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- **Chechnya - the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) experience, 1995-2003**

- **Abstract:**

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- Comprising 55 participating states, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has, since its establishment in 1995, been given numerous assignments concerned with early warning, conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation. These tasks have been carried out by a diverse group of field operations, including the (now defunct) Assistance Group to Chechnya. Despatched to Grozny in 1995 during the separatist war, the Assistance Group came to play a unique role insofar as its mandate explicitly also included mediation between the conflicting parties, namely the Russian federal government and the Chechen separatist regime. Exploiting a brief window of opportunity, the Assistance Group was a spectacular success, facilitating the 1996 cease-fire, organising and monitoring the subsequent democratic elections, and also paving the way for the May 1997 Russian-Chechen peace treaty. By that time, however, the Russian government had given notice that the Assistance Group's mediation efforts were no longer wanted. Subsequent developments - including a general breakdown in the security environment, the Russian repudiation of their previous recognition of the

Chechen authorities and of their own commitment to the peace process, and finally the renewed military hostilities from 1999 - led to a drastic scaling-down of the scope and relevance of the Assistance Group's activities. After unsuccessful attempts to reestablish the Assistance Group as a field operation, its mandate was terminated in 2003. Lessons learnt from the Assistance Group experience include the realisation that the consensus principle remains the main obstacle preventing the OSCE from playing a decisively meaningful role in conflicts involving one of the organisation's own more powerful member states. Russia's insistence that Chechnya is a purely domestic matter precludes any action - diplomatic or otherwise - on the part of the OSCE in resolving the prevailing conflict situation. Nevertheless, the OSCE also remains the organisation best equipped to keep a watchful eye on developments such as we have seen in Chechnya, thereby also contributing to keeping alive the hope that the international community will not tolerate indefinitely the plight of the people who have fallen victim to this semi-forgotten conflict. Besides, even when the road to peace, stability and a comprehensive political settlement seems closed, there will always be a need for a credible provider of basic humanitarian assistance. Although not a core function of the OSCE, this is nevertheless an area where the organisation has the ability to make a difference.

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