of that name, while Abkhazia considers itself to be the target of what it sees are ongoing plans for war against it by Georgia. Abkhaz officials even claim that Georgian special forces conducted

⁶⁶ Olena Betlii, *Foreign Policy Audit: Ukraine-Moldova*, (Kyiv: Institute for World Policy Discussion Paper, 2016).

⁶⁷ Other numerous, regional projects, for example, include this: National policy dialogues on water in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, OECD <http://www.oecd.org/env/outreach/npd-moldova.htm>; a regional EU initiative was the 2007 launched Black Sea Synergy (BBS), which includes Romania. The downside of such projects, as BBS is to know the actual measurements of success, https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/black-sea-synergy/346/black-sea-synergy_en.

⁶⁸ EUBAM, ‘Who we are’, last accessed 8 June 2018, available at: <http://eubam.org/who-we-are/>.

raids across the river that divides the two territories.⁶⁹ Any developments of positive rapprochement between Abkhazia, Georgia and Russia can only be constructive – and yet several efforts in the EED have seen possibilities for fruitful cooperation and confidence-building. The following sections establish how the EED has incentivised CBMs for conflict resolution: Fearful Abkhazia needs Georgia’s support to preserve its beautiful but fragile ecosystem and subtropical tourist attractions. The scope for, and indeed the fact of unexpected regional cooperation among these hardened adversaries confirm the EED’s confidence-building capacities.

The Russian search engine Yandex confirmed Abkhazia as the third most popular destination for Russian tourists, after Turkey and Cyprus.⁷⁰ According to UNPO, while the participants agree to work on the non-use of force document in the Geneva International Discussions (GID), they expressed ‘their willingness to continue searching for solutions to humanitarian issues, including environmental safety, preservation of cultural heritage, education, and searching for missing persons.’⁷¹ Although economic or environmental in the context of conflicts is always an indicator of some potential that the conflict might be solved in future, literature tells us that in the absence of formal economic cooperation, informal trade exchange might still take place on a local, unrecorded scale. Furthermore, it is wise to start cooperating from the environmental dimension first as the cause is in everyone’s interest and goes beyond the benefit of the individual.

⁶⁹ This claim has been made by de facto officials on several separate occasions.

⁷⁰ ApsnyPress, ‘Abkhazia is among the top three tourist requests on “Yandex”’, 30 June 2017, available at: <http://apsnypress.info/en/news/abkhazia-is-among-the-top-three-tourist-requests-on-yandex/>. One de facto Abkhaz official insisted that two million Russians vacation annually in Abkhazia (meeting 25 January 2014). Even if the actual numbers are one-tenth, they remain essential for the Abkhaz economy.

⁷¹ UNPO, 23 June 2017, Abkhazia: Georgia Maintains Aggressive Stance towards Abkhazia <http://unpo.org/article/20158>.

In May 2016, after being idle for four years the resumption of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) in Georgia IPRM is a possibility for functional cooperation around this ecological imperative.⁷²

The pests: box tree moth, the brown marmorated stink bug, and palm weevil

Despite the military-political deadlock and animus, Russia, Abkhazia and Georgia now share common enemies in the form of three pests. It is from these that even greater prospects arise for the utility of the EED as a CBM in this conflict.

Brief digression to natural history is essential. The box tree caterpillar and moth was largely unknown in Europe (originally deriving from China but became then also common to Italy) but Britain's Royal Horticultural Society has deemed to be the UK's 'top pest' problem because of 'severe defoliation' in parts of the UK.⁷³ The intensity of threat in the Caucasus is far greater, as the pest can only be cured completely from places where the box tree does not grow indigenously. The insect threat was visibly demonstrated by its quick defoliation of trees in both southern Russia and Abkhazia when they arrived in seedlings imported to spruce up the Sochi winter Olympic grounds in 2014.⁷⁴

The box tree moth consumes both hazelnut and citrus fruits, two essential Abkhaz crops and therefore of particular concern for Abkhazia; most hazelnut trees are located in Eastern Abkhazia, which is the Gali district (a major pastoral area, with little infrastructure and after the expulsion of the Georgians only a few have returned unofficially). Under special arrangements, however, these Abkhaz-originated hazelnuts are transported to Georgia and sold abroad. To underscore the economic risk, Georgia (including Abkhazia) is one of the

⁷² Civil.ge, 'Gali IPRM Meetings Resume, After a Break of Four Years', 28 May 2016.

⁷³ 'Box tree caterpillar', <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=760>, last accessed 25 April 2018; BBC, 'Box tree caterpillar tops Royal Horticultural Society pests list', 18 March 2016.,

⁷⁴ For a brief account in English, see 'Abkhazia: boxwoods in danger', JamNews, 14 September 14 2017, available at: <https://jam-news.net/?p=58716>.

world top five-hazelnut exports, and hazelnuts provide 8.5 percent of Georgia's foreign exports.⁷⁵ 90 percent of those are grown in Georgia's region closest to Abkhazia.

Understandably the Georgian government responded to the box tree moth threat with alarm, and also a willingness to engage in new cooperation.⁷⁶

The moth has affected Russia's Sochi area, Abkhazia, and parts of Georgia and Turkey; Georgia has shared its anti-moth experience with Iran,⁷⁷ and funding from the EU's European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument produced a report for the EaP countries, assessing forest pests and diseases in native boxwood forests of Georgia.⁷⁸ The strong focus on fighting the environmental pest entails real need and opportunity for cooperation among the conflict parties. At the same time, this cooperation is nevertheless political sensitive and the activities are kept to a low profile.

The brown marmorated stink bug, its comical name notwithstanding, provides the second threat. It can devour some 300 different plant species, including a wide range of crops, but also particularly targets the region's hazelnuts, and could attack other key crops such as citrus, maize and pitted fruits. Apart from its appetite, the bug enjoys extraordinary annual reproduction – of a factor of 200. Once settled, its exponential expansion presents immense threat to harvests.

The palm weevil constitutes the third natural threat. As the name suggests, it attacks, palm trees. While an ever-expanded geographic threat, its presence in the Caucasus is relatively new and thus presents one area of the world where its infestation can be arrested. The search for a specific mechanism of irradiation remains, given the lack of consensus on the

⁷⁵ Devi Dumbadze, 'Invasive Stink Bug Pest Devastates Georgia's Agriculture', *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 14, No. 133, 19 October 2017), available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/invasive-stink-bug-pest-devastates-georgias-agriculture/>.

⁷⁶ Ministry of Agriculture, Georgia, 27 August 2016, <http://www.moa.gov.ge/En/News/1172>

⁷⁷ FOA, 'Georgia shares box tree moth control experience with Iran', 26 December 2016, <http://www.fao.org/georgia/news/detail-events/en/c/462290/>.

⁷⁸ Iryna Matsiakh, *Assessment of Forest Pests and Diseases in Native Boxwood Forests of Georgia* (published in Tbilisi by the Ukrainian National Forestry, Department 2016).

pest's origins. The Director of the UN's FAO called it 'a global threat', and the EU's External Action Service also expected it to be more of an ecological threat in the European area.⁷⁹

In the meantime and regardless of the pests' origins, Abkhaz authorities have raised these ecological threats in the Geneva International Discussions (GID), the sole international forum for dealing with the conflicts in Georgia since the 2008 war. In a 2016 GID meeting, the Abkhaz recognised the intensity of the problem as having 'severely defoliate[d] the flora'. Governmental experts from Georgia, Abkhazia, Russia, and Turkey and the Czech Republic, were brought into two assessment workshops, enabled by the financial and technical support and guidance of the OSCE, UN and EU. Anti-pest spraying operations, despite all the seeming intractability of this complex conflict, was agreed and implemented. The EU's Special Representative for the South Caucasus Hebert Salber commented on this project in 2016: 'This form of rather effective co-operation can hopefully send the signal that a co-operative approach can also bring about progress in other [conflict] areas'.⁸⁰

Similarly, Toivo Klaar, the following EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, stated the obvious but essential point that 'if you have a stink bug threatening the crops and if you just address this issue on one side of the ABL and you do not do enough on the other side, it will simply come back to you again and again. This is no help to the farmers who are working so hard to make a living.' Such a situation calls for 'everyone to be pragmatic enough to make progress on a problem which affects everyone.'⁸¹

Swiss diplomat Gunther Bächler, OSCE Chairman for the GID, went further, even observing popular appreciation for solving humanitarian and environmental issues. It can be suggested that developing a collaborative programme on agricultural disease-prevention and

⁷⁹ Based on an interview, 28 June 2017.

⁸⁰ 'Address to the ASRC by Ambassador Herbert Salber European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia Vienna, 28 June 2016', PC.DEL/954/16, , Annual Security Review Conference, p.4, available at: <https://www.osce.org/whoweare/248976?download=true>

⁸¹ Quoted in civil.ge, 'Toivo Klaar on Geneva Talks, Engagement with Sokhumi, Tskhinvali', 2 February 2018, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/219657>.

anti-infestation was a ‘problem-solving exercise’,⁸² one that could be usefully applied more widely to the protracted conflict.

The potential of these interactions should not be understated, especially as Georgia routinely blocked Abkhazia’s mere presence in these forums. Furthermore, Bächler remarked on a three-way workshop in Vienna, that despite challenges, the engagement ‘works quite well and I think nobody wants to give that up.’⁸³ Unfortunately, successful functional cooperation also gives a disquieted party added leverage; Russia used the risk of infestation as an excuse to embargo imports of Abkhaz produce, thereby pressuring the vulnerable Abkhaz economy, just four days before Georgia made a peace offering to the separatist region in April 2018.⁸⁴

That aside, Abkhazia’s engagement on ecology and environmental issues is based on protecting its lucrative tourism and agriculture. This initiative’s success comes from low-profile cooperation. EU policy makers are confident that it has real potential to grow into a regional approach.⁸⁵

Although the OSCE is co-sharing (with the UN) the IPRM and the GIDs, the OSCE seems absent in projects on the ground,⁸⁶ which, however, also shows a clear task sharing and distribution in Georgia. At the same, the OSCE should be encouraged to do more in the Second Dimension, as illustrated by the successful examples given and also demonstrated by the following example. According to an EEAS official, there is more space for the OSCE to fund follow-up projects. A successful precursor was the grant of \$40,000 by the German OSCE Chairmanship and implemented by the UNDP, which procured and delivered spraying

⁸² ‘OSCE Chairman on Geneva Talks & Tskhinvali’s “Alania Referendum”’, Georgia Today, 10 April 2017, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/6297/OSCE-Chairman-on-Geneva-Talks-%26-Tskhinvali%27s->.

⁸³ Georgia Today, 10 April 2017.

⁸⁴ Civil.ge, ‘Does Tbilisi’s Peace Step have a Future?’, 27 April 2018, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/240128>.

⁸⁵ As indicated above in interviews with international policy-makers.

⁸⁶ Interview with the EU, 27 June 2017. It has cooperated via the headquarters for the past three years.

equipment to the Abkhaz authorities, and funded an entomological laboratory in the Abkhaz capital Sukhum/i.⁸⁷

The example of ecological cooperation remains sensitive, as the conflict parties engage in cooperation beyond issues and positions that would be counterproductive to their negotiating positions in another context. Russia tends to resist Abkhaz-Georgian cooperation but interest remains for a broader regional framework to safeguard the (touristic) environment, including Abkhaz own interests.⁸⁸ This is important as these projects also foster Abkhazia's civil society that could also produce more interlocutors for conflict transformation.⁸⁹ About 60 NGOs are registered but only about 20 of them are targeted for such projects, which leaves scope to ask about the infrastructure of NGOs including the gender dynamics (given the loss of many veterans from the 1992/92 war more women seem to be engaged in NGOs)⁹⁰. Many NGOs are also disadvantaged because they lack sufficient technical skills to know how to engage in joint projects. The major EU/UNDP financed Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM),⁹¹ launched in 2010, started the final phase in January 2016 for another three years, through which all local needs will be addressed in the scope of specific sectoral initiatives across and within communities.⁹²

⁸⁷ Interview with the EEAS, 28 June 2017. The spelling Sukhum/i is intended for neutrality, the former being the Abkhaz spelling, and the full name being the Georgian.

⁸⁸ Thomas Ambrosio and William A. Lang, 'The Architecture of Annexation? Russia's Bilateral Agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia', *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 44 No.5, (2016), pp. 673-93.

⁸⁹ Tomáš Hoch, Vincenc Kopeček, and Vladimír Baar, 'Civil Society and Conflict Transformation in De Facto States: The Case of Abkhazia', *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 64, No. 6 (July 2016), pp.1-13.

⁹⁰ This is a general trend across the erupted conflicts following the Soviet collapse, , Laura Dean, 'Kennan Cable No.26: Women's Organizations Peacebuilding across Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union', 11 October 2017, available at:

, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no26-womens-organizations-peacebuilding-across-conflicts-the-former-soviet>.

⁹¹ It has allocated a budget of about € 5.5/6 million is targeted at collaborating closely with I/NGOs.

⁹² UNDP, 'Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM)', http://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/operations/projects/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/confidence-building-early-response-mechanism--coberm-.html

The EU, still functioning under its 2009/10 engagement but non-recognition policy,⁹³ has to ensure that its work through COBERM does not contribute to much Abkhaz capacity building towards growing into a functioning ‘state entity’ (a matter strenuously rejected by Georgia and for this reason is very sceptical of all foreign activities in Abkhazia) but improves living conditions. One key reason why COBERM has been successful is its ‘apolitical, impartial and flexible’ project character, the focus being on the promotion of rural development, while modernising (vocational) education and even attempting to improve border management between Georgia and Azerbaijan.⁹⁴ In the same source, the UNDP’s project map indicates 40 projects but does, however, not indicate projects with Abkhazia (or South Ossetia).⁹⁵ The core EU funding though derives from the ENP, channelled through the ENPI with about €17 million allocated to Georgia, which has subcontracted full €8 million towards Abkhazia.⁹⁶

Such initiatives and also the financial background of it show that CBMs can assist conflict transformation. The de facto Abkhaz MFA reported positively through social media of the discussion with EUSR Salber in February 2017 on the highly-sensitive issue of border-crossings to Georgia. Those discussions also included ‘environmental issues of regional security’, specifically the insect plague. The EUSR commented that ‘the meeting was held in a warm and friendly atmosphere.’⁹⁷ While much larger issues remain unresolved in the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict, and all that this conflict tinderbox adds to Russian tensions with

⁹³ Sabine Fischer, *How to Engage with Abkhazia?* (Brussels: European Union Institute for Security Studies, November, 2010); Alexander Frolov, ‘Abkhazia: A Zone of Alienation or a Zone of Growth?’, *International Affairs: A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy and International Relations*, Vol 62, No. 5 (2016), pp.179-190.

⁹⁴ ‘Project Map’, <http://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/operations/projects/map.html>

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Interview with the EU, over €15 billion funding has been granted to the period 2014-2020, with 95 per cent foreseen for national and multi-country programmes and 5 per cent for cross-border cooperation programmes.

⁹⁷ MFA Abkhazia, 16 February 2017, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/MFAofAbkhazia/posts/1208429479264650:0>

the West; the pest infestation has still provided for CBMs and also positive dimensions to the otherwise dichotomised narratives that continue to divide the conflict parties.

Conclusion

The EED is considered not only an integral part of the OSCE's comprehensive security but also a means of confidence building in its own right. Western-Russian relations are inarguably poor, and measures that can ease some of those tensions should be welcomed. That goes particularly in post-Soviet conflict zones, such as Transnistria-Moldova and Abkhazia-Georgia, where the Kremlin often presents Russian interests in moral terms, yet add to larger geopolitical tensions. Indeed, Western-Russian interests have collided in these protracted conflicts.

This article contends that the previous and current history of the EED offers some means forward. That requires having Western and post-communist governments to be more forceful in their own commitment to the EED. Post-Soviet states, however, are generally stronger rhetoric supporters of the EED than Western states; this support can be used to channel, shape and encourage the potential of the EED more visibly.

Thus, pSs should recognise that the EED's confidence-building capacity cannot have significance without that OSCE dimension itself gaining more prominence. PSs often accord the EED still scant attention and should increase the prominence of the EED in their own MFA and Mission explanations, as well as in statements for example to the OSCE's Permanent Council. OSCE institutions and affiliated structures, such as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, could do likewise. Euro-Atlantic governments could update and expand their webpages *per se*, and also give fuller attention to the EED, even before considering its CBM potential. As much as field missions are highly politicised in the OSCE,

mandates continue to support EED activities, very possibly because they are seen as apolitical, win-win. By retaining and expanded the EED dimension, the OSCE can also retain its human dimension activities, if only, at the worst, to be a source of protection and support for civil society activists and human dimension defenders.

Coordinated work with other IOs would be essential to maximise results and minimise overlap and competition. Western governments (despite poor public dissemination) support the EED and in its field missions; they could explore further the use of non-budgetary funds for EED projects. National funding is brandable as such if relevant to the domestic constituencies of donor governments, and the credit thus not being lost in a pool of collective aid. These initiatives could include support for project-based initiatives in existing field missions/project coordination offices; and linking more intensively anti-terrorism initiatives, for which enormous rhetorical support exists, to economic initiative, such as anti-money laundering. Indeed our expectation, including based on a number of informal discussions, is that EED activity does occur and may generate greater confidence between parties The OSCE's various media tools can then be mobilised to acknowledge and disseminate positive examples. The OSCE Academy's Masters programme in Economic Governance and Development, which brings together graduate student from across Central Asia an Afghanistan (occasional additional countries) could be expanded.⁹⁸

And perhaps most significantly, the EU expressly ties contents of its AAs and DCFTAs with Georgia and Moldova to aspects of the conflicts, and seeing its overriding ambitions of reform as helping to address the conflict dynamic. Thus the AA writes that 'strengthening democracy and market economy will facilitate participation of Georgia [and separately and similarly with Moldova] in EU policies, programmes and agencies.' Those reforms, in turn, with conflict resolution efforts 'will mutually reinforce each other and will

⁹⁸ See <http://www.osce-academy.net/en/masters/edg/>.

contribute to build confidence between communities divided by conflict'.⁹⁹ That confidence can come from, for example, the EU's permissiveness to the sale of Abkhaz agriculture in Georgian exports. The EU routinely supports OSCE conflict resolution efforts; further mobilisation of EU capacities in the EED could be highly significant.

Almost counterintuitively, the article has identified EED areas of activity in two protracted post-Soviet conflicts where cooperation has occurred. That in turn, may help to change the rigid and threatening narratives each side has of the other, and which have consequently ensured that the conflicts themselves unresolved. Perhaps a long shot, but these EED potentialities might even assist to improve Russian-Western relations. The cooperation regarding the Nistru/Dniester river basin has shown cooperation not only between the two riversides but also between Moldova and Ukraine, which is very important in light of Russia's financial influence by means of Transnistria's gas debt as indicated earlier. In the South Caucasus, a similar phenomenon – here not the safeguarding of water as a resource but the protection of the forestation and flora – justified the cooperation of three parties that cannot agree with each other. In the context of the environment, they could. The latter example demonstrated how complementary the OSCE's role served the EU and UN capacity on the ground. The OSCE remains the key driver in the efforts that are jointly with the German development agency GIZ, the UNDP and other local foreign-financed NGOs (the role of the EU did not seem notable looking at the coordination between the major IOs with regard to water management as the EU seems to focus more on SMEs and the health sector; coordination is natural and necessary).

⁹⁹ See the Preamble, in In Agreements Council Decision of 16 June 2014 on the signing, on behalf of the European Union, and provisional application of the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part (2014/494/EU), available at: https://cdn1-eeas.fpfis.tech.ec.europa.eu/cdn/farfuture/VjycjKJ-ii28659I8FYZ8Phir2Qqs0f2jZUoh4un5IE/mtime:1473773763/sites/eeas/files/association_agreement.pdf.

In view of the unexpected or overlooked EED CBM identified in this article, it further recommends that the OSCE should continue to seek and support low-political or apolitical EED projects in in conflict zones. The Organization is inclined to cooperate with other IOs and IFIs and the EU has particularly undertaken small-scale initiatives to assist in unrecognised or partially recognised post-Soviet states but without thereby implying, let alone effectively granting recognition.¹⁰⁰ The OSCE knows well the exclusivist national narratives told by each conflict party, but can integrate current cases of functional cooperation to rebuild aspects of Soviet-era trust and cooperation. Abkhazia-Georgian relations have benefitted from the necessary cooperation around the Soviet-era Inguri dam, which has supplied electricity to both conflict parties, even during very tense periods. That textbook case of functional cooperation, however, did not, to use functionalist peace-building language, ‘spillover’ into other sectors. Agricultural cooperation may now be that achingly-needed new sector.

The strength and weakness of the OSCE is that it has had all of its disparate participating States sign up to normative values, but on political rather than a binding-legal basis. The EED is an integral part of the OSCE comprehensive security. The EED does feature, albeit unduly quietly, in positive ways, including in confidence-building. Considering the poor state of relations among post-Soviet entities, and those, foremost Russia, in turn with the West, the EED presents no losses or risks, and much potential. That ready opportunity can and should be seized.

¹⁰⁰ Of the relatively few analysts of EED potential divergent opinions exist on how well the OSCE works with other IOs. On one hand, particularly in Central Asia, it has been noted that ‘the OSCE is working in areas that other organisations often know better’ and ‘the OSCE can never match’ their resourcing. On the other hand, the concern has long-existed that the OSCE has been pushed towards development projects, an activity that is not its main focus. For the former see, Warkotsch, ‘OSCE as an agent’, p. 836; the latter, Evers, ‘Building Co-operation’, p. 5. Fawn, *International Organizations*, suggests a way forward in the conclusion.