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## OSCE Operational Capacity in the Regulation of Armed Conflicts in the Countries of the Former Eastern Bloc (1991–2021)<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to present the operational capabilities of the OSCE in regulating armed conflicts and their application in the former Eastern bloc countries. In order to show the role of the OSCE in the regulation of armed conflicts, OSCE operational capabilities have been structured in a conceptual grid including: OSCE regulatory tools – in the form of missions, field offices and field coordinators; regulatory mechanisms and emergency mechanisms applied in the light of the peaceful pathways of OSCE involvement in the regulatory process. The common feature of operation at each phase is the broadly understood maintenance of stability or achieving stability. There are armed conflicts against which the OSCE has selectively used regulatory activity, omitting certain phases of the conflict, and those against which the application of regulatory tools has not led to lasting stabilisation. The results presented in the paper confirm the correctness of considering the above theories against the background of the conflict cycle concept. Institutional and legal analysis and comparative analysis were used in this paper.

**Keywords:** *security, OSCE, armed conflicts, operational capabilities, field operations, Eastern bloc*

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is the result of the research stay at Charles University and in OSCE Documentation Centre (“Research-in-Residence Programme”), supported by Visegrad Fund, Slovakia, on the decision no. 52110938 (grant number). The research was carried out during the stay at the OSCE Documentation Centre as part of participation in the OSCE “Researcher-in-Residence” programme, thanks to the financial support of the International Visegrad Fund (grant number: 52110938).

## Introduction

This article aims to present the operational capabilities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in regulating armed conflicts in the former Eastern bloc countries. Regulatory tools and peace methods used by the OSCE within the framework of relevant regulatory mechanisms or the emergency mechanism against conflicts occurring in the former Eastern bloc countries from the 1990s to 2021 will be analysed. The discussed conflicts include the war in Donbas, the Transnistria war, the war in Georgia (the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia), the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Chechen wars, and the Tajikistani civil war. In this work, the author is guided by the search for answers to the following questions: what operational capabilities does the OSCE have in relation to the regulation of individual armed conflicts occurring in the post-Soviet area? What characterises the operational capabilities deployed by the OSCE? At what stages of each armed conflict does the OSCE take regulatory action? The author tries to assess whether the OSCE's involvement in the presented conflicts is sufficient and encourages further discussion on whether and how the operational capabilities of the OSCE contribute to the regulation of armed conflicts. The research methods used in the study will include institutional and legal analysis and comparative analysis.

Establishing the object of research of the OSCE and analysing and evaluating its contribution to the regulation of armed conflicts, the considerations fit into the liberal-institutional paradigm. In the study of international relations and security research, the focus on international organisations from the point of view of institutionalism is extremely important. The OSCE's contribution to regulating armed conflicts is consistent with the need to strengthen cooperation and view international organisations as "proponents of norms and values" (Devitt, 2011, p. 4). From the point of view of the theory of liberalism, the behaviour of a given state can be predicted based on the preferences of the states involved (Moravcsik, 1992, p. 12). In a situation of converging preferences, cooperation is born (for example, in the field of international organisations), or these preferences enable it to continue, while divergent needs generate conflict (Moravcsik, 1992, pp. 10–11; Marszałek-Kawa, 2021; Marszałek-Kawa & Plecka, 2021). From each of these possibilities, a change is born, which is treated as an inseparable phenomenon of the functioning of systems. In the event of a conflict, the existence of an external structure in the form of the OSCE may be a platform for changing the dynamics of interstate relations and giving it a direction suitable for further shaping the security of societies and peace. The established field operations are a transfer tool that enables the process of change to take place at various levels of cooperation.

First, the author briefly explains some key concepts:

- Field operations – are one of the basic activities of the OSCE. The activities of the OSCE are focused on a potential or ongoing conflict to stabilise the conflict situation. Field operations are structured, vertically and horizontally organised regulatory

instruments of the OSCE that are established to serve the process of armed conflict regulation<sup>2</sup>. Within one field operation, several regulatory tools can operate. More details can be found in Section 4.1, “OSCE field operations”.

- Regulatory tools – missions (“special missions”, “expert missions”, “short-term missions”, “long-term missions”); “Program Office”; “Project Coordinator” and groups (“Assistance Group to Chechnya”, “Minsk Group”). Regulatory tools are set up as part of a field operation. The type of tool and their quantity depends on the demand and operational capabilities. More details are included below in Section 4.4, “OSCE in the face of conflicts in former Eastern bloc countries”.
- Peaceful methods/methods of peaceful resolution of armed conflicts – are used to support the regulation of armed conflicts. The OSCE uses peaceful methods at all stages of the conflict “cycle”. They include mediation, negotiation, and political dialogue/dialogue facilitation<sup>3</sup>.
- Regulatory mechanisms – by using specific regulatory mechanisms at the appropriate phase of the conflict cycle, the OSCE implements the tasks crucial to stabilising or changing the conflict phase. Regulatory mechanisms are correlated with conflict cycle phases. The following regulatory mechanisms can be differentiated: “conflict prevention”, “conflict management”, “conflict resolution”, and “post-conflict rehabilitation”. They are seen to be correlated with the stages of the conflict “cycle”: the time before hostilities occur; the outbreak of the conflict and its duration; the period after the end of the conflict (stages of the conflict “cycle”, Grech, 2010, p. 15). More details can be found in Section 4.3, “OSCE and the concept of conflict cycle”.
- Emergency mechanisms – the Berlin Mechanism, the Moscow Mechanism, the Valletta Mechanism, and the Vienna Mechanism. Their scope usually includes calling meetings and sending out fact-finding missions to investigate relevant events. OSCE safety mechanisms can be used in emergencies or pose a threat, depending on the specification set for a particular mechanism. More details are included below in Section 4.5, “Emergency mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution”.

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<sup>2</sup> OSCE. *OSCE Factsheet Conflict Prevention Centre* field operations were called the “instrument”, author used this indication in the definition.

<sup>3</sup> According to OSCE classification, “dialogue facilitation” is a tool used besides to mediation (OSCE, 2014a, p. 10).

Table 1. OSCE regulatory mechanisms in subsequent conflict phases. More in section 4.3, “OSCE and the concept of conflict cycle”

OSCE regulatory mechanisms	Phase I of the conflict cycle: the period before military operations	Phase II of the conflict cycle: outbreak of the conflict and its duration	Phase III of the conflict cycle: post-conflict period
Conflict prevention	✓	–	–
Conflict management	–	✓	–
Conflict resolution	–	✓	–
Post-conflict rehabilitation	–	–	✓

Source: author’s own study.

Addressing this research problem is important because armed conflicts still abound in the post-Soviet region and external entities, including the OSCE, have been involved in attempts to solve them for years. Field operations are one of the main forms of the OSCE’s activity. The OSCE’s role in armed conflict regulation requires further analysis due to the gaps in knowledge on this topic. The literature describing the influence of OSCE operational capabilities on the process of armed conflict regulation is scarce and mostly comes from the 1990s; furthermore, some of the works concern other geographical areas. There are texts on conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation, which will form the theoretical basis for this analysis. The unexplored issues include applying this knowledge to the operational scope of the OSCE, a theoretical approach to determining OSCE’s operational capacity, and an approach to what is known about the OSCE and the actual armed conflicts from the perspective of the conflict cycle concept. The effectiveness of conflict resolution procedures implemented by the OSCE during armed conflicts that occurred by 2021 in the countries of the former Eastern bloc has not yet been assessed. This study is partially based on the materials (both classified and accessible to the public) kept at the OSCE Documentation Centre in Prague. The OSCE Documentation Centre offers ample resources within the *Research-in-Residence* programme. The archived materials include OSCE field reports, written records and minutiae, conclusions, decisions, strategic documents, and letters.

## Literature Review: OSCE Operational Capacities

The issue of the OSCE’s operational capabilities has not been thoroughly investigated. The most relevant works on the conflict cycle theory include Jonathan Cohen’s *Conflict Prevention in the OSCE. An Assessment of Capacities*, published in 1999 by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael”. The author presents the application of OSCE missions to conflicts in the 1990s. The work is useful for extending the discussed issues to the next few years, and understanding the role of the OSCE and its legal basis. Gabriel Munuer’s *Prevent-*

ing *Armed Conflict in Europe: Lessons from Recent Experience*, published in 1994 by Chaillot Papers stands out as a case study approach to implementing conflict prevention mechanisms (preventive diplomacy); it covers the period up to 1994. The text is an important help in understanding the functioning of the most important regulatory mechanism of the OSCE. Another title that should be mentioned is Daniel Warner's *Preventive Diplomacy: The United Nations and the OSCE*, PSIO Occasional Paper no. 1 (1996), which covers theoretical aspects of preventive diplomacy. Maria Raquel O's *Conflict and Security in the Former Soviet Union: The Role of the OSCE*, Routledge 2003, is a very significant source for this study although it covers only part of the analysed period. The chapter "Post-Cold War Conflict in the OSCE Area" contains a comprehensive discussion of the OSCE's involvement in conflicts in the post-Soviet area from the 1990s till 2003, which distinguishes specific conflict phases and points to operational capacities (including safety mechanisms). OSCE reference guide from 2014, *Mediation and Dialogue Facilitation in the OSCE*, demonstrates the OSCE's role in the process of armed conflict regulation during each conflict phase (conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution, post-conflict rehabilitation) in the context of OSCE's mediatory role. That allows for understanding the mediation function performed by the OSCE in the face of ongoing armed conflicts. The publication presents working definitions of possible ways of involving the OSCE in the regulatory process: mediation, negotiation, and political dialogue. The author extends the concept used in the reference guide by indicating the role of the OSCE at various stages of the "cycle". The publications: Chester A. Crocker, Fen O. Hampson and Pamela Aall (2018), *International Negotiation and Mediation in Violent Conflicts. The changing context of peacemaking*, Routledge; Jacob Bercovitch (2011), *Theory and Practise of International Mediation. Selected Essays*, Routledge; Siniša Vuković (2015), *International Multiparty Mediation and Conflict Management. Challenges of cooperation and coordination*, Routledge, are examples of works related to the broadly understood use of mediation in an international environment. The above publications allowed the author to better understand the OSCE mediation activities. Ryszard Zięba's work *Bezpieczeństwo europejskie czterdzieści lat po podpisaniu Aktu Końcowego KBWE [European Security 40 Years after Signing the CSCE Final Act]* contributes significantly to the understanding of the shaping of the OSCE operational activity, as the work entitled: *Funkcjonowanie panaeuropejskiego systemu bezpieczeństwa KBWE/OBWE [The functioning of the CSCE/OSCE pan-European security system]* by the same author, which additionally describes the mechanisms for stabilising the peace order in the OSCE zone. The volume *Human Rights and the Conflict Cycle* (2010), edited by Omar Grech and Monika Wohlfeld, discusses several variants of the conflict cycle, each of which reflects another context of a conflict as well as different configurations and correlations of conflict escalation and de-escalation. This work helped understand the conflict cycle theory; also, knowledge of the OSCE could be used in the framework of a theory selected from this volume that seemed most convergent with regulatory mechanisms used by the OSCE.

## OSCE Operational Capacities

The OSCE's operational capacity can be viewed as the entity's ability to use resources (intentionally created) to achieve an effect (outputs)<sup>4</sup>. The expected effect is the support of the regulation of armed conflicts with the help of peaceful methods of conflict resolution. The link between the OSCE and the effect achieved after the application of field operations is the operational capacity of OSCE. The effect is a state resulting from the application of operational capabilities. The operational capacity of the OSCE requires the presence of resources (personnel, material), and their nature and functions are determined in the event of a situation requiring operational support. This way, the chance of applying methods and measures appropriate to a given conflict situation increases.

The beginnings of building a theoretical framework for the contemporary operational activity of the Organization for Security and Coordination in Europe resulted from the will to create a forum for dialogue and cooperation in the face of security-related challenges. To this aim, 35 European states, the US and Canada signed the Helsinki Final Act during the Conference on Security and Coordination in Europe (CSCE, 1973–1975) (OSCE, 1975, p. 2). The signing of the Final Act was particularly important in the context of the post-Cold War political, economic and social division between Eastern and Western Europe (Cohen, 1999, pp. 38–39; Grudziński, 2002, pp. 117–118; Rosas, 1992, p. 14). As Ryszard Zięba (2015, p. 109) notes, the Final Act was of great importance in this context, mainly because it codified the rules for relations between the states of the then East and West and the European neutral and non-involved states. The Preamble of the Act includes the principles aimed at strengthening security in Europe and expediting the democratisation and transformation of Central and Eastern European states (Zięba, 2015, p. 109). In 1994, at the summit in Budapest, the CSCE was renamed as the Organization for Security and Coordination in Europe (OSCE). During the summit formal changes were made, which shifted focus from regulatory mechanisms directed at inter-state conflicts to internal conflicts. It is said that the OSCE's operational capacities were expanded with the creation of the post of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and with the establishment of the possibility of using long-term field missions. Notably, this change formalised the main regulatory tool of the OSCE, which are international interventions in the case of armed conflicts, i.e., the field missions (discussed in Section 4.1, "OSCE field operations"). Since then, the OSCE has been considered a key organisation working for early warning, conflict prevention and solution, crisis management and rebuilding in post-conflict situations<sup>5</sup> (Freire, 2003,

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<sup>4</sup> The "outputs" concept indicates that the system as a separate entity consists of the so-called inputs, which are then converted into outputs. In the case of the OSCE, the creations are the result of changes made after the application of the OSCE regulatory tools (Easton 1957, pp. 383–400; OSCE, 2011b). OSCE capabilities and MoND (2014, p. 4) served as inspiration for the definition of OSCE operational capabilities.

<sup>5</sup> A significant change introduced by the "Helsinki Final Act" was abandoning the concept of „hard”

p. 10; OSCE, 1975, p. 2; OSCE, 1995). The codified principles set by the Helsinki Final Act were included in the Charter for European Security of 1999. The OSCE Permanent Council allowed for establishing field missions and issued guidelines on their functioning. The goal of established missions was defined as maintaining and restoring law and order; helping in creating conditions for negotiations or other means that might facilitate peaceful conflict resolution; verifying or helping in fulfilling agreements on peaceful conflict resolution; and providing support during post-conflict rehabilitation (Freire, 2003, p. 27; OSCE, 1999b, pp. 9–10). The above aspects of operational activity in the scope of conflict regulation can be thus ascribed to all phases of the armed conflict cycle: 1. period before military operations; 2. outbreak of the conflict and its duration; 3. post-conflict period (Section 4.2, “OSCE and the concept of conflict cycle”).

UN General Assembly Resolution 65/283 of 28 July 2011 on enhancing the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and conflict resolution was the first resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on mediation. It emphasises the importance of partnership and cooperation for the complementarity and effectiveness of mediation activities (OSCE, 2012a, p. 6, 9, 13; UN General Assembly, 2011). The provision was intended to remove the challenges related to the mediation process and to strengthen the effectiveness of conflict prevention and resolution. The resolution was expanded in the following years: resolution no. 66/291 of 13 September 2012; resolution no. 68/303 of July 2014; resolution no. 70/304 of 26 September 2016 (UN General Assembly, 2012; UN General Assembly, 2014; UN General Assembly, 2016). The resolutions are similar in terms of content – each time attention is paid to the need to continue efforts to strengthen mediation at the stage of conflict prevention (stage I of the conflict “cycle” – “time before armed actions”) and at the stage of conflict resolution (stage II of the “cycle” conflict – the “outbreak of a conflict and its duration”), moreover, encourage the regular development of guidelines for more effective mediation, taking into account the conclusions of past mediation processes.

In turn, OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/11 of 2011 *on elements of the conflict cycle, related to enhancing the OSCE’s capabilities in early warning, early action, dialogue facilitation and mediation support, and post-conflict rehabilitation* is one of the few documents that indicates the necessity to apply the OSCE operational capabilities to all stages of the conflict “cycle”. The document emphasises the role of the OSCE as an organisation for the peaceful settlement of disputes in Europe (OSCE, 2011b). The Chairmanship and executive actors (missions, field offices, field coordinators, groups) are expected to fully use their mandate at all stages of the conflict (OSCE, 2012a, p. 4). Greater use of CBMs (Confidence-Building Measures) and CSBM (Confidence- and Security-Building Measures) is also encouraged in all security dimensions and all phases of armed conflict (OSCE, 2012b, p. 5). This document,

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security, understood only in its military aspect, and including within the concept of security the following issues: trust building; economic, scientific, technological and environmental cooperation; individual human rights; fundamental freedoms (OSCE, 1975).

compared to other documents created in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, was distinguished by its content that extended the methods of influence used by the OSCE.

## **The OSCE's Role in Armed Conflict Regulation**

### *OSCE Field Operations*

Through its field activity, the OSCE reacts to a potential or ongoing conflict by using a developed regulatory system, whose foundations are field operations established to stabilise the conflict situation. The element closest to stabilising armed conflict are missions, which are a part of OSCE field operations. Field operations can be defined as structured, vertically and horizontally organised instruments that comprise specialised tools of impact used in armed conflict. The goal of OSCE field operations is, at minimum, stopping the armed conflict from further escalation, and at maximum – putting a definitive end to the conflict. The process of armed conflict stabilisation – i.e., stopping the further escalation of the conflict or taking stabilising actions aimed at resolving the conflict or implementing post-conflict rehabilitation – is achieved through missions and consists of building mechanisms of mutual trust and resolving conflicts through mediation, negotiation, and political dialogue. The state of stabilisation is the basic purpose of establishing such a tool as missions; another frequent goal of missions is observation. A characteristic feature of field operations is that they have multiple functions as they are established in the following dimensions: politico-military, economic, environmental, human, and broadly understood security (OSCE, 2022b). Within the OSCE framework, only civilian field operations take place. They are to be a response of the member states to emerging conflicts (Zellner, 2004, p. 92). A specific advantage is the constant presence of a mission in the given territory and the ability to monitor the situation. Operations differ significantly in terms of size, level of conflict escalation at which they are established, how they are conducted, and the possibilities of impacting the armed conflict from the inside. With the help of field operations, the OSCE can implement actions at all stages of the conflict, within the existing regulatory mechanisms, at the proper territory of conflict occurrence, with the acceptance of the host state, and based on a mandate. Within a single field operation several regulatory tools can function: missions (special missions, observatory missions, expert missions, short-term missions, and long-term missions) and the accompanying field offices (the so-called the “Program Office”) as well as field coordinators (the so-called “Project Coordinator”) and groups (i.e., “Assistance Group to Chechnya” or “Minsk Group”<sup>6</sup>) (OSCE, 2022c; OSCE, 2022a). Field operations are one of the basic forms of OSCE activity, with approximately 80% of the budget assigned for their implementation<sup>7</sup>. One of the specific forms of financing is used for the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on the OSCE's presence and the established missions, see OSCE (2022c).

<sup>7</sup> More information on OSCE financing and budget can be found in OSCE (2022a).

(SMM); besides being funded by the OSCE budget, it has also funds voluntarily donated by external entities<sup>8</sup>.

A mandate is a basic element determining a field operation (Zellner, 2004, pp. 92–93). To begin a field operation, the OSCE Permanent Council must agree on adopting the mandate and budget. Missions are initially established for six or twelve months, yet usually they are prolonged. It seems that the shortness of this informally initial period is related to testing how the mission operates in the field rather than to an assumption that the conflict will be resolved so soon. Based on the mandate, the OSCE concludes an agreement with the host country (the so-called Memorandum of Understanding), which determines the conditions of future activities within the established operation. The relatively high degree of mission's independence combined with vague statements in the mandate can result in a poor fit between mission goals and its analytical and financial capabilities. Often the mission's scope is expanded during its operations. So far, most OSCE personnel and assets have been sent to the former Eastern bloc countries (OSCE, 2022a).

### ***Peaceful Methods of the OSCE in Conflict Prevention and Resolution***

Possible routes for OSCE involvement in the regulatory process are highlighted:

- Peace methods – mediation, negotiation, and political dialogue;
- Stabilisation/peace measures: “Confidence-Building Measures” (CBMs) and “Confidence- and Security-Building Measures” (CSBMs). The CBMs and CSBMs distinguish between: “Measures of Transparency”; “Measures of Constraint”; “Measures to Reinforce Confidence”; “Measures for Monitoring of Compliance and Evaluation” (OSCE, 1993, pp. 1–8).

Mediation in relations between states covers a wide range of activities carried out by an entity not involved in the conflict (the so-called third party), with at least two parties involved. Mediation aims to transform the relationship between the disputing parties from a conflicted relationship into cooperation for reaching an agreement (Lesley, 2017, p. 6). The mediation process consists in managing the arising conflicts and resolving them with the help of appropriately selected stabilisation measures. The mediation process is phased: stage I – reaching an agreement; stage II – conclusion of an agreement; stage III – implementation of the provisions; stage IV – maintaining stabilisation (related to post-conflict rehabilitation). Political dialogue usually does not lead to an agreement between the parties to an armed conflict. The results of dialogue processes may consist of a joint declaration, jointly agreed recommendations for further actions, and improvement of relations between the parties to the conflict (measured, for example, with a lower number of violent incidents) (UN, 2012, p. 72). On the other hand, negotiations between the conflicting parties may lead to indirect agreements, declarations regarding further actions or peace agreements (UN, 2012, p. 72).

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<sup>8</sup> This is confirmed by 9 of Decision 1117 establishing the SMM (OSCE, 2014b).

In practical terms, these include ceasefire agreements; agreements on the principles of the mediation process being conducted; agreements on the principles of conflict resolution (UN, 2012, p. 72).

Non-military stabilisation/peace measures introduced by the OSCE as part of the application of appropriate peace methods are aimed at modifying the relationship between at least two conflicting parties in order to prevent the emergence or (re) escalation of inter-state or internal conflicts and lead to a lasting conflict resolution, post-conflict rehabilitation, and stabilisation. For greater effectiveness of the assumed goals, it is indicated that several measures need to be applied simultaneously over a longer period. In the case of CBM, they may change the behaviour of the conflicting parties and modify the context in which the conflict management process takes place, but they will not resolve the conflict on their own, and are an addition to other means of resolving armed conflicts (OSCE, 2012a, p. 9, 16, 20).

The mediator can be natural persons, states, or non-state entities, including international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. In the case of the OSCE mediating function, mediation may be undertaken by: the Chairman, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Head of Mission and other mission members (Freire, 2003, p. 36). The parties to the dispute turn to the mediator or accept the offer because they cannot reach an agreement on their own. Mediation can help to ensure that each party to the dispute has an outcome that is more favourable to them (Lesley, 2017, p. 5).

### *OSCE and the Concept of Conflict Cycle*

To understand how the OSCE becomes involved in solving armed conflicts we should mention “conflict” from the perspective of the conflict cycle concept. A conflict is a dynamic process, and its intensity changes with time. The concept of a “cycle” helps us perceive this dynamic. A conflict cycle can be seen as a closed circle of changing states – from stabilisation to the emergence of tensions or an armed conflict; then from tensions or an armed conflict to their resolution and back to the state of stability (Grech, 2010, p. 60). A conflict cycle is usually divided into three phases: the period before military operations; the outbreak of conflict and its duration; and the post-conflict period. Sometimes more phases are differentiated (Grech, 2010, p. 15).

Considering the high costs of a military conflict, states usually try to avoid them, pursuing their interests peacefully. However, conflicts do appear and not infrequently last a long time. The inability to establish communication leads to turning to a mediator (in the scope discussed in this study the function of a mediator is taken by the OSCE) or accepting a mediation offer issued by the OSCE (Lesley, 2017, pp. 1–2). The OSCE differentiates the following methods of peaceful conflict resolution: mediations, negotiations and political dialogue/dialogue facilitation (OSCE, 2014a, p. 10). Mediators are entities functioning within the OSCE and engaging in field activity as part of their operations. Their role and the strategies they implement depend on the conflict phase (Bercovitch, 2009, pp. 96–97).

The documents and other texts published by the OSCE do not contain a comprehensive definition of peace methods; situations that make it possible to apply specific measures have not been classified either. The concepts of “mediation”, “negotiation”, or “dialogue” seem used almost interchangeably. The text *Mediation and Dialogue Facilitation in the OSCE* (the OSCE’s reference guide) presents working definitions of some of the used means – mediation and dialogue. Mediation is described as a “structured communication process, in which an impartial third party works with conflict parties to find commonly agreeable solutions to their dispute, in a way that satisfies their interests at stake” (OSCE, 2014a, p. 10). The mediation process comprises four stages: stage I – preparation for negotiations (the so-called “talks about talks”); stage II – mediatory negotiations; stage III – agreement; stage IV – implementation. This definition allows seeing OSCE mediations as a means by which negotiations are conducted, hence the lack of OSCE negotiations in the comprehensive definition. Dialogue facilitation, in turn, is a “more open-ended communication process between conflict parties to foster mutual understanding, recognition, empathy and trust. (...) [T]he primary aim is not to reach a specific settlement, but to gain a better understanding of the different perspectives involved in a conflict” (OSCE, 2014a, p. 10). Dialogue facilitation can be a one-time event or last for a long time.

With the help of field operations, the OSCE implements stabilising activities directed at subsequent phases of an armed conflict. For this purpose, the OSCE differentiates four regulatory mechanisms: conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation (OSCE, 2014a, pp. 17–20).

Conflict prevention (the so-called “preventive diplomacy”) is one of the main fields of the OSCE’s operations<sup>9</sup>. Tasks implemented within preventive diplomacy are to stop escalating conflict situations into armed conflicts. In the early phase of an emerging conflict the use of mediation or negotiations can be effective and relatively easy to implement due to the flexibility and low costs of such solutions. Within this mechanism the OSCE uses such regulatory tools as reconnaissance missions, reporting missions and field experts (OSCE, 2014a, pp. 17–18; Sandole, 2007, pp. 41–42). Documents published by the OSCE do not differentiate between the definitions of reconnaissance and reporting missions; however, their applications differ. Reconnaissance missions are sent in order to investigate a conflict situation. Observers collect information useful for the further regulatory process; if a need arises, such a process is considered and then implemented with the agreement of the state in whose territory the conflict is occurring. During a reporting mission, besides collecting information on the ongoing conflict, observers carry out other functions included in the mandate (conducting negotiations and participating in a mediation). Field experts are sent to support missions during a regulatory process. It happens that long-term missions carry out the functions of reporting or reconnaissance missions, sent both to engage in preventive diplomacy and subsequently (after prolonging the mandate) to achieve goals resulting from

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<sup>9</sup> For more on preventive diplomacy and early action, see Schernbeck (2016).

conflict management, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation. The implementation of non-military confidence-building measures (CBMs) at the preventive diplomacy stage is important to strengthen the link between “early warning” and “early action”. The Early warning mechanism provides information on the escalation of the conflict situation to the relevant OSCE bodies in such a time that the OSCE can react and adjust measures under preventive diplomacy (Freire, 2003, p. 35).

The conflict management and resolution stage is reached when the prevention mechanism has not fulfilled its role because the means used turned out to be insufficient or due to the lack of will among the states-parties to employ preventive diplomacy. The OSCE’s crisis management efforts include reaching a ceasefire and encouraging the parties to (re) start a negotiation process. All these actions aim to lower tensions and end violence (Freire, 2003, p. 36; OSCE, 2014a, p. 18). The stage of conflict resolution seems to have the same goals as conflict management; often the number of participants in mediation or negotiations increases as the longer the conflict, the more complex the set of issues that need to be discussed and solved (OSCE, 2014a, p. 17). As in the first stage, in the second stage, the OSCE is looking for a platform of understanding between the parties to the conflict through mediation and negotiation. In turn, the use of confidence-building measures is to support the dialogue between the authorities and the society – in the case of internal and inter-state conflicts – between the parties to the conflict (OSCE, 2012a, p. 21; OSCE, 2014c, p. 18). CBMs can be used, *inter alia*, in the aspect of considering complaints of one of the parties or in the process of concluding an agreement and signing contracts. Confidence-building measures are also used to monitor the line of contact between feuding parties and assist in returning prisoners of war and other detainees on the front line (OSCE, 2012a, p. 27). CBMs can cooperate with field operations established within the framework of the OSCE, which often have an observation and mediation function, and can also constitute a “platform” for building the confidence needed to implement CSBMs (Confidence- and Security-Building Measures). The second stage of the conflict ‘cycle’ is a much more frequent moment of launching CSBMs than the stage of preventive diplomacy. Support for field operations and using CBMs is good for providing security guarantees for activities where it is necessary to use CSBMs for conflict resolution. These are, for example, activities involving verifying troops and their movement. CSBMs, engaged in the light of the military threat, are necessary for a lasting resolution of the conflict and ensuring peace (OSCE, 2012a, p. 21). At this stage of the conflict, the effectiveness of CSBs is the least effective. The will of the parties to end the conflict plays a key role, then the participation of CSBs can support the second stage of the conflict “cycle” – the “outbreak of the conflict and its continuation” (OSCE, 2012a, p. 26).

Stage III of the conflict “cycle” – the “period after the end of hostilities”, is the period of implementation of the post-conflict rehabilitation mechanism. At this stage, it is important to maintain the agreements and continue building long-term reconciliation. The key element of this stage is to rebuild the relationship between the conflicting parties so that both parties

feel durability in securing their own interests and rights (OSCE, 2012a, p. 27; OSCE, 2014c, p. 19). Such a situation concerns, for example, the necessity to consolidate the agreements so that a ceasefire turns into a lasting peace (Freire, 2003, pp. 39–40; OSCE, 2012a, p. 22).

The OSCE's involvement in numerous armed conflicts revealed how multifaceted the same regulatory tools are. A common feature of acting at each stage is understood as maintaining or achieving stability. Conflict cycle phases are not closed areas of intervention. Tools used in conflict prevention are also used in post-conflict reconstruction – both require a long-term perspective. What is important in the case of managing and solving a conflict are reactive actions, focused on improving the situation quickly; this is followed by making the achieved results permanent and by activities that rebuild the dialogue (Freire, 2003, p. 34).

### ***OSCE in the Face of Conflicts in the Former Eastern Bloc***

The OSCE became involved in regulating the following armed conflicts occurring in the former Eastern bloc states: the war in Donbas, the Transnistria war, the war in Georgia (the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia), the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Chechen wars, and the Tajikistani civil war<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding the war in Donbas, on March 21, 2014 a field operation was established to serve as an OSCE regulatory tool – “The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine” (SMM). The missions closed on March 31, 2022. Considering the time of establishing the operation and the legal basis, the following regulatory mechanisms were used during the conflict in Donbas: preventive diplomacy, conflict management and conflict resolution. As the war in Donbas has not ended yet, the mechanism of post-conflict rehabilitation has not been used. The OSCE acted as a mediator during the first phase of the armed conflict (before military operations) and the second stage (outbreak of the conflict and its duration).

During the Transnistria war, on February 4, 1993, an OSCE regulatory tool was established as a field operation “The OSCE Mission to Moldova” (ongoing as of December 2021). For the Transnistria conflict, the following regulatory mechanisms have been used by the OSCE: conflict management and conflict resolution. The field operation was launched after the outbreak of armed hostilities, and the conflict remains unsolved; thus, the mechanisms of preventive diplomacy and post-conflict rehabilitation have not been used. The OSCE acted as a mediator in the second phase of the armed conflict (outbreak of the conflict and its duration).

As to the war in Georgia (the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia), the OSCE established “The OSCE Mission to Georgia”, a regulatory tool for that military conflict. The mission operated in the years 1992–2008. The following regulatory mechanisms were used during that conflict: conflict management, conflict resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation. The field operation was established after the military operations began, so the mechanism of preventive diplomacy was not used. The OSCE acted as a mediator during the second

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<sup>10</sup> The legal basis of the established regulatory tools included in Section 4.3 comes from OSCE (2020).

phase of the armed conflict (outbreak of the conflict and its duration) and the third phase (post-conflict period).

Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the OSCE established the following regulatory tools: “The Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on the Conflict Dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference”; “The OSCE Office in Yerevan”; and “The OSCE Office in Baku”, later transformed into “OSCE Project Coordinator in Baku”. Here it should be noted that the regulatory tools used in this case are not limited to field missions but include other forms of armed conflict regulation (presented in Section 4.1, “OSCE field operations”). The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh involved using such regulatory mechanisms as conflict management, conflict resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation. The field operation was established after the beginning of military operations, so the mechanism of preventive diplomacy was not applicable. The OSCE acted as a mediator during the second phase of the armed conflict (outbreak of the conflict and its duration) and the third phase (post-conflict period). The second and third phase of the cycle were repeated due to renewed fighting.

During the First Chechen war (1994–1996), the “OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya” was established within the OSCE. This tool fulfilled a regulatory function in 1995–1998 as part of post-conflict rehabilitation. As the operation was established after the conflict ended, the mechanisms of preventive diplomacy, conflict management and conflict resolution were not used. The OSCE was a mediator during the third phase of the armed conflict (post-conflict period).

To deal with the Tajikistani Civil War, in 1993, the OSCE established a field operation whose regulatory tool was “OSCE Mission to Tajikistan”. Conflict management, conflict resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation were used to support the regulation of the Tajikistani Civil War. As the field operation was established after the armed hostilities began, the mechanism of preventive diplomacy had no application. The OSCE acted as a mediator during the second phase of the armed conflict (outbreak of the conflict and its duration) and the third phase (post-conflict period).

The discussed form of OSCE operational capabilities is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. OSCE field operations in response to subsequent phases of armed conflicts in former Eastern bloc states

Armed conflicts in former Eastern bloc states	Preventive diplomacy	Conflict management	Conflict resolution	Post-conflict rehabilitation
War in Donbas	✓	✓	✓	–
Transnistria War	–	✓	✓	–
Georgian wars	–	✓	✓	✓
Nagorno-Karabakh conflict	–	✓	✓	✓
Chechen wars	–	–	–	✓
Tajikistani civil war	–	✓	✓	✓

Source: author’s own study.

### *Emergency Mechanisms for Peaceful Conflict Resolution*

According to the will of participating states, decisions made by reaching a consensus are a way the OSCE most frequently uses to react to conflict situations. The fact that the decision-making process is compromise-based may hinder reaching the decision, particularly when its implementation is of great importance. This style of functioning, founded on consensus and dialogue, was complemented by operational activity undertaken within the agreed-upon safety mechanisms, which include the “Vienna Mechanism on Unusual Military Activities”; “Moscow Mechanisms on Human Dimension”; “Berlin Emergency Mechanism”; “Valletta Mechanism”. Common features of these mechanisms are: activation depending on the occurrence of specific external factors requiring “intervention”; lack of restrictive measures in the form of sanctions; cooperative nature – activation using the principle of consensus (Ackermann, 2009, p. 225); two-way commitment – both on the part of the state asking for “intervention” and on the part of the state in breach of the commitments made. “The Berlin Mechanism” is a mechanism of consultation and cooperation in emergencies of internal or inter-state character. Emergencies are defined as “major disruptions endangering peace, security or stability” (OSCE, 2011a, pp. 23–24). So far, the “Berlin Mechanism” has not been activated as part of conflict regulation in the area of the former Eastern bloc. In turn, the “Vienna Mechanism” encompasses military activities beyond the scope of regular operations – the so-called “unusual military activities” that occur between states or within one state. The “Vienna Mechanism” applies to untypical, unplanned situations of military significance, with forces located outside their usual station, during peacetime. If such a situation occurs, the state is tasked with reporting it to avoid misunderstanding between states-signatories. The “Vienna Mechanism” was activated by the OSCE during the second Chechen war in 2008. During the CSCE review conference (“The Vienna Meeting of The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe”, 1986–1989), efforts were made to expand the ways of raising human rights issues in the context of the OSCE and formulating the “Moscow Mechanism” (OSCE, 2017, p. 1; OSCE, 1989). “The Moscow Mechanism” deals with issues related to the human dimension of the OSCE. It can be activated by the signatories in case of a threat of a military conflict. In the area of the former Soviet bloc, it was activated in Moldova (1993), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992), Serbia and Montenegro (1993) and Chechnya (2008). The Valletta Mechanism is the only mechanism that can be applied only to inter-state issues (not to intra-state problems). If a dispute arises between signatories, consultations and negotiations are the first method of searching for a solution within this mechanism. The mechanism involves a selection (by reaching a consensus) of a state or a group of states to support the political dialogue with parties to the conflict (Ackerman, 2009, pp. 225–227; Freire, 2003, pp. 37–39; OSCE, 2018). This mechanism has not been activated so far regarding armed conflicts in the former Eastern bloc countries.

Emergency mechanisms often involve consultations, calling for meetings and sending reconnaissance missions to investigate events. If a safety mechanism is activated, decisions

can be made on an ad-hoc basis by any participating state or a group of states in order to mobilise activities aimed at a specific goal. A characteristic feature of this mechanism are direct actions undertaken quickly in the face of crises in the area of a military conflict with regard to political crises and crises in the human dimension (Freire, 2003, pp. 37–38). As regard their concept, OSCE mechanisms are an important element of early warning and peaceful conflict prevention; however, they are rarely activated and their effectiveness is limited by the care taken by states during their implementation (Ackerman, 2009, pp. 225–226; Freire, 2003, pp. 38–39; OSCE, 2014a, p. 11; OSCE, 1992).

## Discussion

In case of a conflict, the existence of an external structure in the form of the OSCE may be a platform for changing the dynamics of interstate relations and giving it a direction suitable for further shaping the security of societies and peace. Therefore, the established field operations are a transfer tool that enables the process of change to take place at various levels of cooperation. Pointing to this function, the author discussed the operational capabilities of the OSCE in regulating armed conflicts, indicated the stages of the conflict “cycle” for which the OSCE launched field operations, and assessed the involvement of the OSCE. The author encourages a discussion of whether and how the operational capabilities of the OSCE contribute to regulating armed conflicts. Is the OSCE’s involvement in the post-Soviet area sufficient? When evaluating it, we should look at the OSCE as a link between the social dimension of the conflict and political decisions, and simultaneously as an entity upholding conflict resolution using peaceful methods. As a result of the conducted analysis, the author answers the research questions and draws the following conclusions.

As part of the war in Donbas, the conflict prevention mechanism was applied too late, after the start of hostilities. The OSCE did not continue its support, and the third stage of the conflict cycle was not implemented. In view of the armed conflict over Transnistria, the conflict prevention mechanism was not used, and regulatory activity was initiated only at the second stage of the conflict cycle. In the case of the wars in Georgia over South Ossetia and the war over Abkhazia, the Mission did not participate in the first stage of the conflict cycle, therefore the OSCE preventive diplomacy could not be used. Due to the “August War”, the mission operated in Georgia until 2009, taking part in negotiation talks, but did not participate in further work for post-conflict rehabilitation. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the OSCE did not participate in the preventive diplomacy phase. The regulatory activity was undertaken with regard to the second and third stages of the conflict cycle. In the case of the Chechen wars, the OSCE only used the post-conflict rehabilitation mechanism, and in the case of the Tajikistani civil war, the preventive diplomacy mechanism was not applied, and the OSCE involvement occurred at the second and third stages of the conflict cycle.

This analysis highlights the inconsistency of the OSCE’s use of its regulatory measures. Would greater consistency in applying regulatory mechanisms cause the conflict to end at

its early stage? It is difficult to assess, because internal and external factors are not without significance. An external factor having a positive impact is the participation of other international actors, including the UN, the EU and other institutions and state representatives. In turn, a negative factor is the involvement of the other Russian republics in the armed conflict, which, for example, took place during the wars in Georgia. An internal factor is certainly the impossibility of working out peace agreements, most often related to the lack of willingness of the parties to work out such agreements, mainly the Russian Federation. Not without significance for the peace process is the internal instability of the states during the thorny process of consolidating the new political system, which increases their internal problems. In a country with no stable government and social satisfaction, nationalism is more likely to spread, and armed conflicts of an internal nature are more likely to appear (the case of Georgia and Tajikistan). The main considerations of the OSCE concern pragmatic issues and aim to improve field operations. Criticism of the OSCE mainly comes from Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. It concerns the interference of field operations in the internal affairs of these countries (especially in the area of democratisation) and the imbalance associated with the transfer of the Western policy to the East (Zellner, 2004, p. 450). As indicated by W. Zellner and F. Evers, the “variable intensity of actors’ engagement with the strategies and *modus operandi* of the OSCE and its field operations can partly be explained by differences in the need to cooperate with the Organization. It also demonstrates the differences in how the various actors perceive both the actual security situation in Europe’s subregions and the OSCE’s security offering” (Zellner, 2004, p. 451).

Recent events: the militarisation of Crimea (2014), the war in Georgia (2008), the continuation of the Russian military presence in Transnistria, the smouldering conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the open aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine (February 24, 2022) shown failed attempts at mediation and require international organisations to strengthen their operational capabilities, more efficient “early action” and a coherent, tailored strategy. Does the OSCE play such an important role in regulating armed conflicts that its contribution outweighs the costs? The mediator strives for a “balance of power”, trying to influence the aggressor through restrictive measures. Instruments of political, diplomatic and economic pressure are not without risk also for the mediator, but their effectiveness may exceed the costs (Lesley, 2017, pp. 2–3). OSCE importance lies in serving as the venue for negotiations designed to hammer out new decisions. The OSCE’s position is bolstered by its record in confidence- and security-building measures (CSBM) (Geremek, 1998, p. 27).

Does the failure to apply some emergency mechanisms prove their ineffectiveness or maladjustment? Some mechanisms have not been used in any conflict situation. It seems that the specific nature of emergency mechanisms and the rarity of their activation should not exclude the possibility of using the mechanism in the event of an emergency, as the lack of will of some states may turn out to be crucial for ensuring security. Failure to apply some of the emergency mechanisms may indicate limitations in their use. For example, the “Valletta

Mechanism” covers interventions in conflicts between states rather than within a single state. For this reason, it could not be applied in most of the armed conflicts occurring in the post-Soviet area. The effectiveness of resolving armed conflicts by means of contingency mechanisms is under discussion. The implementation of the mechanisms is questioned due to the lack of binding character of the recommendations or discussions resulting from this procedure (Freire, 2003, p. 93).

The binding nature could constitute a coercive measure, and it should be noted that the current shape of the activities undertaken by the OSCE is consistent with the concept of soft power in terms of the peaceful methods used (i.e., mediation, negotiation, political dialogue) and the use of stabilisation/confidence-building measures. It was the initial intention of the resulting operational capabilities and was maintained. Using military force as an element of deterrence, causes challenges for the international community that are strongly correlated with a sense of threat. As F. Fukuyama points out: “changing the system through intervention and occupation is extremely costly and uncertain (...)” (Fukuyama, 2006, p. 112; Potocki, 2010, p. 8). Demonstrating state power through “hard” security measures, such as violence, coercion or deterrence, is not conducive to integrating nations or organisations. In relations between states, an important category is the “usefulness” of politics in jointly shaping the common good (Potocki, 2010, p. 4). The nature of taking action in the international environment is characterised by “soft power”. The activity of the OSCE in regulating armed conflicts should be continued, extended and strengthened, as the efforts of the international community for stabilisation and peace have a chance of having an impact.

## Conclusions

This article presented how the OSCE undertakes regulatory activity towards armed conflicts in the former Eastern bloc states. Field operations are closest to the stabilisation of the armed conflict. The OSCE uses regulatory tools within the operations framework, including missions, accompanying field offices, and field coordinators. Through field operations, the OSCE can implement regulatory actions at all stages of the conflict, as part of the existing regulatory mechanisms, at the territory where the conflict is occurring, with the acceptance of the host state and based on a mandate. So far, most OSCE assets and personnel have been deployed to the former Eastern bloc states. In this area, the OSCE has been involved in regulating the following conflicts: the war in Donbas, the Transnistria war, the war in Georgia (the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia), the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Chechen wars, and the Tajikistani civil war. The article demonstrated the OSCE’s operational capabilities during each conflict phase. Maintaining or achieving stability was considered a common feature of OSCE’s activities in each phase. Regulatory mechanisms include preventive diplomacy, conflict management, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation. The regulatory mechanisms used by the OSCE revealed gaps in OSCE’s support. There were conflicts in the former Eastern bloc countries towards which the OSCE selectively applied its regulatory

activity, omitting certain phases of the conflict. There were also conflicts, such as the one in Nagorno-Karabakh, where regulatory mechanisms, including post-conflict rehabilitation, have not led to permanent stabilisation. These results justify analysing the theories against the background of the conflict “cycle”, which should be perceived as a closed circle of changing states, and whose phases should be seen as open states of intervention. As demonstrated concept-wise, the OSCE’s mechanisms are an important element of early warning and peaceful conflict prevention, yet they are rarely activated and their effectiveness is limited by the fact that states and the OSCE implement them very cautiously.

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