

**Building an inter-governmental platform to advance
cooperation and security in the wider Gulf region**

A draft proposal for discussion



Kuwait, November 2019

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Executive Summary

Kuwait's Vision 2035 suggests that Kuwait sponsors the creation of an "Organization for Security and Cooperation in the Gulf" (OSCG) for members of the wider Gulf region. It would allow both friends and adversaries to participate and create a platform to address vital cross-border issues and opportunities in the region. At the moment the Middle East is the only major region in the world that doesn't have an effective and inclusive multilateral organization, that full-fills this function and brings countries together which otherwise wouldn't discuss their different views and interests.

Such an organization can learn from the experience of similar bodies, especially the "Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe" (CSCE), which during the height of the cold war managed to create channels of bi-lateral and multi-lateral negotiation and cooperation between the cold war camps. The CSCE is credited with having helped to de-escalate conflicts and drive cooperation in many areas in spite of ongoing political differences and hostilities. It established mechanisms of non-violent conflict resolution, early warning systems, and confidence-building measures. And it created several areas of economic cooperation which beside the economic benefits also helped to de-escalate tensions in other areas.

An "Organization for Security and Cooperation in the Gulf" (OSCG) could follow this example. It could organize a process of conferences and meetings, where the most pressing issues can be addressed by high level government delegations. And it could then establish technical working groups to discuss specific areas and develop recommendation, for example on protection of marine environment, security in the wider Gulf region, cooperation in the area of energy and economic development.

The organization should initially contain the GCC countries plus Iraq and Iran. International stakeholders, like the USA and potentially even the P5+1 countries (security council members plus Germany), should also participate, potentially under an observer status.

The participating countries would have to agree on certain principles, which allows them to advance the finding of solutions in such a difficult environment. Principles that proved helpful with similar organizations include equal voting rights or the rule that decisions are only politically rather than legally binding.

The establishment of such a process or organization needs to be carefully planned and prepared given the current political climate. As Russia and recently Iran also suggested the establishment of a regional security platform, it is important that Kuwait positions its own proposal as a counteroffer supported by all or some GCC countries. Otherwise Kuwait risks to be perceived by some of its own allies to fall into an Iranian trap.

Still, the current discussions show that the time might be right for the region to finally also create a regional platform where all players can come together in spite of their differences, address vital cross-border issues and find solutions. The future of all countries in the Gulf depends on those.

Building an inclusive multilateral regional organization for security and cooperation

A platform that contains friends and adversaries

The potential impact of an inclusive multilateral regional organization has been proven during the cold war, when the USA and its allies were at loggerheads and often at the brink of war with the communist world. The idea was that there is the need for a platform of adversaries, where in spite of all the tensions urgent areas of mutual interest could be addressed through conversations, information exchange and coordination. The two blocks started the “Helsinki process” which then led to the creation of the “*Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe*” (CSCE) and later the OSCE. These organizations are today credited with helping to reduce tension during the cold war, minimise misunderstanding and prevent military accidents as well as advance necessary technical areas of cooperation during this period.

Similar principles are nowadays applied to other regional organizations which bring players together with different and often opposing or even hostile interests. Examples include:

- “*Shanghai Cooperation Organization*” (SCO) for central Asia (which includes for example both India and Pakistan, as well as China and Russia.)
- Several platforms linked to ASEAN, like the “*ASEAN Regional Forum*” or the “*ASEAN Plus Three Forum*”, which include the South East Asian countries together with China, Japan and Korea, all of which have very diverging interests in the South China Sea for example
- The “*South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation*” (SAARC) with the adversaries India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- Similar arrangements are currently under discussion for other conflict areas, like in *North-Eastern Asia*, where both Koreas with their regional and international allies would be included.

At the moment the Middle East is the only major region in the world that doesn't have an effective and inclusive multilateral organization, that full-fills a similar function. And this in spite of the fact, that the need for coordination and reduction of tensions is among the highest in the world.

A platform to address vital regional issues

It is time for the countries in the wider Gulf region to establish a similar platform, initially as a process and later potentially as an organization. In its set-up, principles and processes it can learn from the experience of these other organizations.

- **Areas to be covered.** Starting with the recognition that there are different and often conflicting interest, such a process or organisation could create a platform to discuss diverse issues of importance for the wider Gulf region like security, environmental issues, cooperation in the area of energy and economic development (see separate chapter below)
- **Membership and participation.** The OSCG should start with the core membership of the countries in the wider Gulf region, which would include the GCC countries, Iraq and Iran. International strategic partners and stakeholders, like the USA but potentially also China, India and Russia or the P5+1 countries could be involved in different forums as observers. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, for example, differentiates between member states, observer states, dialogue partners and guest attendances. (see separate chapter below)
- **Organizational set-up.** The platform could grow through a phased approach. It could start as a process with well-prepared meetings and conferences and a small secretariat, similar to the “Helsinki Process” and then develop into a more structured organization over time if it is judged to be the right moment.
- **Principles of platform.** The participating countries should agree on certain principles Based on the experience of the CSCE, ASEAN or the different UN bodies that focus on urgent issues with conflict partners at the table. Principles that should be considered for inclusion are for example:
 - A commitment by all states of non-interference in the internal politics of other members
 - Equal voting rights of each member. However, decision making would happen by consensus so that every member state would be able to veto any action by the collective
 - Decisions should be politically rather than legally binding. No participating state will have to be afraid of being forced by others to undertake measures against its will. Lacking mechanisms of legal enforcement will make it easier for the participating States to reach out for a consensus.
- **Process.** There could be different kind of meetings.
 - *Regular meetings* where the countries can share their concerns and fears, identify threats and opportunities and clarify their current position and interest in the joint conversations. These meetings would be attended by high level representative of the member countries.
 - Meetings of *subcommittees* discussing technical solutions in specific areas like environment, energy cooperation, security. Participation in these subcommittees is voluntary. Many of the participants will be technical experts. The sub-committees will require a certain degree of autonomy to develop their solutions and suggestions.

- **Potential results of the platform** are multiple. In general, the OSCG should help to create mutual understanding and trust, address joint risks and threats through non-violent means and identify areas of cooperation in the region.
 - *Mutual understanding and trust in spite of diverging interest.* Obviously, a lot of tensions in the region are rooted in mutually exclusive interests and claims. However, many conflicts are also growing, purely because of a lack of understanding and trust. Having a platform for exchange of information and joint conversations can reduce these risks substantially.
 - *Joint declarations.* The CSCE process led to the “Helsinki Final Act”, a declaration signed by all participating countries, which became the foundation of future cooperation in the area of security and conflict resolution, economic and scientific cooperation and human rights.
 - *Bi- or multilateral treaties* on different issues.
 - *Confidence- and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs)* especially in the area of security and conflict resolution. For the CSCE these included among others:
 - An annual exchange of military information. Prior notification of certain military activities. Observation of certain military activities. Constraining provisions on military activities.
 - Compliance and verification measures
 - A network of direct communication (“hot links”/ “red telephone”) between the various capitals
 - Mechanisms of conflict resolution
 - *Cooperation projects* in vital areas of cross-bouder challenges.

Areas in need of cooperation

There are several areas that are in need of urgent cooperation among the states in the wider region, which will have to be addressed, even if there is continuous disagreement and tension in other areas

Environmental protection and climate change

In the area of environmental protection and climate change it is most obvious that most issues are transborder and solutions will have to be supported by the several countries. Some of the key issues include

- **Marine Environment:** Habitat Loss due to rapid coastal development and the decline in fish stocks can be considered the most important transboundary environmental issues in the Gulf (see separate document “Brief on Marine Environmental Issues in the Gulf”). Climate change is expected to exacerbate an already stressed environment. The Gulf countries are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise which is expected to inundate vital coastal cities. In addition, rising temperatures and salinity due to reduced rainfall, increased evaporation and acidification will impact vulnerable habitats and migratory patterns of key fisheries stocks. An integrated management approach which identifies priority actions within the region could provide an opportunity for increased technical cooperation within the framework of the OSCG.
- **Water scarcity and security:** The GCC countries in particular rely on desalination as a water source as it is one of the most water scarce regions in the world. Desalination plants produce large amounts of brine as a by-product that is discharged into the sea. The impact of brine pollution on the water security profile of GCC countries cannot be over-stated. Any risk of disruption to the desalination process, whether incremental or catastrophic, must be carefully assessed as a social, economic and political priority and if possible mitigated to avoid significant risks to economies of Gulf countries.

In addition, other renewable and non-renewable water resources are under stress due to groundwater depletion for agricultural use, dam construction upstream of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and pollution discharge impacting the water quality of the Shatt al Arab area and the Gulf as a whole. This stress is expected to increase as rainfall decreases due to climate change.

A regional water supply network and a regional water management strategy can be an optimal solution given the high environmental impacts and socio-economic risks of the current water management practices

- **Air Pollution:** The region is characterized by poor air quality due the natural occurrences of dust and the highly polluting fossil fuel, energy and transport sectors. Emission standards and regulations are generally lax causing high rates of morbidity and mortality.

Transboundary factors are likely to be accelerated by climate change due to the expected increase in regional dust storms. Large scale deployment of renewable energy, improved transport systems, regional dust reduction initiatives, combatting desertification, harmonizing air quality standards are essential to improve ambient air quality in the region.

- **Climate Change:** In general, the one issue where countries of the region might have common ground is climate change. The impact of climate change has no geographic borders. It is a cross cutting issue that impacts all sectors and has profound economic consequences if not addressed urgently. While mitigation is contentious at this stage due to the reliance of all the countries on fossil fuels, adaptation to the impacts of climate change can be an entry point to enhance further collaboration.

Security

Security questions were at the core of the CSCE and should also be prominent for the OSCG. In this area, several issues would have to be addressed.

- **Security of the shipping routes in the Arabian Gulf.** This is not only key for the export of oil, but also the import into the GCC for example of vital supplies like food, medicine and pharmaceuticals.
- **Counterterrorism and counter-piracy** is a major concern of all wider Gulf area countries. In the past the US led Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) focussing on ‘defeating terrorism, preventing piracy, encouraging regional cooperation, and promoting a safe maritime environment’ have been quite successful. It will have to be analysed which areas of cooperation the new regional security platform should explore.
- **De-escalation of other conflicts in the region.** Mechanism developed in this area by similar organizations could be designed and implemented to prevent contentious topics to develop into violent conflict.

The current tensions around these issues makes it more challenging to set the organization up. However, given recent developments, it might also be an opportunity.

Energy markets

The wider Gulf region is the largest energy hub in the world. Every country in the region faces similar opportunities but also similar challenges. Some of those areas of common interest are being addressed by the OPEC, where most GCC countries as well as Iran and Iraq

are present. However, in other areas, a higher degree of cooperation can help identify synergies and additional opportunities as well as better address risks

- **Diversification of sources of energy.** In order to continue to be a player in the global energy market in the long run, the region needs to intensify the development and leverage of alternative renewable energy sources. Several countries are already experimenting with sun and wind energy. However, if the region wants to take a global leadership position in the area – similar to what it has today with oil and gas – it would benefit from more joint efforts in terms of knowledge development, financing and development.
- **Improved own leverage of energy sources.** Today the wider Gulf states on their own are big energy consumers. However, their resources are often not spent wisely, for example running very wasteful oil-powered electricity plants instead of leveraging the cheaper gas from the region. A higher degree of cooperation and an improved network of pipeline between the countries could lead to a better mix of energy sources on a regional level and would benefit all players involved.
- **Diversify into downstream.** The region does not yet leverage the opportunities it has in terms of downstream development, be it in oil refining or in the development of a petrochemical industry. Some of these developments lead to a market competition between countries and players, which is healthy. However in other areas a higher degree of cooperation on a regional level will lead to a win-win situation for all parties involved.
- **Innovation** in product development and processes. New developments – like Blue Hydrogen – are creating new opportunities. There is no reason why the wider Gulf region shouldn't be one of the leaders in developing these kinds of innovations and bringing them to the market.

Of course, these kind of areas of cooperation will require a previous solution of some other issues. As long as the US embargo is enforced it will be difficult for many GCC states to get involved into these initiatives.

However, the OSCG could already do some conceptual preparation for a time when relations are back to normal. It could thus show the lost opportunities and potentially serve as an incentive to come an amicable solution in other areas.

Economic development

The same is true for questions of economic development. These ideas can be implemented after some of the current diplomatic issues have been solved. However, the opportunities identified in this area can have already a positive function before that.

Given its own location, Kuwait would have a special interest in intensified cooperation. Kuwait's aspiration is to become a trade and logistics hub. Its natural "catchment area" is in

the north given that the southern Gulf region is already quite saturated by a world class infrastructure. However, in order to realize this vision and its potential, the coordination between the involved countries has to intensify in several respects in terms of rules and regulations, investment protection, financing structures, etc.

If cooperation in this field would be possible, huge opportunities would open up, as can be seen from other regions. In the wider Gulf region even more so, given that we have very diverse countries which allow to complement each other in strength, expertise and market forces.

Potential participants

The organization should start with the core members of the wider Gulf region:

- The **GCC** countries plus **Iran** and **Iraq** should be considered as founding members.
- Given that the current conflicts in **Yemen** are intertwined with the tensions in the Gulf region, Yemen's inclusion into the platform could be justified and should be assessed for a second stage.
- The focus of the OSCG should be on the issues of the wider Gulf region and it should therefore not try during its initial phase to also address other regional problems, like the Palestinian or Syrian conflict. Accordingly, countries like **Syria**, **Lebanon**, **Jordan** or the **Palestinian areas** should not be included at this point in time.

Additionally, some of the international observers should be added early on. These include:

- **USA**. Given the vital role the USA is playing as the factual security guarantor in the region, the USA needs to be included especially in those areas which touch on security questions.
- **China** and **India**. As the leading Asian countries and the same time main oil importer from the Gulf both countries have a major stake and interest in the region. Their inclusion (as observers) could also increase the clout of the new organisation.
- **Russia** plays recently a greater role in the Gulf region. Their inclusion could be positively perceived by Iran as a counterbalance to the Western presence.
- **P5 + 1**. It would also be possible to invite all security council members (P5) as observer to the conference or organization. Adding Germany (+1) turns it into the group which since 2006 has led the diplomatic efforts around Iran's nuclear program. Having the P5+1 group present as observers could be easily justified on diplomatic grounds while at the same time creating a more broad-based observer group with several members sympathetic to Kuwait's concerns, like the US, UK, Germany and France.

Making it happen

A potential window of opportunity in spite of current tensions

While current regional tensions make this an even more urgent task, they also make it more challenging.

- Ongoing tensions and recent military activities in the Arabian Gulf create a challenge for the creation of any platform of regional cooperation.
 - The political goal and diplomatic efforts of the USA and the KSA focus currently on far reaching isolation of Iran in order to put economic pressure on them and force them to further concessions. They might be reluctant to join a project that brings Iran on a joint table.
 - Currently Iran doesn't have diplomatic relations with several Gulf states like UAE, Saudi and Bahrain. The US embargo with Iran makes any discussion of future economic cooperation difficult.
 - Iran's goal is to not have the US involved in security issues in the Gulf region. They might reject a participation of the US even as an observer.
 - Power infighting in Iran, makes their openness to any form of cooperation less predictable under the current political environment
- The GCC itself is currently divided on several issues
- The US foreign policy has lost its strategic act and long-term vision and is very unpredictable

While these tensions might create a barrier to advancing the discussions about the security platform, there are also signs of an opening window of opportunity. Several stakeholders have signalled their interest in the establishment of a joint security platform. And some of the adversaries in the region – like Iran, the USA and KSA – are by now looking for backchannels to address the current crisis.

- **Recent proposals for the establishment of a regional security platform.** Some of these proposals might not be in the interest of Kuwait, when looking at the details. But the discussion could create a positive momentum which Kuwait could shape with its own proposal.

- *Iran*. President Hassan Rouhani proposed at the UN General Assembly (Sept 25th, 2019) a “Coalition of Hope” for countries directly affected by the developments in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. ¹
 - Some of the element would mirror the CSCE process.
 - It would provide a platform for “various venues for cooperation”, such as the collective supply of energy security, freedom of navigation and free transfer of oil and other resources to and from the Strait of Hormuz and beyond.
 - Publicly it sounds as if the Iranian President wants this as a regional platform, in order to keep the USA out. However, he might stress this for internal political reasons and Iran might still be open to have the USA and other super-powers involved.
- *Russia*. In June Russia suggested the creation of a Security and Cooperation Organization in the Persian Gulf (PGSCO) that would include, in addition to the Gulf countries, Russia, China, the USA, the EU, India and other stakeholders as observers or associated members.²
- *China* supported the Russian initiative.³
- The *UAE* had started a discussion about the establishment of such a security platform 5 years ago led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, it was stopped in the concept phase given the rising tensions at this point in time.
- *USA*. Given the current crisis, the USA is interested in **creating an informal backchannel** to talk to the Iranians on the topics of conflict. Also given the 2020 election, the US government might be happy to be able to show early signs of potential diplomatic ways to solve the current conflict. The Kuwait model could even be packaged as a “grand bargain”, a deal which is superior to just solving one of the issues on its own.

A careful communication

Given these recent efforts of Iran to establish an Iran led regional security platform, there is a risk that a Kuwait initiative would be perceived by the USA and KSA as if Kuwait is just following the Iranian or Russian lead and “falls into their trap.”

¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/09/1047472>

² <https://www.voltairenet.org/article207131.html>

³ <https://tass.com/world/1070312>

It will therefore be important that Kuwait presents its own proposal as a counter- offer to those proposals with some different elements. It is an offer which is complementary to the Kuwait's and the region's current security arrangement, meaning a strong GCC plus a reliable partnership with the US and other western powers (See attachment 1 concerning Kuwait's three pillar security strategy as suggested by the Vision 2035).

In general, **Kuwait is well positioned as an initiator** of such an effort.

- Even though considered as moderate, Kuwait has a good standing both within the USA and the GCC.
- His Highness the Amir is rightfully credited as one of the voices of reason and de-escalation in the region with a sincere interest in creating win-win situations for all players involved.
- Kuwait already hosts one of the intergovernmental organisations that addresses vital cross border issues in the wider Gulf region: the “Regional Organization for the of Marine Environment” (ROPME) has representative of the GCC countries as well as Iran and Iraq working together in spite of all the current diplomatic and military tensions.

However, Kuwait should still seek support within the GCC early on. When presenting it to the USA or other international partners it would be advantageous to have it as an initiative which has already a strong support from some or all GCC partners, or is potentially even co-sponsored by 2 countries, like Kuwait plus Abu Dhabi. Such an approach would make it more credible especially to the Americans.

A phased approach to bring stakeholders gradually on board

Because of these tensions, the set-up of the OSCG will not be an easy task. In order to convince key players to participate in such a platform, the build-up needs to happen in phases and apply certain principles.

- The initiative should be well prepared and tested out with Kuwait's strategic partners before any official announcement. Otherwise it might be perceived as just one of many ideas to be discussed instead of a serious project.
- It is important to present the proposal as a holistic concept. It would address topics where regional coordination is vital for the peaceful and healthy development of the region, like environmental protection or security. But it would also identify opportunities of coordination with a huge upside potential, for example in economic development, if solutions in the other areas can be found.
- It should start with a core group of the wider Gulf region: the GCC states, Iraq, Iran plus the international observers. Over time and after the platform has been stabilized, other partners can join.

- Initially the focus could lie on less contentious and more technical areas, where coordination and decisions can be reached easier, like environmental protection and climate change adaptation.

Preparing the launch

Phase 1: Preparing the concept

During the preparation of the concept, Kuwait should understand the experience of similar bodies in this area and translate those into the concept of the OSCG.

- Learn lessons from other regional platforms about set-up, processes and principles of such an organization. This could include:
 - Organisations should include the CSCE, ASEAN, “*South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation*” (SAARC), *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*. Information can be gathered through visits and interviews and potentially of a closed workshop with representations from different organisations.
 - Similarly Think Tanks and academic institutions should be approached to share their knowledge. An example would be the *OSCE-Research Centre (CORE)* at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg
 - Interview with the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs to understand their previous efforts and the limitations they found.
 - Review experience of the “Regional Organization for the of Marine Environment” (ROPME)
- Develop and detail processes, organizational set-up, governance and budget of the organization
 - Details and suggestions will have to be provided both for the overall set-up of the OSCG but also for the focus and processes of the technical working groups.
 - At this stage it will be important to provide alternative options for the key questions including the pros and cons. This will enable the Kuwaiti negotiation leader to have informed discussions
- Set-up a Kuwaiti task force to lead the negotiation process
- Start the stakeholder involvement with Kuwait’s allies in the GCC and USA.

- This will involve exploratory meetings where the ideas will be discussed and potentially adjusted.
- For the USA it might include meetings with opinion shapers and decision makers from different political institutions like the White House, the US Department of State, congressmen from both parties
- Prepare communication strategy for outreach to Iraq, Iran, international observers

Phase 2: Getting all stakeholders on board

- Start bilateral discussion with Iraq and Iran. Understand their perspective and try to address their concerns.
- Start bilateral discussion with international observers, like China, Russia, P5+1 states
- Set-up an OSCG secretariat and technical working group
 - Review and potentially adjust overall concept
 - Draw-up necessary documentation, decisions to be taken
- Prepare the first OSCG conference

Phase 3: First conference

The objective of the first conference would be to agree on the principles of the new organization or process, high level processes and procedures as well as the focus of the working groups. This conference needs to be well prepared, agreement to key decisions should be reached ahead of the conference and the technical working groups be selected so that they can start working right away.

Appendix 1

Kuwait's three pillar security strategy – excerpt from the “Kuwait Vision 2035”

Kuwait 's international policy needs to provide the peace and stability which should foster the achievement of Vision 2035's ambitions:

A three-pillar security strategy:

1. Kuwait should continue to build on its alliance with the USA while diversifying its partnerships with other NATO allies and the emerging powers of Asia (China and India).
2. Kuwait should continue its efforts to strengthen the GCC for economic and security reasons, particularly by proposing to work towards a mutual security guarantee and greater economic cooperation on the world stage.
3. Kuwait should pioneer a framework in which any regional differences can be resolved peacefully. Creating an Organisation for Security and Cooperation in the Gulf (OSCG) - a regional security organisation in the style of the Conference for Security and Economic Cooperation in Europe¹ - may be the best way to achieve this.

...

The Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), or Helsinki Process, played a key role during the Cold War in ensuring that disputes were settled peacefully. The Conference both started the process of mutual disarmament in Europe; and included a set of cultural and human rights goals which set in motion a process of democratisation and respect for human rights that culminated with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In the same way, the charter of an Organisation for Security and Cooperation in the Gulf (OSCG) would need some basic premises that ensure security for all members, such as:

- Respect for sovereign rights
- Territorial integrity of states and inviolability of borders
- Refraining from the use of force or the threat thereof
- Peaceful settlement of disputes
- Non-intervention in internal affairs
- Respect for human rights

Additionally, the organisation would have to promote security cooperation in myriad ways. As a starting point, a basic security cooperation agenda might include:

- Early warning systems
- Arms control
- Conflict prevention and crisis management
- Border security
- International policing
- Combating terrorism
- Environmental security

The OSCG could also facilitate economic, scientific, cultural and environmental exchanges among member states. For example, the organisation could establish practical cross-regional working groups on topics such as climate change, human rights, education, culture and media.

Kuwait should take the initiative in proposing this new body, starting by building support for it in the GCC and with the five Permanent members of the UN Security Council. It is always difficult to agree which countries should be excluded from such new international bodies at their inception, but a good precedent has been pointed out in the form of the Expanded Iraq Neighbours Group which met in Kuwait in April 2008. Iraq has made it clear that it has no objection to participating in a regional organisation, but it is no longer prepared to participate in one that is focussed particularly on one country. This would therefore be a good moment to propose the transformation of the Expanded Group into a CSCG. Its members would be the GCC, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey as well as the Arab League, the UN, the P5 and the EU.

Appendix 2

Benefits of the CSCE to the participants – from: In: Multilateral regional security - OSCE experiences and lessons, by Hans J. Giessmann

The CSCE, though being comprehensive and inclusive, was based on equality and flexibility, on political will and consensus of all participating States, and it was from the very outset a lean structure in the true sense of the word. Being hardly more than a conference mechanism at first, the CSCE provided the participants with three assets that had not existed before.

- First, a **normative code of conduct** that was accepted by all participants helped strengthen the idea of a common regional identity, independent of existing politico-military confrontation and ideological opposition. The recognition of transparent norms and common principles in their state-to-state relations created a framework, by which the participating States for the first time could develop stable, flexible patterns of bilateral, sub-regional and regional co-operation. Also, such a framework provided a somewhat verifiable code for handling diverging interests among the participants. More importantly, however, the political commitment of the governments of Eastern European states to adhere to specific norms and principles gave the people within these states the opportunity to address issues related to these norms to their governments. Hence, it became more difficult for any government to bluntly violate the Helsinki norms, also in its domestic politics, for domestic behaviour of all governments could now be measured against their public commitments. Besides, the Helsinki norms encouraged more and more people in Eastern and Central Europe to speak up and to call upon their governments to cope with their own commitments. In fact, it can be argued that the CSCE norms sowed the seeds of peaceful transformation, which took place a decade later.
- Secondly, the CSCE opened up **venues for permanent channels of a multi-layered and multilateral communication** between the participating States. As important, the meetings took place regularly, by which the partners were not only given the opportunity to address matters of dispute early and pro-actively, but also by which any measure was fed-back multilaterally, and decision-making and enforcement could be verified and controlled. Regular meetings helped the participants to get to know and understand each other, to overcome distrust and to create growing confidence among them, thereby facilitating solutions for even difficult and sensitive issues.
- Thirdly, the comprehensive CSCE agenda was prospective. It provided not only a **wide range of fields for co-operation**, but created a **long-term vision for such co-operation**, independent of progress in each of the individual fields. Three inter-related topics were put into separate baskets: security dialogue and military confidence building; economic co-operation; and human rights and humanitarian issues. The basket-construction of the CSCE provided leverage to the participating States for linking different issues, when

necessary or helpful. It can be argued that the Eastern States were more interested in the first basket because it endorsed the post-war status quo of Europe and especially strengthened the legitimacy of the communist rule. They were also interested in the second basket for acquiring economic and financial assistance from the West, the Western States laid the primary focus on a gradual systemic change of the Eastern societies and humanitarian relief for the people living in the East.