What is the OSCE?
Who we are

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 for stability, peace and democracy for more than a billion people, through political dialogue and through practical work to build and sustain peace and stability.

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 OSCE helps to bridge differences and build trust and co-operation within and between states. Where there is instability, the OSCE works to prevent conflict, manage crises, and promote post-conflict rehabilitation.

With its institutions, expert units and network of field operations, the OSCE addresses issues that have an impact on our common security, including arms control, terrorism, good governance, energy security, human trafficking, democratization, media freedom and national minorities.

The OSCE’s work on the ground enables the Organization to tackle crises as they arise. The OSCE has deployed hundreds of monitors to Ukraine with the aim of reducing tensions.
The OSCE traces its origins to the early 1970s, to the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the creation of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which during the Cold War served as an important multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiation between East and West.

The Helsinki Final Act, which was signed on 1 August 1975, contains a number of key commitments on politico-military, economic and environmental and human rights issues. It also establishes ten fundamental principles (the ‘Decalogue’) governing the behaviour of States towards each other as well as towards their citizens.

From 1975 through to the 1980s, the CSCE, through a series of meetings and conferences built on and extended the participating States’ commitments, while periodically reviewing their implementation. It created a clear link between human rights and security, and was one of the few channels of dialogue between the Communist bloc and the West, also involving neutral and non-aligned countries.

With the end of the Cold War, the Paris Summit of November 1990 set the CSCE on a new course. In the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the CSCE was called upon to play its part in managing the historic change taking place in Europe and responding to the new challenges of the post-Cold War period. This led to its acquiring permanent structures, including a secretariat and institutions, and the establishment of the first field operations.

After the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the ensuing conflicts, the CSCE helped to manage crises, and re-establish peace. It also worked with states in the process of post-Communist transition.

In 1994, the CSCE was renamed the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to more accurately reflect its more permanent nature. The Organization continues to evolve to address threats and challenges, while remaining rooted in its founding principles.

Our history

The Helsinki Final Act, signed on 1 August 1975, established ten fundamental principles (the ‘Decalogue’) governing the behaviour of States towards each other as well as towards their citizens. The document guides the OSCE’s work to this day. (akg-images)
Decision-making bodies
Each week ambassadors meet at the Permanent Council, the OSCE’s regular decision-making body, and the Forum for Security Co-operation, where decisions are taken regarding military aspects of security. A Ministerial Council is held annually to review OSCE activities and provide overall direction. Summits of Heads of State or Government of OSCE participating States take place periodically to set priorities at the highest political level.

OSCE Chair
A different participating State chairs the OSCE each year, with that country’s foreign minister as Chairperson-in-Office (CiO), working alongside the previous and succeeding Chairs, who together form the OSCE Troika. The CiO may appoint personal representatives. Currently there are personal representatives covering a wide range of issues from preventing and managing conflicts in the OSCE region to ensuring co-ordination in specific areas like gender and youth issues and promoting tolerance and non-discrimination.

Secretariat
Elected to a three-year term by the Ministerial Council, the Secretary General heads the Secretariat based in Vienna, and directly supports the OSCE Chair. The Secretariat comprises the Conflict Prevention Centre and departments and units focusing on economic and environmental activities, co-operation with Partner countries and organizations, gender equality, anti-trafficking, as well as transnational threats. They monitor trends, provide expert analysis and implement projects in the field.

Institutions
The OSCE includes three institutions dedicated to specialized areas of work.

The Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) promotes democratic development and human rights. Its work includes election observation, supporting the rule of law, promoting tolerance and non-discrimination and improving the situation of Roma and Sinti. ODIHR hosts the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, the largest annual human rights conference in the OSCE region.

The Vienna-based Representative on Freedom of the Media monitors media developments and provides early warning on violations of freedom of expression and media freedom, promoting full compliance with OSCE media freedom commitments.

As an instrument of conflict prevention, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, based in The Hague, uses quiet diplomacy and early action to seek resolution of ethnic tensions that might endanger peace, security and stability.

Parliamentary Assembly
The Parliamentary Assembly brings together more than 300 lawmakers from the parliaments of OSCE participating States to facilitate dialogue and co-operation and to promote accountability. OSCE parliamentarians also play a key role in the Organization’s election observation activities, conduct field visits, and encourage organizational reform.
The OSCE takes a comprehensive approach to security encompassing three dimensions - the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human.

Together, the different parts of the OSCE support the participating States in building trust and working toward a free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community.

In military matters, it seeks to create greater openness, transparency and co-operation and has developed the world’s most advanced regime of arms control and confidence-building measures. Areas of work include security sector reform and the safe storage and destruction of small arms, light weapons and conventional ammunition.

Economic and environmental issues are also key factors in building security. Promoting good governance, tackling corruption, environmental awareness, sharing natural resources and sound management of environmental waste are amongst the ways the OSCE helps.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the bedrock of stable societies. The OSCE helps its participating States build democratic institutions; hold genuine and transparent democratic elections; ensure respect for human rights, media freedom, the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and the rule of law, and promote tolerance and non-discrimination.

The OSCE also addresses security challenges that pose a threat across borders, such as violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism, cyber-attacks, large groups of people on the move, trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings and the environmental and human impacts of climate change. These are matters on which, by necessity, states need to work together.

Across the full spectrum of its work, the OSCE aims for gender equality and engaging with youth.

The OSCE works closely with other international and regional organizations and co-operates with its Mediterranean and Asian partner countries. It involves civil society in many of its activities and increasingly reaches out to a wide range of other partners, including in academia and the private and development sectors.
Most of the OSCE’s staff and resources are deployed in field operations in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Recognizing that schools are an excellent place to nurture mutual trust, break down stereotypes and broaden understanding of universal human rights, the OSCE engages actively with children, young people and educators.

Field operations are established at the invitation of the respective host countries and their mandates are agreed by consensus of the participating States. They support host countries in developing their capacities through projects that respond to their needs. Some OSCE Missions work to reduce tensions, like the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which includes over 700 civilian monitors.

One of the OSCE’s core activities is to resolve protracted conflicts in its region through agreed formats. These include the Transdnistrian Settlement Process, aimed at achieving a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict over Moldova’s breakaway region; the OSCE Minsk Group, which seeks a peaceful negotiated solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; and the Geneva International Discussions on the aftermath of the August 2008 conflict in Georgia, which the Organization co-chairs along with the United Nations and the European Union.

The OSCE observes elections, and advises governments on how to develop and sustain democratic institutions.

Promoting professional and effective policing is an integral part of the OSCE’s efforts in conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation.

Independent and professional media are a cornerstone of democratic societies, and a key focus of the OSCE’s work.

The OSCE, through its field operations, helps to stop the spread of surplus weapons and offers assistance with their destruction.
The OSCE’s field operations assist host countries in putting their OSCE commitments into practice and fostering local capacities through concrete projects that respond to their needs. The field operations enable the OSCE to tackle crises as they arise, and in many places play a critical post-conflict role, helping to restore trust among affected communities.

### Executive structures

- **Secretary General / Secretariat, Vienna**
  - The Secretary General heads the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna, acting under the guidance of the Chairperson-in-Office. The Secretariat, which includes the Conflict Prevention Centre, assists the OSCE Chair in its activities, and provides operational and administrative support to field operations and, as appropriate, to other institutions.

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

- **Representative on Freedom of the Media, Vienna**
  - The Representative observes media developments in all 57 OSCE participating States and provides early warning on violations of free expression and media freedom.

- **High Commissioner on National Minorities, The Hague**
  - The High Commissioner’s role is to provide early warning and take appropriate early action to prevent ethnic tensions from developing into conflict.

### OSCE in the field

#### South-Eastern Europe
- Presence in Albania
- Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Mission in Kosovo
- Mission to Montenegro
- Mission to Serbia
- Mission to Skopje

#### Eastern Europe
- Mission to Moldova
- Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine
- Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine
- Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gilboko and Donetsk

#### South Caucasus
- Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on the conflict dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference

#### Central Asia
- Centre in Ashgabat
- Programme Office in Nur-Sultan
- Programme Office in Bishkek
- Programme Office in Dushanbe
- Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan

### OSCE-related bodies

- **Joint Consultative Group**
  - This Vienna-based body deals with questions relating to compliance with the provisions of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.

- **Open Skies Consultative Commission**
  - This body meets regularly in Vienna and consists of representatives from each of the 34 States that have signed the Open Skies Treaty.

- **Court of Conciliation and Arbitration**
  - This Geneva-based Court serves as a mechanism for the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law and OSCE commitments.
Vacancies and internship opportunities are posted regularly on the OSCE website: jobs.osce.org

For more information about the OSCE, its work and structures, visit the website: osce.org

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