



Bridging differences, building trust

What is the OSCE?

With 56 participating States in North America, Europe and Asia, the OSCE is the world's largest regional security organization, working to ensure peace, democracy and stability for more than a billion people.

Forum for dialogue – platform for action

The OSCE offers a forum for high-level political dialogue on a wide range of security issues and a platform for practical work to improve the lives of individuals and communities. As an inclusive regional instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation, we help bridge differences between states and build trust through co-operation.

With its specialized institutions, expert units and network of field operations, the OSCE addresses a range of issues that have an impact on our common security, including arms control, terrorism, good governance, energy security, human trafficking, democratization, media freedom and minority rights.

Security touches upon many aspects of our lives. The OSCE views security as comprehensive and works to address the three dimensions of security – the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human – as an integrated whole.

Connected security

The OSCE seeks to enhance military security by promoting greater openness, transparency and co-operation. Under its auspices, its participating States have developed the world's most advanced regime of arms control and confidence-building measures.

At the same time, we take a broad approach to the politico-military dimension of security, focusing on, among other issues, defence reform, policing and the safe storage and destruction of small arms and light weapons and conventional ammunition.

Economic prosperity is a cornerstone of security, and the OSCE is dedicated to promoting economic co-operation and good governance in a region that includes most of the northern hemisphere.

Moreover, the OSCE considers environmental issues as a key factor of security. We work with participating States to ensure that hazardous waste is soundly managed, to promote environmental awareness and to foster co-operation over shared natural resources.

Lasting security is not possible without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The OSCE helps its participating States build democratic institutions; hold free, fair and transparent elections; promote gender equality; ensure respect for human rights, media freedom, minority rights and the rule of law; and promote tolerance and non-discrimination.

The OSCE's approach to security connects these three dimensions; this makes us especially effective in addressing "cross-dimensional" security challenges – transnational threats including terrorism, organized crime, cyber crime and trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings – which require joined-up, sustainable responses.



The OSCE also seeks to connect different actors inside and between States and across regions. This includes strengthening local government, building partnerships between the private and public sectors and working with civil society.

The OSCE works closely with other international and regional organizations. Recognizing that security in the OSCE region is inextricably linked with that of neighbouring areas, the OSCE co-operates with partner countries in the Mediterranean region and in Asia, as well as with Australia.

From the Cold War to new threats

The OSCE traces its origins to the early 1970s, to the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the creation of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which at the height of the Cold War served as an important multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiation between East and West.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 followed by the independence of the republics of the former Soviet Union held out the promise of a “new era of democracy, peace and unity”. In the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the participating States called upon the CSCE to help them work toward that end.

During the early 1990s, the CSCE acquired its first permanent structures, including a secretariat and institutions, and established the first field missions. After the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the ensuing conflicts in the Balkans, we were on the frontline, helping to manage crises and re-establish peace.

In 1994, the CSCE, having evolved well beyond its initial role, was renamed the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Thanks to its inclusive membership and developing partnerships, its comprehensive approach and its flexibility, the OSCE has continued to provide its participating States with effective, efficient tools and means to address current security issues.

The need to deal with challenges inherited from the past – resolving protracted conflicts, promoting military transparency, supporting transition processes and democratic reforms – as

well as the transnational threats of the 21st century, has made it clear that the co-operation fostered by the OSCE is needed now more than ever.

How we work

OSCE Heads of State and Government, at the 2010 Summit in Astana, reaffirmed their dedication to realizing a “free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok, rooted in agreed principles, shared commitments and common goals”.

This vision underpins everything we do. Overall political responsibility lies with the Chairperson-in-Office, the foreign minister of the country holding the OSCE Chairmanship, which rotates annually. The Chairmanship is supported by the previous and succeeding Chairmanships, who together form the OSCE Troika. In turn, the Chairmanship and Troika are supported by the Secretary General, who ensures the continuity of operations.

The foreign ministers of the OSCE participating States hold an annual Ministerial Council, where they review OSCE activities and provide overall direction to the Organization.

Continuous dialogue and negotiations take place in Vienna, where the ambassadors of the participating States and Partners for Co-operation meet weekly in the Permanent Council, the OSCE's political decision-making body, and the Forum for Security Co-operation, where the participating States take decisions regarding military aspects of security in the OSCE area, in particular confidence- and security-building measures.

OSCE participating States enjoy equal status within the Organization, and decisions are taken by consensus.

The Secretariat in Vienna, under the direction of the Secretary General, supports the Chairmanship through the year and is home to units focusing on conflict prevention and mediation, economic and environmental activities, co-operation with partner countries and organizations, gender equality, combating transnational threats (anti-terrorism, border management and policing) and anti-trafficking.



Secretariat activities range from implementing projects on the ground and monitoring developments that affect the Organization's work, to offering support to the whole of the Organization and providing expert analysis and advice.

The Secretary General directly supports the Chairmanship in achieving its objectives and serves as the guardian of core OSCE values, helping to ensure continuity and the sound implementation of the decisions of participating States.

A number of institutions and other instruments have evolved over time to help the OSCE participating States fulfil their commitments, including the Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which works in the fields of election observation, democratic development, human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, and the rule of law. The Office promotes the full integration of Roma and Sinti. It also hosts the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, the largest regular human rights conference in the OSCE region.

The Vienna-based Representative on Freedom of the Media observes media developments in the OSCE region, provides early warning on violations of freedom of expression and promotes full compliance with OSCE media freedom commitments.

The High Commissioner on National Minorities, based in The Hague, uses quiet diplomacy as an effective conflict prevention tool, to seek early resolution of ethnic tensions that might endanger peace.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, with an international secretariat in Copenhagen, brings together parliamentarians from OSCE participating States to facilitate inter-parliamentary dialogue. The Parliamentary Assembly holds regular meetings and plays an important role in election observation activities.

On the ground

Most of the OSCE's staff and resources are deployed in the OSCE's field operations in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. These operations are established at the invitation of the respective host countries, and their mandates are agreed by consensus by the participating States.

The OSCE's field operations enable the OSCE to tackle crises as they arise, and to play a critical post-conflict role, helping to restore trust among affected communities. More broadly, they foster the capacity of their host countries through concrete projects that respond to the needs of participating States and their societies. These include initiatives to support law enforcement, minority rights, legislative reform, the rule of law and media freedom.

The OSCE also helps to build networks of professionals to promote exchanges of experience and best practices, and to work more efficiently in addressing transnational threats.

A number of tools have been developed to address specific concerns. For instance, the OSCE Border Management Staff College, based in Dushanbe, was established in 2009 to serve as a single point of knowledge delivery for international standards and best practices concerning all aspects of border management.

The College offers training to senior managers of the border security and management agencies of the OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, and promotes greater co-operation and exchange of information between them.

Another good example is the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, which offers scholarships to Central Asia's leading students, including from Afghanistan, and – through its Masters programme and specialized courses – helps to train the next generation for careers in public service.

The OSCE also works to address protracted conflicts in its region through agreed formats. These include negotiations in the "5+2" format aimed at achieving a comprehensive political settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict, and the OSCE Minsk Group, which seeks a peaceful negotiated solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Along with the United Nations and the European Union, the OSCE co-chairs the Geneva International Discussions, launched after the August 2008 conflict in Georgia.

Together, the different parts of the OSCE support the participating States in building trust and working toward a free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community.



Facts and figures

OSCE participating States

Albania	Finland	Luxembourg	Spain
Andorra	France	Malta	Sweden
Armenia	Georgia	Moldova	Switzerland
Austria	Germany	Monaco	Tajikistan
Azerbaijan	Greece	Montenegro	the former Yugoslav
Belarus	Holy See	Netherlands	Republic of Macedonia
Belgium	Hungary	Norway	Turkey
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Iceland	Poland	Turkmenistan
Bulgaria	Ireland	Portugal	Ukraine
Canada	Italy	Romania	United Kingdom
Croatia	Kazakhstan	Russian Federation	United States
Cyprus	Kyrgyzstan	San Marino	Uzbekistan
Czech Republic	Latvia	Serbia	
Denmark	Liechtenstein	Slovakia	
Estonia	Lithuania	Slovenia	

Partners for Co-operation

Afghanistan	Algeria
Japan	Egypt
Republic of Korea	Israel
Mongolia	Jordan
Thailand	Morocco
Australia	Tunisia

OSCE in figures

Budget (2011): 150.8 million euros. **Staff:** 2,831 staff work for the OSCE, with the majority – 2,283 staff – engaged in its 16 field operations in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The Secretariat and the specialized institutions together employ 548 staff.

Vacancies and internship opportunities are posted regularly on the OSCE website: osce.org/employment.

For more information about the OSCE, its work and structures, visit the website: osce.org

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