

The CSCE/the OSCE

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Created between 1973 and 1975 as a diplomatic conference designed to pave the way for East-West dialogue between the European countries that formed the two Cold War blocs, the **Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe** (CSCE) developed, as from 1990, into a pan-European security organisation with a very well-organised operational role, particularly in conflict prevention and crisis management.

Two fundamental programmatic documents marked the start of each of these two main periods.

The **Final Act** of the CSCE, signed at Helsinki on 1 August 1975, was a major political undertaking. It guaranteed the continuity of negotiations between the countries in the two blocs and enabled the dictatorial regimes in the Eastern bloc to be gradually destabilised. As a code of conduct including not just recommendations but also universal principles, the Helsinki Final Act gave to the countries of the West and to political dissidents in the East an effective instrument of protest and means of demanding human rights and fundamental freedoms, and it made a key contribution to the fall of the Communist regimes.

The **Charter of Paris for a New Europe**, dated 21 November 1990, continued the link established by the Helsinki process between the concepts of collective security and respect for human rights in a new, larger and more heterogeneous geopolitical area. It renewed the political undertaking given by the former CSCE participants and reformed what had been a forum for consultation, providing it with permanent structures and an action programme. The progressive institutionalisation of the CSCE and its conversion into an international organisation was embodied in its change of name from 1 January 1995, when it became the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).