



# BULLETIN

No. 70 (70) • December 7, 2009 • © PISM

Editors: Sławomir Dębski (Editor-in-Chief), Łukasz Adamski, Mateusz Gniazdowski,  
Beata Górka-Winter, Leszek Jesień, Agnieszka Kondek (Executive Editor),  
Łukasz Kulesa, Ernest Wyciszekiewicz

---

## Military Confidence- and Security-building Measures in Europe: Present State and Future Prospects

by Robert Śmigielski and Marcin Terlikowski

*Military confidence- and security-building measures have contributed to greater transparency of states' military activities and a reduction of political tensions in Europe. But with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe practically suspended, and given problems with Vienna Document implementation, these measures are no longer sufficient. The removal of these problems—a complicated task in view of a protracted, multifaceted dispute between Russia and NATO countries—would enable Europe's present security system to retain its efficiency and predictability.*

The main elements of the system of military confidence- and security-building measures in Europe, negotiated within the CSCE/OSCE framework, are the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) and the relatively less known Vienna Document of 1999.

**Vienna Document.** The document specifies political commitments with regard to states' military activity. A notification requirement applies to exercises, transfers and deployments involving more than 9,000 troops (one alternative criterion is the deployment of 250 battle tanks), and curbs are imposed on the frequency of such activities (the largest, involving more than 40,000 troops or 900 battle tanks, may be held only once in three years and must be announced in the preceding year). If these activities exceed a certain threshold (13,000 troops or e.g. 300 battle tanks), signatories acquire observation rights. They may also demand inspection on the territory of a party to the document and evaluation visits at military units for verification. The parties undertake to provide data on the numbers and organizational structure of their armed forces, main types of the weapons used and plans for the deployment of new weapon systems, the current strategy and military doctrine, institutions in charge of their implementation, and the defense budget. The document also specifies the mechanisms for intergovernmental consultations (within the OSCE framework) should extraordinary military activity be detected or dangerous armed incidents take place.

Vienna document implementation was quite unproblematic, but in recent years a number of troubling points have emerged, including a deteriorating quality of (incomplete) information provided by states and unsatisfactory results of visits/inspections. Many military activities below the Vienna Document's thresholds remain outside the notification/observation system (given a changed nature of the tasks assigned to the armed forces, large scale exercises are rarely held at present). The mechanisms of extraordinary consultations proved dysfunctional in the spring of 2008: they could not be launched when armed border incidents involving Russia and Georgia broke out, and in 2009 Georgia rejected Russia's request for an inspection and evaluation visit, citing the force majeure clause and previous repeated rejections of its own requests for inspection in Abkhazia.

These problems stem from the Vienna Document's maladjustment to the present military reality. It leaves out some forces, such as the navy, and its notification/observation thresholds are too high. But the main cause of problems is an OSCE impasse and absence of practical results of the organization's activities in the security field—reflecting a long-term NATO-Russia dispute over the coming into force of the 1999 Agreement on the Adaptation of the CFE treaty and the continuation by Russia of a December 2007 moratorium on CFE implementation. The crisis has been exacerbated by Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (rejected by most OSCE member states), the

deployment of increased Russian forces there, and Russia's veto against the continuation of the OSCE mission in Georgia monitoring the situation in South Ossetia.

Russia proposes a wide package of Vienna Document improvements, such as lowering the thresholds, extending its regime to cover multinational rapid reaction forces, naval forces, and also new kinds of weapons (e.g. unmanned aerial vehicles), and introducing the requirement to notify deployment of foreign armed forces on the territory of OSCE member states. But the Russian proposals have been accompanied by controversial military activities, such as the exercises codenamed "West" in western Russia, Belarus and Kaliningrad, and "Ladoga," in Karelia in September 2009.

Although the NATO member states reacted positively to the idea of Vienna Document updating, they lay emphasis on the need to solve the CFE crisis, and they unswervingly criticize Russia for its policy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia. For these reasons, a discussion about possible changes in the Vienna Document is unlikely to end in agreement any time soon.

**CFE Treaty.** The CFE impasse has been dragging on, with Russia laying the blame for the moratorium at NATO's doorstep. The country is now simultaneously demanding the ratification by NATO countries of a modified CFE, the removal of flank limits (constraints on force deployment in north-western Russia and northern Caucasus), and the lowering of arms limits for NATO countries. Russia also wants the notion of "substantial combat forces" to be defined—in the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security, signed with Russia in 1997, NATO accepted a commitment (political, but not legal) to pursue collective defense goals without additional permanent deployment of "substantial combat forces"—and to specify CFE accession conditions to be met by NATO member states which are not parties to the treaty.

Responding to the moratorium, the Alliance proposed a "parallel actions package," whereby the pullout of Russia's last units from Abkhazia and Transnistria would be accompanied by a progressing fulfillment of most of Russia's conditions. The proposal, first put forward in autumn 2007 and then specified in greater detail and repeated by the Alliance in 2008, has failed to draw the interest of Russia, which consistently upholds the moratorium (with inspection requests being rejected and only general information passed about the country's conventional weapons). In Russia's opinion, the "parallel actions package" may provide a starting point in work on a new agreement that would resume CFE implementation. Meanwhile, however, Russia is describing its own expansion of military potential in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as bilateral issues. As for the Alliance, it has steadfastly called for the moratorium's abandonment and resumption of negotiations based on NATO proposals.

**Conclusions.** What is required for Vienna Document implementation to improve is not necessarily its updating (which otherwise would be welcome), but primarily a settlement to the NATO-Russia political dispute over CFE, a solution to the question of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and bona fide use of the Vienna Document's numerous facultative measures. Still, being a political agreement, the Vienna Document cannot nearly make up for the non-operation of legally binding CFE commitments.

A continuation of CFE crisis and OSCE paralysis adds to the threat of rising tensions in regions with major unresolved political conflicts, and it may render the expected improvement in NATO–Russia relations much more difficult to achieve. This state of affairs is cited by Russia when it argues that the present security architecture in Europe is ineffective and in need of major revamping along the lines of President Medvedev-proposed draft treaty on security in Europe. The breaking of the current deadlock, however difficult to achieve, would make it possible to keep the present European security system without its fundamental revision proposed by Russia. That would require NATO member states' consent to most of the Russian demands on the CFE—but in return, the mechanisms of verification and exchange of information on conventional forces would be restored, additionally providing an impulse to restoration of mutual trust. The greatest value of the CFE is the openness of military/strategic moves by parties to the treaty, as none of them intends to exceed the numerical quota (an increase in Russian military presence in the Caucasus took place due to NATO concessions, made at a time when Russia was observing the CFE). And as seen from the Polish perspective, given a possible strengthening of Russian potential in Kaliningrad, an end to the Russian moratorium would be a welcome development, restoring chances for having CFE inspections in the region.