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EUROPEAN ORGANIZATIONS

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Introduction

The Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) are the two most important institutions promoting European cooperation and collaboration that extend their membership beyond that of the European Union (EU). The two organizations have different histories, but their organizational identity is rooted in Europeanness. Both were created during the Cold War. The CoE was set up in 1949, at the very beginning of the Cold War. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, the precursor of the OSCE) was negotiated in 1975, at the height of the Cold War. The Soviet Union was part of the process of creating the CSCE, but by contrast, the CoE was set up in order to counter communist regimes and so was directed against the Soviet Union in particular.

In Russian/Soviet interactions with Europe, being considered a part of Europe, and Europe's place as a reference point for Russia, have been important. The CoE and OSCE therefore figure strongly in Russian foreign policy, given Russia's wish to be a significant player in European affairs. This desire was expressed by President Putin when, paying respects to the late German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, he quoted him approvingly: "If we want to maintain our civilization in this tough and quickly changing world . . . Then naturally Europe and Russia need to be together" (Druzhinin, 2017). Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has been especially keen on multilateral interaction in its foreign policy. Russia is active in multilateral frameworks like the G20, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South-Africa) and (up until 2014) the G8, and multiple international organizations like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), etc. But the CoE and OSCE have a unique European dimension which the others lack. However, as a result of the deepening cooperation and widening geographical scope of the EU, understandings of Europeanness have been changing and Europe has become a disputed concept. The Russian foreign policy view is that both the CoE and OSCE represent wider Europe, or the pan-European concept. This leads to a mismatch between the EU's perspective that Russia is an outsider in Europe, and the perspective from the OSCE's and CoE's point of view that Russia is part of Europe.

In this chapter both organizations, the OSCE and CoE, are introduced. The origins and purpose of both are very important in tracing the evolution of Russia's relationship with the organizations today. Despite the deep differences between Russia and most other members

in the two organizations, the need and usefulness of the organizations is still recognized by all members and at the grass roots level one can argue there have also been successes which could well prove to be significant in the future.

The Council of Europe

The CoE was created in 1949 as a means of giving Western Europe the upper hand in the battle of ideologies. Its aim was to hold up democracy in opposition to communism and fascism. It was considered very important at the time for the sake of European unity to promote some common norms and rules as well as define values in democracy, human rights and the rule of law – the holy trinity, as some CoE officials call them.

The initiative for forming an organization like the CoE came from France and Great Britain. Winston Churchill stated in Zurich in 1946 that the way forward for a prosperous Europe would be the creation of a United States of Europe:

What is this sovereign remedy? It is to recreate the European fabric, or as much of it as we can, and to provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety, and in freedom. We must build a kind of United States of Europe.

(Churchill 1946)

Churchill's idea was to ensure that West European unity would hold up against the communist "threat", as it was then seen. Some of the ideas of socialism were attractive for all societies. In order to counter them and to ensure that the rise of fascism would not be repeated, Western Europe needed mechanisms to enhance its own democratic institutions. Those institutions would also erect obstacles to belligerent acts by governments in any country. In other words, the central idea was to create the basis for strong West European soft power or cultural statecraft towards the East, while at the same time ensuring history would not repeat itself in the form of conflicts between European states.

One essential feature that continues to affect the organization's mechanisms and abilities was already decided back then. France and Great Britain differed slightly in their visions of the kind of organization they wanted. France even suggested the name "European Union", but this was rejected by the British on the grounds that the term was too loaded. The British view was that the new body would work better if it was more an organization that provided general guidelines and acted as a forum for the exchange of opinions than if it was able to force its decisions onto its members. The general feeling was that human rights, the rule of law and the understanding of democracy were too difficult subjects for an agreed substance to be imposed on different countries in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War in Europe and the rest of the world.

With the founding of the EU and its expansion in the 1990s, less attention has been focused on the CoE and its role in European cooperation. The EU has absorbed into its own agenda many of the issues that are at the core of the CoE's functions. This has created an interesting situation. The EU has 28 members (27 from the end of March 2019 following the UK's decision to leave) dealing with many of the same issues as the CoE. The CoE has 47 members, 19 of which do not belong to the EU, a majority of which are countries from the former Eastern bloc. This has opened up the possibility of dialogue between countries of the EU on the one hand and those countries that are members of the CoE but not EU members, of which Russia is the largest, on the other. This duality is both the CoE's strength and its weakness at the same time. By bringing together all European countries, the organization is able to some extent to paper over the distinction between the two Europes – the Europe made up of countries that are

not members of the EU and the one made up of EU member countries. Thus it is a genuinely pan-European organization. On the other hand, the fact that its membership is dominated by one organized bloc weakens its credibility as a truly shared and democratic organization.

Russia became a member of the CoE in 1996. It was granted membership even though at the time there was a great deal of controversy over the first Chechen War, the use of the death penalty, and other shortcomings relating to the rule of law and human rights protection. Hence it has been argued that Russian membership was granted more on pragmatic grounds rather than on the basis that it was fully suitable for membership (Webber, 2000: 134). There were also two other noteworthy aspects of the application process: Russian understandings of its own exceptionalism, and the fact that there was such a high level of consensus among the Russian domestic public and elite opinion relating to Russian membership in the CoE (Webber, 2000; 135; Smith, 2014). The exceptionalism was part of Russia's great power identity, its self-perception as a great power even at a time when its material means and capabilities did not match the requirements of a great power. Regardless of whether Russia was a great power or not, this self-perception affected its attitude to CoE membership. Great powers often interpret common rules from their own perspective and are unwilling to accede if the common rules go against the great power's own interests. This great power self-perception explains much about Russia's behaviour in the CoE, once it had become a member. The consensus surrounding the application for membership was a rather unique factor in Russian foreign policy, at a time when there were strong divisions within the political establishment. At the beginning of the 1990s, Russia was seen as part of the West and part of Europe by a strong majority of Russians, which laid the basis for some unity in relation to foreign policy. This was clear in the views of both Andrey Kozyrev, Russian foreign minister from 1992–1996, and of Yevgeni Primakov, Russian foreign minister 1996–1999. They both saw Russian membership in the CoE as a concomitant of Russia's "rightful place in Western civilization as an equal partner" and as a "step towards a genuine unification of Europe" (Webber, 2000: 132, 134). These two factors paved the way for Russia joining the CoE. The first factor led to a Russian presumption that Russia would have an exceptional role inside the organization. The second factor linked membership with Russian integration with Europe in a broader sense. Each of the factors contained a high conflict potential, since both were grounded in the immediate expectations and perceptions of the time and therefore led to difficulties adapting to or preparing for what was to lie ahead.

The third factor that led to a high potential for conflict was the fact that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) was part of the membership package. On joining the CoE, Russia ratified and so recognized the compulsory jurisdiction of the ECHR and the right of individuals to sue Russia in that court over violations of the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. This decision became increasingly unpopular, however, among the Russian political elite, while at the same time its popularity increased among ordinary Russians as well as with Russian judges (Trochev, 2009: 165). There seem to be three reasons for this. Since Russia joined the CoE, the number of cases brought against Russia in the ECHR has expanded rapidly. According to VTsIOM, in September 2001 only 2–3 percent of Russians saw the ECHR as a place to seek redress for justice over human rights. In 2003 the number had grown to 19 percent and by 2007, after a decade of Russian membership, 27 percent of respondents were ready to turn to the ECHR with a complaint against the Russian state about human rights violations (Trochev, 2009: 148). While the number of complaints against Russia grew, the number of judgements issued against Russia grew as well. The statistics are grim from a Russian perspective. There were 1,604 judgements issued against Russia in the period 1996–2014. This number is exceeded only by those for Turkey (3,095) and Italy (2,312), which have been subject to ECHR jurisdiction since its founding in 1959 (Newcity, 2015).

At the beginning of Russian membership, Russia was prepared for the fact that there would be judgements against it from the ECHR. Its record up to the 2010s for taking the complaints seriously, trying to work inside Russia to reduce the numbers of complaints, and paying up the fines the ECHR ordered was good. But while the number of complaints was growing, the work load to counter the complaints increased beyond the available resources and the level of fines also began to mount significantly. Another issue is the fact of Russian judges looking to the ECHR judgements as setting legal precedents has been a source of some concern for the Russian power elite. In 2015, President Putin signed a law which established the priority of national laws over the judgements of international court rulings. In response to a motion from the President or government, the Russian Constitutional Court has the right to recognize these rulings as unenforceable (Sinelschikova, 2015). This shows how decisions made a long time ago, in the mid-1990s, have become a problem for Russian political power, after judges and civil society made the ECHR the “most popular court” for Russians.

There are two decision-making mechanisms within the CoE. This leads to a certain duality for the whole organization. On the one hand, there is parliamentary oversight. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) consists of parliamentarians from each member state. They meet four times a year. The PACE elects the judges to the ECHR, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the CoE Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General as well as its own Secretary General. The PACE has eight committees and adopts recommendations for the Committee of Ministers, resolutions that express its own point of view and opinions relating to membership applications, draft treaties, etc. It can strip a member state of voting and participation rights. In Russia’s case this has happened twice, in 2000 relating to the second Chechen War and in 2014 relating to the Russian annexation of Crimea.

The PACE’s status has not always been considered high, and it has suffered from the reputation of being a home for ‘second class parliamentarians’. This reputation, however, does not do justice to the PACE and its members. Its reports have been highly valued and well put together. In the process of monitoring the democratic progress of former socialist countries, including Russia, it has been essential for the process of European integration. The Russian PACE team has been made up of very senior Russian representatives, with not only a parliamentary background but also diplomatic training. Out of all the institutions of the Council of Europe, the PACE has had the most complicated relationship with Russia as a member state. It is in this forum that the consequences of the Russian annexation of Crimea were at their most visible. After the suspension of its voting rights, Russia announced in summer 2017 that it would not pay its membership fee in full since it was no longer to participate fully in the PACE. Despite such problems with the PACE, Russia has continued to participate in the activities of all the intergovernmental committees and monitoring bodies as well as the Ministerial Council (MC).

Real power in the Council of Europe lies with the Committee of Ministers (CM). Countries are represented on the CM by their foreign ministers. The CM can suspend cooperation and assistance programmes, or freeze or cancel membership altogether (CoE Statute, 1949: article 8). CM decisions are arrived at in three different ways, depending on the issue: unanimous vote, simple majority or two-thirds majority (CoE Statute, 1949: article 20). Furthermore, the meetings of the CM are private in nature and the CM decides what will become public from their meetings (CoE Statute, 1949: article 21). As a decision-making body, the CM fits well with the Russian understanding of how international relations should function, and its workings fall into the sphere of traditional diplomacy. Russian foreign ministers have had a much easier time with the CM than the Russian PACE delegation has in the PACE. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Russian membership in the CoE, its General Secretary Thorbjorn Jagland wrote, in reply to a letter from Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, that “The council of Europe

remains a crucial pan-European platform for dialogue and enhanced co-operation, and the Russian Federation is an indispensable member of this community” (CoE, 2016). Lavrov’s letter also stressed the pan-European nature of the CoE and, just as former foreign minister Primakov had expressed in 1996, Lavrov stated that he also saw the CoE as working to remove the dividing lines inherited from the Cold War in Europe (Lavrov, 2016).

The CoE highlights the duality in Russian foreign policy. On the one hand, it wants to be part of Europe; on the other, it views Russia as a sovereign great power which cannot be bound institutionally on an equal basis with smaller powers. The CoE’s pan-European nature is one of the major factors why the organization has been attractive to Russia. In the PACE the Russian delegation has come under fierce criticism and has responded by accusing the whole organization of double standards and Russophobia, questioning the usefulness of the organization and threatening to leave or withhold its membership fees. Inside Russia, opinions have also been divided about Russia’s role in the organization. Then in the CM, Russia has been received in accordance with the traditions of diplomacy, and problems are discussed in diplomatic language, stressing the importance of open and frank dialogue and pan-Europeanness. This approach is appreciated in Russia and it is very much in line with Russian foreign policy’s European orientation and its long-term policy aim of seeing a Europe without dividing lines. The ECHR has proven to be a challenge for Russia in ways that were not foreseen when Russia was applying to become a member of the CoE. The increasing number of judgements against Russia as well as some high-profile judgements related to cases like YUKOS and the cases launched against Russia by Georgia and Ukraine led to Russia turning against the ECHR and claiming that its activities had become politicized. In the cases where ordinary Russian citizens have filed against the Russian state after all legal mechanisms inside Russia have been exhausted, it has not been so easy to argue about the politicization of the ECHR. So the ECHR continues to have an impact in improving human rights conditions inside Russia, even if in a small and roundabout way.

The three different elements of CoE – PACE, MC and ECHR – all have something to contribute to the Russia-Europe dialogue in spite of strong differences of opinion and of interpretations of events. The CoE’s role in a pan-European context is significant, and whether Russia will remain a member or not, its significance will only grow in the future when mechanisms of cooperation and European unity are set to become even more important.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE is the product of a Soviet initiative towards all-European security. Some analysts date its inception to February 10, 1954 when “Molotov’s plan” was published; but others date this Russian desire for a pan-European collective security arrangement to as far back as the 1930s (Zagorsky, 2005: 22). The Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the creation of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), were two of the most important developments in Soviet-West and especially European relations:

The road of multilateral preparations for the CSCE was not easy. The East and the West held very different concepts of European security. The NATO countries saw the armed forces and arms in Europe as the main issues. However, the Warsaw Pact countries wanted to have political consultations under the auspice of CSCE.

(Zagorsky, 2005: 43)

Ultimately, the political aspects of the Helsinki Final Act were enormously significant for the future of European security and the fate of the Soviet Union.

The CSCE became an important balancing act in Soviet security thinking. Since relations between the superpowers took most of the foreign policy capital, Western Europe was left in the shadow of superpower politics. The CSCE kept Moscow involved in Europe, and by the mid-1980s “elements in the Soviet leadership realized that this policy (the concentration of Soviet-USA relations) had not just decreased Soviet security in Europe but had resulted in the Soviet Union’s isolation from an increasingly dynamic group of states” (Lynch, 2000: 99–124). This factor, alongside Mikhail Gorbachev’s new thinking policies with a greater focus on European affairs, meant the CSCE gained more attention in late Soviet security and foreign policy thinking.

Today the OSCE has 57 members and a wide geographical reach including North America, Europe and Asia. In this way, the organization has stretched the idea of “Europe” and today the OSCE is more frequently talked about in the context of East-West relations than European affairs. In comparison to the CoE, the OSCE acts as a bridging institution (Krašev and Leonard, 2014: 6), whereas the CoE is seen as a core European institution. The OSCE’s main functions are as a security organization, but it involves a comprehensive approach to security with politico-military, economic, environmental and human dimensions considered as relevant. Issues like arms control, terrorism, good governance, energy security, human trafficking, democratization, media freedom and national minorities figure on the agenda of the organization. As with the CoE, the OSCE’s highest decision-making body is the MC. It was established at the Paris Summit of the OSCE (then still the CSCE) in 1990. The Paris Treaty also stressed that the era of confrontation and division in Europe had ended and the unity of Europe was seen as of utmost importance (OSCE, 1990b). There was a high level of Soviet influence in drafting the charter. In this way the Soviet Union used the OSCE framework to transform existing European structures so that they related to a wider Europe, a Europe without dividing lines (Lynch, 2009: 5–13). As Mikhail Gorbachev stated:

Great European minds have often dreamed of a united, democratic and prosperous Europe, a community and a commonwealth not only of nations and States but of millions of European citizens. It is up to our generation to tackle the task of making that plan an irreversible reality in the coming century.

(OSCE, 1990a)

Gorbachev’s statement fitted with the Soviet leadership’s emphasis in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the OSCE could be used to create “a new European Community based on confidence, mutual understanding and an effective system of collective security” (Lynch, 2000: 102). It was also clear after the fall of the Soviet Union that Russia wanted to view the OSCE as a structure for dealing with security matters in Europe and as an alternative to NATO. “Its [Russia’s] general line toward security matters in Europe has been to propose a collective security system based mainly on the OSCE structures” (Pursiainen, 1999: 144). The way the Russian leadership stressed the OSCE framework was visible in the Russian foreign policy doctrine of 1993, which mentioned the organization 13 times and where it “was seen as almost a panacea for all the problems facing Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union” (Godzimirski, 2009: 126).

The Budapest summit of the OSCE (the last time it was known as CSCE, changing its name from 1 January 1995 OSCE), in December 1994, just before the first Chechen War, reflected the general mood in Russia-West relations. The old tensions that so many had hoped would have disappeared were back. The visible East-West rift overshadowed the important items that were agreed on in the summit, and in spite of Russia’s continuing hopes relating to the OSCE, the idea of a new European collective security was given a back seat.

Since the 1994 OSCE Budapest summit, the concept of “Cold Peace” has been used to characterize Russia–West relations. Russian president Yeltsin first used the concept in his Budapest summit address:

There should be no longer enemies, winners or losers, in that Europe. For this time in history, our continent has a real opportunity to achieve unity. To miss that opportunity means to forget the lessons of the past and to jeopardize our future . . . Europe, even before it has managed to shrug off the legacy of the cold war, is at risk of plunging into a cold peace.

(Talbot, 2002: 141)

After issuing this warning about cold peace, Yeltsin suggested:

A roadmap for Europe towards the 21st century . . . Its essence is the creation of a comprehensive European security system. In this room there are now the leaders of more than 50 countries in the world! CSCE is, in its coverage of countries and the potential of its participants, a unique structure. It is designed to be a strong and effective instrument of peace, stability and democracy.

(Yeltsin, 1994)

Yeltsin’s vision was that the programme would have been based on an agreement between NATO, the EU, the OSCE and the CIS. A major thrust of Russian diplomacy at that time was pushing such an option as an alternative to NATO’s eastward expansion. For Russia it was important to promote an alternative to NATO enlargement, even if the indications coming from the former East European countries and the United States were that there was no stopping enlargement.

In order to further this end of promoting the OSCE’s role as the main security organization in Europe, Russia was willing to accept a role for the OSCE in the first Chechen War. The first and second Chechen Wars did not help Russia in achieving European collective security, but the OSCE’s role in the first Chechen conflict especially gave the organization experience of a new role in conflict management, which it also attempted to follow in the Second Chechen War and the war in Georgia in 2008. The two latter attempted interventions were not successful due to Russian dissatisfaction with the organization, and Russia’s cooperation was essential if the OSCE was to have any meaningful role.

OSCE’s summit in Istanbul in 1999 proved to be a watershed in Russian attitudes towards the OSCE. The new collective European security order failed to materialize and, in spite of the OSCE’s constructive role in the First Chechen War, Russia was not happy about the way the OSCE criticized Russia. There was a long list of disagreements between Russia and, especially, Western member states. The Second Chechen War was a particularly hot topic for the OSCE, while Russia viewed it as an internal matter which the OSCE should not get involved in. Another issue was the adoption of a statement relating to Georgia which defined South Ossetia and Abkhazia as parts of Georgia. The Transnistria conflict was taken up and the normalization of Moldova–Transnistria relations was called for. A new treaty on conventional forces in Europe was signed which reflected the new realities of Europe, but the section that dealt with the Russian military presence in Georgia and Moldova was not as Russia would have wanted it. In the case of Georgia, Russia fulfilled the OSCE’s requirements, but Moldova became a disputed issue. All of the issues discussed at the Istanbul summit developed into problems between Russia and the Western member states of the OSCE later on.

One further issue caused irritation in Moscow's eyes. In the 1990s the OSCE took up the monitoring of elections as one of its core functions. The OSCE's legitimization of elections to the Russian Duma and presidential elections is important for Russia. Even though shortcomings were always found, for a number of years the monitoring showed improvements in the election system. Nonetheless, the election monitoring was viewed in Russia as a measure directed against Russia and illustrating the double standards of the organization. At the time of the 2007 Duma elections, Russia decided to put limits on OSCE election monitoring, which then undermined the whole process of Russian elections and their legitimation. This created even more tension between the organization and Russia.

Such problems and disputes only increased during President Putin's first two presidential terms, 2000–2008. At the Munich security conference in 2007, Putin reflected on the situation from Russia's perspective:

What do we see happening today [with the OSCE]? We see this balance [between the political-military, the economic and the human dimensions] is clearly destroyed. People are trying to transform the OSCE into a vulgar instrument designed to promote the foreign policy interests of one or a group of countries.

(Putin, 2007)

While there were multiple problems relating to the OSCE, Russia was at the same time engaging in collective security arrangements in the East with the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). These organizations fulfilled one aim of Russian foreign policy relating to collective security, but they did not satisfy the aspiration of Europeanness or ideas of pan-European cooperation with Russia as one of the strong and equal partners. When Dmitry Medvedev became president of Russia in 2008, he raised the idea of European collective security again. His proposal included the idea that all relevant security organizations – NATO, the EU, the OSCE, the CSTO and the CIS – should try to find a common framework for security matters in a pan-European way. As such, the Russian initiative did not get much support even though it aroused a good deal of interest. It was seen as Russia's own vision for European security and, in a positive sense, as a proactive move from Moscow to seek better relations between Europe and Russia. At that point relations were at a low point and Russia was seen as more interested in obstructing the interests of others than in advancing their own positive agenda (Lo, 2009). With this initiative, Medvedev was reviving the idea of the OSCE as a European security umbrella, only an umbrella that should be reformed according to Moscow's perspective. Even if the Medvedev initiative did not, ultimately, lead to any new security arrangements and the agenda was yet again pushed to the back seat at the beginning of Putin's third presidential term, events in Europe have proved that frameworks like the OSCE are essential when it comes to European security. With the Ukraine crisis, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass, the role of the OSCE has yet again become important, but more in the format of its Helsinki 1975 role than in that of the 1990s.

The Russian foreign policy establishment has continued to bring up the need for collective European security. Even if Russian criticisms of the West have been stronger than ever within the framework of the OSCE, Russia has also taken the opportunity to remind everybody of the need for a common security framework. As Russia's permanent representative to the OSCE, Alexander Lukashevich, pointed out: "It is vital to start a strategic dialogue on the future of European security, understood in a broadest sense. The current system seems to reproduce confrontation" (Mid, 2017a). Foreign minister Lavrov, in his joint press conference with OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier in Moscow in April 2017, pointed out that:

“Russia consistently advocates strengthening the OSCE and enhancing its role in the Euro-Atlantic region and in the international arena as a whole” (Mid, 2017b). Lavrov also talked once again about a true community with united and indivisible security that was part of the OSCE 2010 Astana summit declaration.

In this way the duality of Russian foreign policy is present in the OSCE as it is in the CoE. The OSCE is a complicated international organization. However, its history as a bridge between East and West still stands. The overall tensions in international relations, particularly between the East and the West, are very visible in the organization and can paralyze it in the worst case. However, the pan-European nature of the organization, together with a transatlantic dimension, is clearly in line with one side of Russia’s foreign policy interests that sees integration in Europe as important. The fact that Russia sees the OSCE as the main international organization in the Ukraine conflict is an indication that, in spite of all of the Russian criticisms and objections, the organization has an important place in Russian foreign policy thinking.

Conclusion

The CoE and the OSCE are pan-European organizations. This feature makes them attractive from a Russian perspective. Russia’s relationship with the two organizations has similarities and differences. The similarities are that both organizations view Russia as a challenging member, whereas Russia views both organizations as influenced by Russophobia. At the same time, both organizations are vital to Russia’s interests relating to Europe and being part of Europe. Differences in Russia’s relationship with the two organizations are down to their nature.

The CoE deals with questions on the rule of law and human rights. Its actions are based on the ECHR. Each of the members of the CoE subscribed to the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. This also gave the CoE the mandate to monitor the application of that convention by its members and enabled the ECHR to make judgements in cases where domestic legal routes had been exhausted. In this way, Russia recognized along with 46 other states the jurisdiction of an international organization over its national law. This only changed in 2015 when President Putin signed a law making it possible for the Russia President or government to question the decision of the ECHR and send the case to the Russian constitutional court. This change highlighted the growing rift between Russia and the West after events related to Ukraine in 2014.

Russian membership in the CoE brings a strong European dimension into Russian foreign policy. Despite deep dissatisfaction of the ECHR and PACE, Russia seems to value the overall framework of the CoE sufficiently that it is not ready to pull out of the organization. At the level of the Ministerial Council where traditional diplomacy is dominant, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov feels much more comfortable, and relations, even during difficult times, emphasize the importance of open and frank dialogue.

The OSCE’s focus on security issues fits not only with Russian foreign policy interests in the concept of a wider Europe, but also relates to Moscow’s historical and long-term foreign policy aim of creating a European collective security architecture. This is as much to protect Russia’s foreign policy interests as securing it as part of Europe. The activities of the OSCE that deal with issues other than security, like election monitoring, are less to Russian liking even if Russia benefitted greatly from OSCE election monitoring. The monitoring reports always included strong criticisms of the Russian system, but at the same time they legitimized the elections and highlighted some improvements in the process, making it easier for Russia to argue about the progress of democracy in Russia. Since 2007, when Russia started to limit the election monitoring process, talk about Russia as a democracy has also been decreasing rapidly.

With the events in Ukraine starting in 2014, OSCE has once again been given a significant role as a conflict management organization. This is not without problems, and in the worst-case scenario the organization's ability to act can be paralyzed if consensus cannot be found. In the long-term picture, from Helsinki 1975 until today, the organization has shown that it has an important place in European security architecture and as part of Russian foreign policy's pan-European dimension.

Russian interactions with both organizations show how difficult a partner Russia can be in a multilateral framework. Still, despite the existence of dividing lines, both organizations have succeeded in lowering East-West divisions.

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