

The OSCE at a glance

How the OSCE works

The OSCE is chaired by one of its participating States, a role which rotates annually. In 2007, Spain held the Chairmanship. Together with Belgium (2006) and Finland (2008), it formed the OSCE Troika. This body ensures continuity of the OSCE's activities and advises the Chairman-in-Office. 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 Foreign Ministers of the participating States meet annually as the Ministerial Council to review the OSCE's activities and to provide guidance and direction. The *Economic and Environmental Forum* meets every year 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 Permanent Representatives 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 oversees the OSCE's politico-military dimension. It also convenes weekly in Vienna's Hofburg.

All 56 OSCE participating States enjoy equal status. Decisions are taken by consensus and are politically but not legally binding.

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

To assist participating States in complying with OSCE principles and commitments, the OSCE includes the following specialized Institutions: the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (established as the Office for Free Elections in 1990) based in Warsaw, Poland; the High Commissioner on National Minorities (1992) based in The Hague, Netherlands; and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (1997) based in Vienna. The Organization's autonomous parliamentary body, the Copenhagen-based OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (1991), consists

of 320 parliamentarians from the national parliaments of the participating States.

The OSCE collaborates with States outside the OSCE area, notably with six Mediterranean and five Asian Partners for Co-operation. It works closely with other international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, the Council of Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

The OSCE has 19 field operations in 17 States. Slightly more than 70 per cent of the OSCE's 2007 budget of € 168 million was allocated to field operations, 18 per cent to the Secretariat and 11 per cent to its Institutions.

History

The OSCE traces its origins to the early 1970s, when the two-year Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe brought together representatives from Eastern and Western countries in Helsinki and Geneva, resulting in agreement on the *Helsinki Final Act*, signed on 1 August 1975. This document contained a number of key commitments on politico-military, economic and environmental and human rights issues and also established fundamental principles governing the behaviour of States toward their citizens and toward each other.

Following the end of the Cold War, the CSCE took on a new role in managing the historic change taking place in Europe and responding to new security challenges. This led to its acquiring permanent institutions and operational capabilities, including a Secretariat, an Office for Free Elections and a Conflict Prevention Centre. Important agreements on military confidence- and security-building measures were signed in 1990, 1992, 1994 and 1999 (*Vienna Documents*). The CSCE participating States belonging to NATO or the Warsaw Pact concluded a major arms control agreement, the *Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe*, in 1990 and updated it in 1999. Another CSCE-related agreement, the *Treaty on Open Skies*, was signed in 1992. In the early 1990s, the Conference's work became more structured, meetings were held more regularly and field operations were established. Recognizing that the CSCE was no longer simply a Conference, participating States agreed at the 1994 Budapest Summit to change its name to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

The complex security challenges of the twenty-first century, such as the fight against terrorism and combating trafficking in human beings, often involve all three dimensions of security, making the OSCE's comprehensive approach more effective than ever. A priority of the Organization continues to be the resolution of protracted conflicts in the former Soviet Union and the embedding of stability in the Balkans. Important arms control agreements concluded by the participating States in the twenty-first century include the *Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons* (2000) and the *Document on Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition* (2003).