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Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Factsheet

What is the Forum for Security Co-operation?

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is a forum for dialogue and a platform for action among 56 participating States. The OSCE promotes comprehensive security through its work in three security "dimensions": the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human.

The Forum for Security Co-operation is one of the OSCE's two main regular decision-making bodies. Leaders at the 1992 Helsinki Summit of the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe – the OSCE's predecessor – established the Forum for Security and Co-operation to strengthen the focus on politico-military security by providing for negotiations and consultations on military security and stability in the CSCE area.

The Forum focuses on the politico-military dimension of security, including the confidence- and security-building measures that were first outlined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and further developed in the CSCE and OSCE.

The Forum's main tasks include:

- regular consultations and intensive co-operation on military security matters,
- negotiations on confidence- and security-building measures,
- further reduction of the risks of conflict, and
- implementation of agreed measures.

The Forum provides a unique platform for the 56 OSCE participating States to discuss topical security challenges on an equal footing. The agenda for the weekly Forum meetings in Vienna always includes security dialogue, allowing participating States to raise and discuss security concerns and challenges. These discussions regularly lead to initiatives and measures to strengthen politico-military security.

The Forum Chairmanship rotates among the OSCE participating States, with each State holding the FSC Chairmanship for four months. A so-called Troika, comprising the former, present and incoming Chairmanships, ensure continuity in the Forum's work. The Forum approves documents and decisions by consensus. The OSCE Secretariat's FSC Support Section supports participating States' efforts to implement FSC commitments, which - like all OSCE commitments - are politically binding.

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Promoting security and confidence

A comprehensive set of confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) developed by the OSCE since 1975 forms the basis for the Forum's work. These include information exchanges, means for compliance and verification, and different forms of military co-operation. They aim to reduce risk of conflicts, increase trust among the OSCE participating States and contribute to greater openness and transparency in the field of military planning and activities. This co-operative approach among States helps avoid misunderstandings and contributes to stability and security. The CSBMs also serve as early warning indicators of potential conflict situations.

The Vienna Document, which requires participating States to share information on their military forces, equipment and defence planning, is one of the main CSBMs developed by the OSCE participating States. In addition to information-sharing obligations, the Document provides for inspections and evaluation visits that can be conducted on the territory of any participating State that has armed forces. On average, participating States undertake 90 inspections and 45 evaluation visits each year. The Vienna Document also contains mechanisms to prevent or decrease tensions and to reduce the risk of unexpected military situations that could cause tensions. The Document also encourages sub-regional and bilateral measures to build trust.

The participating States have established a Communications Network to facilitate the implementation of the Vienna Document by providing a reliable and secure means of transferring military information. The Network is maintained by the OSCE Secretariat's FSC Support Section.

The Vienna Document in brief:

- Annual exchange of military information
- Information on defence planning and budgets
- Risk reduction
- Military contacts and co-operation
- Prior notification and observation of military activities
- Annual calendars and provisions that constrain military activities
- Compliance and verification
- Regional measures

Fighting the illicit spread of small arms and conventional ammunition

The Forum has expanded its agenda in response to the emergence of new threats of transnational nature. Since 2000, the threat posed by illicit small arms and light weapons as well as excess and unsafe stockpiles of conventional ammunition has been one of the main topics on the FSC's agenda. The OSCE's work on small arms complements efforts undertaken at the United Nations while tailoring the approach to the needs of the OSCE participating States.

The Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), adopted in 2000, contains a wide range of norms, principles and measures relating to the production, transfer, storage, collection or seizure and destruction of weapons. The Document also obliges the participating States to provide information on their annual imports and exports of SALW as well as the number of small arms seized and destroyed. The Document is supplemented by FSC decisions that regulate related matters, such as SALW export controls.

Conventional ammunition poses a threat not only because it can end up on the illicit market, but also because of its highly explosive nature. In order to tackle these challenges, the Forum works to ensure that stockpiles of conventional ammunition and explosives are maintained safely and securely. The OSCE Document on Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition, adopted in 2003, outlines criteria for identifying surplus stockpiles of conventional ammunition, explosive material or detonating devices. It also recognizes the States' responsibility over stockpile safety and security.

Practical assistance projects

As a result of rapid political changes and reduced military forces and budgets, some OSCE participating States lack sufficient financial and technical resources to secure and manage their stockpiles of SALW and ammunition, and to deal with their surpluses. To help solve these problems, the FSC has developed a mechanism under which participating States can request assistance in collecting small arms, improving stockpile management and security, and destroying small arms and ammunition.

Between 2003 and 2010, the OSCE received more than 30 assistance requests from more than a dozen participating States. The Organization used its technical and managerial expertise, as well as substantial financial resources provided voluntarily by participating States, to take on complex and high-risk projects.

These assistance projects cover a wide geographical area, contributing to security within and across States. Examples include the destruction of more than 320 Man-Portable Air Defence Systems in Cyprus, eliminating the risk of these deadly weapons falling into the hands of criminal or terrorist groups. Each weapon of this kind is capable of downing an airplane within a four-km range with a single shot. In Tajikistan, the OSCE destroyed 26,000 pieces of seized small arms and more than 30 tonnes of surplus ammunition.

The Organization also helped Tajikistan's authorities develop local expertise to upgrade safety and security measures, and it built new storage facilities to reduce the risk of explosions and unauthorized access. In Belarus, the OSCE, together with the United Nations Development Programme, helped reduce the risk of proliferation of SALW by improving security and safety measures at 16 storage sites. In Ukraine, the OSCE began a project in 2008 to eliminate 16,000 tonnes of a toxic liquid rocket fuel component (mélange) that poses a threat to the environment and human life. The mélange, which had been stored in deteriorating vats, could have filled four Olympic-sized swimming pools – while a leak of just one large bathtub's worth would kill anyone within 200 meters.

Democratic control of the security sector

The OSCE participating States have also recognized the importance of democratic civilian control of security forces. In 1994, the FSC adopted the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, which is a landmark document in security sector governance. The Code obliges participating States to provide for democratic oversight of their armed, internal, paramilitary and intelligence forces as well as the police. They are also obliged to ensure that their armed forces remain politically neutral and to guarantee that the human rights of security forces personnel are respected.

The Code also contains principles governing relations between participating States and calls on them to implement all agreed CSBMs and arms control agreements. In addition, it specifies that participating States should maintain only such armed forces as are necessary for individual or collective self-defence.

Each year, the participating States report to each other on their national practices in implementing the Code's provisions. This information exchange adds to the confidence and security promoted by the Code. As an additional transparency measure, the reports are published on the OSCE website (www.osce.org/fsc/44574).

Countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

The OSCE participating States are committed to preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, as well as the technology used for their delivery. To this end, the OSCE participating States have agreed to promote lessons learned and share experiences in the implementation of their international commitments. Since early 2011, the FSC Support Section in the OSCE Secretariat's Conflict Prevention Centre has offered assistance in drafting national action plans and developing national legislation to help OSCE participating States implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 on Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

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FSC Support Section

The FSC Support Section, which is part of the OSCE Secretariat's Conflict Prevention Centre, supports the work of the Forum and its Chairmanship. It provides for continuity in the Forum's work and advises the participating States in the implementation of their politico-military commitments.

The Section maintains the OSCE Communications Network and compiles archives of CSBM information exchanges. The Section also organizes workshops and training courses to support participating States in their implementation of these agreements, especially the Vienna Document, the Code of Conduct and the Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

The Section works together with OSCE field operations to develop and manage practical assistance projects in the field of SALW and conventional ammunition. It provides expertise as needed and assists in finding sufficient funding to implement the projects. The Section also co-ordinates with other international organizations to avoid overlap and optimize results.

The OSCE Communications Network in brief:

The OSCE Communications Network, established in 1990, encourages transparency and openness to strengthen security. The FSC Support Section maintains the Network, which enables the participating States to exchange military information related to several arms control agreements and treaties.

The Network:

- provides OSCE participating States with a reliable, timely and secure channel for transmitting military information to supplement diplomatic channels,
- facilitates the implementation of several treaties and agreements: the Vienna Document, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the Treaty on Open Skies and the Dayton Peace Accords, and
- is considered one of the OSCE's most successful confidence- and security building measures.

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The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) works for **stability**, **prosperity** and **democracy** in 56 States through political dialogue about shared values and through practical work that makes a lasting difference.

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