

# /PERSPECTIVE

## *Dare to Change*

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Inspiring  
perspectives  
and key ideas  
for Helsinki  
2025



**FRIEDRICH  
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**FES Regionalbüro für  
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FES Regional Office for  
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## Introduction

The year 2025 will mark the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act at the third phase of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). The principles enshrined in the Helsinki Act are not only a hallmark and cornerstone of the OSCE's *raison d'être* and institutional philosophy, but "principles and norms of behavior to which we all should continue to aspire".<sup>1</sup> However, following the almost 50 years since the adoption of the Helsinki Act, significant changes have occurred throughout the OSCE region that would have been considered unfathomable at the time of the Act's adoption. We are living in an epoch where multilateral frameworks and dialogue-based processes are increasingly questioned in both the East and the West. This unfortunate return to a system based on traditional power politics is occurring at a time, when a common approach is required more than ever to solve crises such as: the authoritarian renaissance, the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and low "thresholds for using military force".<sup>2</sup> The OSCE, with its proven toolbox (conflict prevention, conflict management, peace-building, and dialogue) should be at the forefront of a renewed multilateral approach. Unfortunately, the past decade instead has seen a limitation of the OSCE's role, an unwillingness to discuss and enable concrete reform proposals, a general disinterest in using the organization's important instruments, as well as countless violations of the principles, which were originally enshrined in the Helsinki Accords.

Therefore, it would be most timely to use the 50th Anniversary as an opportunity to uphold, value, and improve the principles and capacities of the OSCE and collectively embrace a collective vision of a new "Helsinki Spirit".<sup>3</sup> However, as Sauli Niinistö, the President of the Republic of Finland wrote earlier this year,<sup>4</sup> we should not rush this process and instead take our time, discuss what is important, and what needs to be done to make a new OSCE a success in 2025. Following this logic, our paper aims at discussing not only reform efforts that should be considered in the upcoming four years, but examining the necessary steps to generate an environment where change and informal channels of dialogue<sup>5</sup> can occur.

Our recommendations will be clustered around the following thematic issues: first, we will offer some ideas regarding the Chairpersonship process leading up to 2025. Second, we will discuss an approach through which the participating States could actively participate in the discussion and development of the OSCE's future. Third, we will propose some concrete suggestions on certain reform processes that need to be revitalized by the OSCE. Finally, we provide some concrete examples on how the organization could further develop its outreach strategy to maximize the visibility of the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Accords and any potential Summit. We view the recommendations put forth as critically important, in order to ensure that any potential Summit and the Ministerial Council in 2025 are well equipped to guarantee the success of Helsinki 2025. Lastly, the young experts of the Building Peace Working Group of the Perspective 2030 Initiative wish to present the following proposition to the 57 participating States and the OSCE Secretariat, in light of this year's upcoming Ministerial Council and for the subsequent four years: **Dare to Change**.

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1 Hill, William H. "The Charter of Paris and the OSCE today", 2020, Security and Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/the-charter-of-paris-and-the-osce-today/>.

2 Zellner, Wolfgang. "Using the OSCE more effectively- Ideas and Recommendations" 2020, Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy, University of Hamburg, p.5, [https://ifsh.de/file/publication/2021\\_OSZE-Studie/20210301\\_USING\\_THE\\_OSCE\\_MORE\\_EFFECTIVELY.pdf](https://ifsh.de/file/publication/2021_OSZE-Studie/20210301_USING_THE_OSCE_MORE_EFFECTIVELY.pdf).

3 Reynolds, Bradley. "The Spirit of Helsinki at 50 Contemplating Commemoration", 2021, Security and Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/the-spirit-of-helsinki-at-50-contemplating-commemoration/>.

4 Niinistö, Sauli. "It's Time to Revive the Helsinki Spirit" 2021, Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/08/its-time-to-revive-the-helsinki-spirit/>.

5 Liechtenstein, Stephanie. "I want to create informal channels of dialogue", 2021, Security and Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/i-want-to-create-informal-channels-of-dialogue/>.

## Recommendation 1: Creation of the Council of the Five Chairpersonships of the OSCE (Conseil des Cinq Présidences á l'OSCE)

The contemporary discourse on how to reform the OSCE can be traced back to 2005, when the Final Report and Recommendation of the Panel of Eminent Persons was produced as a result of the 2004 Ministerial Council in Sofia. The report contained more than 70 recommendations aimed at strengthening the OSCE and its effectiveness.<sup>6</sup> The debate since then has perpetually centered on similar topics: the roles and mandates of the Secretary General and the Chairpersonship in Office, legal status of OSCE, reform of the field operations, OSCE's work in the three security dimensions, and the role of OSCE in the current security environment.<sup>7</sup> Other attempts at reforming the organization within the last two decades include the so-called "Corfu Process" in 2009, culminating in the Astana Summit of 2010, the 2011 Lithuanian Chairpersonship attempt at the "V-to-V Dialogue" framework. The Lithuanian Chairpersonship's efforts towards the "Helsinki +40 Process" and finally the reforms attempted by the OSCE Troika of Switzerland, Serbia, and Germany.<sup>8</sup> The proposals by former OSCE Secretary General (SG) Thomas Greminger primarily directed at the Secretariat, included in his non-paper titled "Making the OSCE Fit for Purpose," are the latest attempts at reform.<sup>9</sup>

But despite a lack of relative success in previous reform efforts, leading to what can ultimately be described as 'Reform Fatigue'<sup>10</sup>, there still remains a modicum of hope. For the first time in the OSCE's history, there is the potential for a multi-annual, long-term, and coordinated strategic reform approach that may span more than two years. This may be able to successfully tackle the organization's current challenges, while paving the way for the way for any new potential Helsinki Accord in 2025.<sup>11</sup>

From 2021 to 2025, the Chairpersonships for the OSCE might be predetermined for the next five years, including the current Swedish Chair for 2021, the Polish Chairpersonship for 2022, North Macedonia in 2023 and – if approved –, Estonia in 2024 and Finland in 2025. In essence, a Council of the

Five Chairpersonships of the OSCE ('Conseil des Cinq Présidences á l'OSCE'; hereinafter referred to as the CoFC), could and should be immediately presented (pending pS approval of the Chairpersonships) to the pS and Ministers at the upcoming 28th OSCE Ministerial Council in Stockholm, under the rationale of enabling a Summit in 2025. We recommend that the OSCE pS consider establishing the CoFC on the model of the "double Chairpersonship" approach, which occurred in 2014 and 2015, under the Swiss and Serbian Chairpersonships respectively. Moreover, we believe that the central tenet of the "double Chairpersonship" approach, the joint work plan, would translate well into the CoFC structure, as it would ensure at the very least continuity regarding Helsinki 2025. Ideally, a comprehensive and strategic approach that could save time spent on transition related challenges, such as potential knowledge loss due to changes of CiO staff, and advisers, loss of reform momentum and resources.<sup>12</sup> The joint Swiss-Serbian work plan which was adopted at the Dublin OSCE Ministerial Council in 2012, where participating States decided on the consecutive Chairpersonships for 2014 and 2015<sup>13</sup> and also

<sup>6</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe "Common Purpose: Towards a more effective OSCE, Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on strengthening the effectiveness of the OSCE", 2015, <https://www.osce.org/cio/15805>

<sup>7</sup> Stephanie, Liechtenstein. "Reforming the OSCE: Between Continuity and Change." 2018 Security and Human Rights, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/osce-reform-continuity-change/>.

<sup>8</sup> Kanevskiy, Pavel, Juraj Nosál "Age of mistrust: crisis of co-operative security in Europe" 2019, Green Political Foundation, <https://www.boell.de/en/2019/12/09/age-mistrust-crisis-co-operative-security-europe>.

<sup>9</sup> Stephanie, Liechtenstein. "Reforming the OSCE: Between Continuity and Change" 2018, Security and Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/osce-reform-continuity-change/>.

<sup>10</sup> Nünlist, Christian. "Reviving Dialogue and Trust in the OSCE in 2018", 2017, ETH Zurich <https://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/N%C3%B4nlist-121818-BackgroundPaperOSCEin2018.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Reynolds, Bradley. "The Spirit of Helsinki at 50 Contemplating Commemoration", 2021, Security and Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/the-spirit-of-helsinki-at-50-contemplating-commemoration/>.

<sup>12</sup> Liechtenstein, Stephanie. "Three ways to reform the OSCE leadership model", 2018, Security and Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/three-ways-to-reform-the-osce-leadership-model/>.

<sup>13</sup> OSCE "Decision No. 1/12 OSCE Consecutive Chairpersonships in 2014 and 2015" 2012, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/7/97730.pdf>.

launched the so-called Helsinki+40 process, can ultimately be considered as a success.<sup>14</sup> Pivotal to the success of this approach, is ensuring that the selection process of the OSCE's institutional leadership in 2023 – 2024 period is not held up, such as it was in 2020, to guarantee adequate institutional support for the CoFC.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the selected Chairperson(s)-in-Office should have contingencies plans in place in case of national elections, as was the case with the Italian Chairpersonship in 2018.<sup>16</sup>

### **Recommendation 2: Formation of Interest Based Groups (IBGs) to offer the participating States a decisive role in embracing change**

At the same time, the CoFC should actively invite the participating States to take part in the process of preparing for 2025, with the aim of creating a sense of ownership among the pS. In order to foster this ownership and interest among the pS, we recommend that the CoFC create 'Interest Based Groups' (IBG) centered on a comprehensive range of interests which the 57 pS might be wishing to implement for Helsinki 2025. This would require that the Secretariat and institutions map out all of the pS' perceived and actual interests in a 'whole of OSCE' approach, which would inform the initial creation of the different thematic areas for the IBGs to further consolidate into tangible proposals.<sup>17</sup> The IBGs themselves should be structured on a special working group model, headed and coordinated by willing participating States. The pS could then bring forth their points of negotiations based on their special working group's interest to the Ministerial Council and any potential Summit in 2025, thereby ensuring that a broad but relevant range of interests, from the participating States are potentially included in a new Helsinki Consensus in 2025. These negotiation points could be formally discussed at yearly MC meetings, but should be clearly defined and fully presented at least a year before 2025 to the MC and the other pS. The work of the IBGs could be accompanied by other discussions that are taking place at the same time in the participating States and with the involvement of civil society and academia.<sup>18</sup>

### **Recommendation 3: Revise and revitalize previous reform at- tempts through the CoFC**

Parallel to the participating States efforts in developing and negotiating their IBGs, we recommend that the CoFC should also work towards tackling previously attempted reforms, which it and the Secretariat identify as pivotal in helping to ensure the success of a potential Summit in 2025. Previous reform efforts which should specifically be addressed include the legal status of OSCE<sup>19</sup>, and the addition of a second Deputy Head of the Secretariat or Deputy Secretary General to aid the CoFC in achieving its 2025 objectives and helping the overall coordination of the pS IBGs. Perhaps the single most important reform that must be realized in order to ensure the success of 2025 is that of the OSCE budget. Despite a policy of zero nominal growth and with a modest budget pooled from its 57 pS totaling around 140 million Euro in 2020, the OSCE manages to employ some 550 staff throughout its institutions and around 2,330 more across its 15 field operations (recognizing that the majority of OSCE mission staff are seconded and the SSM has its own budget).<sup>20</sup> However, while consensus is a foundational pillar of the OSCE, this rule has proven to be detrimental to the organization vis-à-vis the budget, especially in 2021, when the budget only managed to

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<sup>14</sup> SHR "Switzerland and Serbia present joint work plan in the run-up to their consecutive Chairpersonships in 2014 and 2015", 2013, Security and Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/switzerland-serbia-present-joint-workplan-run-consecutive-Chairpersonships-2014-2015/>.

<sup>15</sup> Liechtenstein, Stephanie. "OSCE Faces Unprecedented Leadership Vacuum", 2020, Security and Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/osce-faces-unprecedented-leadership-vacuum/>.

<sup>16</sup> Liechtenstein, Stephanie. "Three ways to reform the OSCE leadership model", 2018, Security and Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/three-ways-to-reform-the-osce-leadership-model/>.

<sup>17</sup> Liechtenstein. "I want to create informal channels of dialogue".

<sup>18</sup> Reynolds. "The Spirit of Helsinki at 50 Contemplating Commemoration".

<sup>19</sup> Brander, Sonya. "Making a credible case for a legal personality for the OSCE", 2009, OSCE Magazine March-April, p. 19, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/0/36184.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> OSCE "Funding and Budget", 2019, <https://www.osce.org/funding-and-budget>.

be adopted in mid-August and the 2020 budget in May of that year<sup>21</sup>. As such, we recommend that the CoFC should work towards achieving these reforms within its first year; this goal is particularly plausible as the budget reform already had some degree of pre-existing support. Moreover, the CoFC should also not shy away in attempting to adopt discretionary funding for the purpose of a Summit in 2025. Other potential areas of reforms could include those that have been presented in the past by former SG's Lamberto Zannier<sup>22</sup> and Thomas Greminger<sup>23</sup> as well as those proposed by Lars-Erik Lundin<sup>24</sup>, Christian Nünlist<sup>25</sup> and Wolfgang Zellner<sup>26</sup>, among many others throughout the last 10 years.

#### **Recommendation 4: Public Outreach and Engagement Reform**

At the same time, the OSCE must also communicate and inform the outside world of Helsinki 2025, particularly the 1.3 billion people living throughout the OSCE region. Communicating with those outside the OSCE "bubble" regarding the organization's activities, shows that their work is usually not well known to the general population. They are often only known because of the election observation duties of ODIHR, and at times, the OSCE is mistaken for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). However, involvement of the general population should be a key task for the years leading up to 2025, because only through a process of exchange with the population can it be made clear what the OSCE ultimately stands for and what it can help its population with most. Hosting regular press conferences during and after important meetings could help make the organization more transparent. Simultaneously, the OSCE should also further embrace new channels of communications and technologies (Reddit's Ask me Anything-Formats, Telegram channels, and tailored newsletters on specific topics) with the added benefit of increasing outreach among young people and engaging with them on a daily basis. Engagement of youth in the decision-making process by having a limited number of special representatives on Youth and Security at the OSCE, led to the realization that there should be more young voices represented as Ambassadors of the OSCE region, who could actively represent

the organization, promote cultural events and speak about the needs and issues facing the young population of the region.

#### **Conclusion**

As the "Building Peace"-Working Group of the Perspective 2030 Online Academy, we have been given the unique opportunity of developing and putting forth recommendations and ideas towards achieving our group's titular aim, within the context of the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Accords. After our research and mapping of previous reform efforts (see Annex 2), interactions with previous and current OSCE officials through 13 semi-structured in-depth anonymous interviews, seven (7) OSCE 2030 Perspective Academy Sessions and a questionnaire sent out to OSCE participating States, we are convinced that the OSCE remains the best forum for working towards the building of peace and inclusive dialogue in the region. However, the organization must change, it must adapt and it must evolve, because if it is unable to do so the consequences will come at the cost of the lives and prosperity of the 1.3 billion people living in the OSCE region, both young and old. The "Building Peace"-Working Group would like to reiterate our proposition and restate our challenge to the participating States: Dare to Change. If no real changes are able to be

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<sup>21</sup> Liechtenstein. "I want to create informal channels of dialogue".

<sup>22</sup> Liechtenstein, Stephanie. "Interview With Lamberto Zannier, Former OSCE Secretary General", 2017, Security And Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/interview-lamberto-zannier-former-osce-secretary-general/>.

<sup>23</sup> Grass, Fabian, Thomas Greminger, Anna Hess Sargsyan, and Benno Zogg. "Multilateralism in Transition: Challenges and Opportunities for the OSCE", 2021, CSS Studies, [https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/Multilateralism\\_in\\_Transition.pdf](https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/Multilateralism_in_Transition.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Lundin, Lars-Erik. "Working together: the OSCE's relationship with other relevant international organisations", 2012, <http://www.osce.org/cio/92009>.

<sup>25</sup> Nünlist, Christian. "Reviving Dialogue and Trust in the OSCE in 2018", 2017, ETH Zurich <https://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/N%C3%B4nlist-121818-BackgroundPaperOSCEin2018.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Zellner. "Using The OSCE More Effectively – Ideas And Recommendations".



implemented by 2025, then some difficult questions, such as those posed by Walter Kemp<sup>27</sup> regarding the reversion of the OSCE back to a conference on security and cooperation in Europe rather than an Organization, may ultimately be a real and unfortunate possibility at the 50th Anniversary of its very inception. At the end of the day, “the OSCE is what its participating States make of it and allow it to be”, which may very well be considered both as a blessing, and a curse.<sup>28</sup>

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**27** Kemp, Walter. “Executed structures: Leadership crisis in the OSCE”, 2020, Security and Human Rights Monitor <https://www.shrmonitor.org/executed-structures-leadership-crisis-in-the-osce/>.

**28** Liechtenstein, Stephanie. “Successful OSCE Security Days on the role of the OSCE in the 21st century”, 2013, Security and Human Rights Monitor, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/successful-osce-security-days-role-osce-21st-century/>.

## Annex I

Wordcloud based on interviews and the survey response by some of the 57 OSCE participating States. Question posed: What three concepts or ideas come to mind when thinking about the OSCE?



## Annex II

Selected Documented Reform attempts and suggestions since 2005.





### ***Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)***

With 57 participating States in North America, Europe and Asia, the OSCE – the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – is the world’s largest regional security organization. The OSCE works to build and sustain stability, peace and democracy for more than one billion people, through political dialogue and projects on the ground. The OSCE is a forum for political dialogue on a wide range of security issues and a platform for joint action to improve the lives of individuals and communities. The Organization helps to bridge differences, build trust and foster co-operation within and between states. With its expert units, institutions and network of field operations, the OSCE addresses issues that have an impact on our common security such as arms control, terrorism, good governance, energy security, human trafficking, democratization, media freedom and national minorities.

The Secretariat, which includes the Conflict Prevention Centre, assists the OSCE Chair in its activities, provides operational and administrative support to field operations and, as appropriate, to other institutions.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in Warsaw promotes democratic elections, respect for human rights, the rule of law, tolerance and non-discrimination, and the rights of Roma and Sinti communities.

The OSCE Academy in Bishkek provides a regional and international public forum for professionals and students in the spirit of co-operation in the fields of international relations, comprehensive security, democratization, the rule of law and human rights.

### **In cooperation with**



## ***FES ROCPE in Vienna***

The goal of the FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (FES ROCPE) of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Vienna is to come to terms with the challenges to peace and security in Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union a quarter of a century ago. These issues should be discussed primarily with the countries of Eastern Europe – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – and with Russia, as well as with the countries of the EU and with the US. The security order of Europe, based until recently on the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Paris Charter (1990), is under threat. This is, among others, a result of different perceptions of the development of international relations and threats over the last 25 years, resulting in divergent interests among the various states.

For these reasons, ROCPE supports the revival of a peace and security dialogue and the development of new concepts in the spirit of a solution-oriented policy. The aim is to bring scholars and politicians from Eastern Europe, Russia, the EU and the US together to develop a common approach to tackle these challenges, to reduce tensions and to aim towards conflict resolution. It is our belief that organizations such as the FES have the responsibility to come up with new ideas and to integrate them into the political process in Europe.

We support the following activities:

- Regional and international meetings for developing new concepts on cooperation and peace in Europe;
- A regional network of young professionals in the field of cooperation and peace in Europe;
- Cooperation with the OSCE in the three dimensions: the politico-military, the economic and the human.

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