



CHAIR'S SUMMARY

FROM GENEVA TO HELSINKI: FOUNDING PROCESS AND CORE PURPOSE OF THE OSCE Bern, 3–4 September 2026

The conference, co-organised by the Swiss OSCE Chairpersonship and Dodis Research Centre (Swiss Diplomatic Documents), took place in Bern on 3 and 4 September, as part of the 18th International Conference of Editors of Diplomatic Documents (ICEDD). It was the third of four thematic conferences held in Switzerland as part of the OSCE Chairpersonship 2026.

The high-level segment took place on 3 September at the University of Bern. Open to the public, it brought together around 250 participants – representatives of OSCE participating States, ICEDD editors and interested members of the public. Following an introduction by Dodis director Sacha Zala and the Rector of the University of Bern, Virginia Richter, the President of the Swiss National Council, Pierre-André Page, delivered the opening address: he emphasised the Swiss political system, which is centred on seeking consensus between differing positions, thereby echoing the principle of consensus amongst the 57 OSCE participating States, which forms the basis for the functioning of the OSCE. The President of the Council of States, Stefan Engler, and the Federal Chancellor, Viktor Rossi, also attended the high-level segment.

A panel discussion moderated by Daniel Möckli (Centre for Security Studies, ETH Zurich) brought together OSCE Secretary General

Feridun Sinirlioğlu and former Italian Ambassador Umberto Vattani, who witnessed the founding of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which became the OSCE in 1995. The discussion focused on the geopolitical context at the time of the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and on the similarities and differences with the current context, as well as the lessons that can be drawn from it.

In his closing address to the high-level segment, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis, emphasised that the OSCE, whose origins date back to the Cold War, remains as relevant as ever in the current climate of tension. The Helsinki Final Act reminds us that cooperation does not presuppose agreement, but rather a willingness to engage in dialogue despite disagreements. One of the main objectives of the Swiss Chairmanship is for the OSCE to be ready not only as a platform for discussion, but also to make a concrete contribution to a negotiated settlement of the war against Ukraine.

On the evening of 3 September, State Councillor Reto Müller, Head of the Department of Education and Culture for the Canton of Bern, and Marieke Kruit, Mayor of the City of Bern, addressed the reception held for the participants.



**DIALOGUE
TRUST
SECURITY**

Diplomatic documents – from Geneva to Helsinki

Dodis director Sacha Zala presented a collaborative publication on the negotiation process for the Helsinki Final Act, bringing together diplomatic documents from 15 countries and two international organisations ('Geneva, Helsinki, and the Making of the CSCE'). It was published with financial support by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. As Sacha Zala pointed out, the diplomatic record shows that the CSCE developed through years of negotiations in which states pursued different and sometimes conflicting understandings of security, cooperation, sovereignty and human contacts. Positions evolved, proposals were reformulated and compromises emerged gradually. Large and small states, members of the two alliances, neutral and non-aligned countries and other actors brought their own interests and priorities to the negotiations. The Geneva phase in particular created space for initiatives, mediation and compromise-building across political divides. The resulting Helsinki Final Act contained deliberate ambiguities, but these were not merely a weakness: they helped make agreement possible across profound political divisions while establishing a common framework whose significance continued to develop after 1975.

In addition, technical sessions of the conference, held at the Berne Rathaus on 4 September, addressed topics linked to the use of artificial intelligence in the analysis of diplomatic documents.

Assessment

The conference aimed at bringing together the worlds of historians, politicians and diplomats. Against the current backdrop of geopolitical tensions, fostering such interactions helps to improve our understanding, enable us to anticipate developments and make informed decisions based on historical facts. Despite the differences between the context of the Cold War and the current situation, recalling the process of establishing the CSCE/OSCE in the 1970s highlights the relevance of the approach adopted by the Swiss 2026 Chairpersonship, which is based on maintaining and developing channels of communication and dialogue.

By opening the historical discussion to the public, the conference also underlined that access to the documentary foundations of international relations is of value beyond the academic community.



Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis, OSCE Chairman-in-Office

Participants



High-level panel



Working session at the Bern Rathaus