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Helsinki 1975 - 30 years after *The Views of a Founding Member*

I was one of the participants in the Helsinki Summit of 1975, a significant event and an even more evident reflection of great changes of that time. Thirty five heads of state from various countries in Europe and North America signed the Final Act that established the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE).

It was a period quite different from the present and yet all the legendary statesmen such as Brezhnev, Ford, Giscard D'Estaing, Wilson, Schmidt, Tito, Moro and many others came to participate. Europe, being affected by the Cold War, immersed in difficulties and the logic used by the two blocks made the communication between East and West even more difficult.

It was the time of the Warsaw Pact, the Berlin Wall, the two Germanys, the USSR, the time when communism was spread across about half of the continent. It was also the time of the EEC with its nine member states, the time of a reduced NATO and the United Nations with half of its current membership.

The CSCE joined all these organizations on an unpretentious, provisional and intermittent basis without a legal personality and without binding resolutions. The member states respected its decision based on their political will and their hope that the Helsinki Final Act would provide greater security at the borders created after World War II and that it would promote the intensity of contacts between the citizens of Eastern and Western Europe.

However, the International Community realized very soon that the Helsinki Final Act was indeed the political agreement that had never been signed in 1945 when the conflict ended. The document had the power to build bridges between states, enable mixed marriages, promote cultural exchanges, facilitate reforms in education, improve contacts between the media from both sides, render possible for personal and family trips to take place between East and West. All this, which appeared to be so simple and easy, contained power, which in the course of several years, undermined the foundations of the Iron Curtain and caused the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The CSCE, which transformed into a standing organization (OSCE) in 1995 with its Headquarters in Vienna and its institutions spread across different European countries, is beyond any doubt one of the most significant diplomatic legacies of the 20th century. Looking back on the second half of that century, we can say that no other organization had such influence on the transformation of the divided Europe over the sixties and seventies.

Today, the OSCE is active in Croatia, as well as in seventeen other countries in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, in order to achieve full democratization and integration of these areas into the rest of the continent on an equal footing.

Today's Europe is made up of the European Union comprising 25 partners, of NATO, comprising 27 allies, and of the OSCE with its 55 participating States. On 6 October, all of them, including the Croatian authorities, mark the 30th anniversary of the signing of that historical document which contributed immensely to the opening and democratization of present-day Europe.

It will not be easy for the OSCE to repeat its extraordinary performance from the 20th century. The world has changed tremendously in the last thirty years. The East and West do not exist any more as a political reality. In Europe, 22 new independent countries have emerged, including Croatia. The main international organizations are trying to accommodate themselves to the new political environment; that is the case with the UN, the EU, NATO, the Council of Europe and certainly, the OSCE.

Since 1995, when the original Conference was transformed into an organization, the focus of the OSCE gradually turned to the provision of support to the member countries which needed it because of their recently acquired independence, their economic problems or due to the consequences of the war some of them had suffered. With this purpose, five institutions were created and 20 missions were established in different countries to help them with their specific problems such as the return of refugees, the reconstruction of houses, the democratization of the society with respect to its political life, rule of law, media situation, policing and development of civil society.

What can we expect from the OSCE in the coming years? At this early point, at the very beginning of the 21st century, it is not easy to answer that. The new objectives are yet to be defined and the main international actors are still trying to steer in the right direction. In spite of that, the OSCE should never disregard its main mission – the provision of assistance to the countries in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Eastern and Central Asia in order for them to be ready to benefit from the current modern times, the epoch of prosperity, peace and democracy.

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