

The OSCE at a glance

From Vancouver to Vladivostok, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its 3,500 staff in 18 field operations and three specialized institutions are committed to fostering security in the region for its 55 participating States and 11 Partners for Co-operation.

The OSCE's mandate:

The OSCE, a regional, values-based organization under the United Nations' Charter, plays a leading role in promoting security and democratization across the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian States. Specifically, it helps to provide: early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation.

It tackles this security mandate in a co-operative and comprehensive way.

Co-operative: all 55 participating States enjoy equal status. Dialogue, negotiation and common activities, based on consensus, define their decision-taking and operational practice.

Comprehensive: the OSCE recognizes that achieving security depends on focusing on three factors: 1) politico-military, 2) economic and environmental and 3) human. Co-operation in the economic, environmental and human "dimensions" contributes to peace, prosperity and stability, while unresolved problems in these areas can increase tensions within or between States.

1) Politico-military. The OSCE engages in confidence- and security-building measures; arms control initiatives such as fighting against the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons; projects to destroy or safeguard conventional weapons and munitions; and action against terrorism.

Responsible: Forum for Security Co-operation (military); Permanent Council, Ministerial Council and Summits (political); Secretariat and field activities.

2) Economic and environmental. The OSCE promotes entrepreneurship, small- and medium-sized businesses and investment as well as the preservation of the environment, environmental awareness and security.

Responsible: Permanent Council; Secretariat, such as the office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities; and field activities.

3) Human. The OSCE promotes human rights, the rule of law, anti-trafficking, good governance and democratic processes.

Responsible: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Representation on Freedom of the Media, Secretariat and field activities.

OSCE history

The OSCE traces its origins to the *détente* phase of the early 1970s, when the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was created to serve as a multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiation between East and West. Meeting over two years in Helsinki and Geneva, the CSCE reached agreement on the Helsinki Final Act, which was signed on 1 August 1975 by 35 States. The Final Act articulated the three dimensions of security and established fundamental principles governing the behaviour of States towards their citizens, as well as towards each other. Following the end of the Cold War, the CSCE became an organization to assist post-communist states in their transition to democracy and to market economies, and later to help all participating States address new threats and challenges to security.

Today, the OSCE has 55 participating States, with 11 Partners for Co-operation in the Mediterranean and Asian regions. Although it is not based on an international treaty, all OSCE decisions are politically, though not legally, binding.

How the OSCE is run

The OSCE is chaired by one of its participating States, a role which rotates on an annual basis. In 2005, Slovenia held the Chairmanship. Together with Bulgaria (2004) and Belgium (2006), it took part in the OSCE Troika, which advises the Chairman-in-Office in his decision-making. The Chairman-in-Office may also appoint Personal or Special Representatives to deal with specific issues or situations.

Summits of OSCE Heads of State or Government are held periodically. Between summits, the Ministerial Council of foreign ministers meets annually to review the OSCE's activities and to provide guidance and orientation. Once a year, the Economic Forum meets in Prague to focus on selected economic and environmental issues. The Annual Security Review Conference and the

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting focus, respectively, on key issues in the politico-military and human dimensions.

The Permanent Council is the main regular body for political consultation and decision-making. Composed of the Heads of Delegation of the participating States to the OSCE, it meets weekly in Vienna to discuss all pertinent issues and to take appropriate decisions. The Forum for Security Co-operation – overseeing the OSCE's politico-military dimension – also convenes weekly in Vienna's Hofburg.

The Copenhagen-based OSCE Parliamentary Assembly consists of more than 300 parliamentarians from all the participating States. Founded in 1991, its primary task is to support inter-parliamentary dialogue, an important aspect of the overall effort of meeting the challenges of democracy throughout the OSCE region. Its main annual session takes place in summer. OSCE parliamentarians also play an important role in election monitoring.

The Secretariat of the OSCE is based in Vienna. It is headed by Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut of France, who was appointed in June 2005 for a three-year term. As Chief Administrative Officer, Mr. Perrin de Brichambaut manages the OSCE's structures and operations and supports the OSCE's Chairmanship.

To assist States in complying with OSCE principles and commitments, the OSCE founded the following specialized Institutions: the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (established as the Office for Free Elections in 1990); the High Commissioner on National Minorities (1992); and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (1997). Currently, the OSCE has 18 field missions in 16 States. Seventy per cent of the OSCE's revised 2005 Unified Budget of €159.4 million was allocated to field operations, 20 per cent to the Secretariat and 10 per cent to Institutions.

OSCE STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS

