


The Helsinki Process: from the CSCE to the OSCE

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History of the establishment of the OSCE

[Commentator] During the Cold War, the world was living in constant fear of a global conflict with Europe as the main battlefield. Détente politics opened the way for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the signing in 1975 of the landmark Helsinki Final Act. History now credits the so-called Helsinki Process with helping to end the Cold War and the division of Europe.

[?] Ladies and gentlemen, I have the great honour to declare open the first stage of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

[Hans Dietrich Genscher] Normally, people are used to sign a treaty in order to finish a capital [chapter] of History. This is exactly the other way round. The Final Act of Helsinki and the signature of the Final Act was the beginning of a new face in European History, a starting point of a process. And, as we see, it changed the world. The idea of this Conference, in the first line, was a Soviet idea and the main goal of this Soviet proposal was to freeze the division of Germany and the division of Europe. And it was a great success of Western diplomacy to change the goal of our Conference; that means to introduce Western values as the right of self-determination and, in particular, human rights, cooperation, and I think the Russians underestimated the importance of their own commitments. And this provided a basis for argument by those people who were fighting for civil rights and as we now know that many of them justified their own ideas by focusing on the Final Act and saying 'this is signed by our government, it cannot be forbidden; it's our normal right to refer to that what is signed by our Prime Minister.' And this was a starting point for a new development in the whole of Europe, in particular changing the situation in the Soviet-dominated part of Europe. For us, the Final Act of Helsinki was the key to overcome the division of Europe and of our own country.

[Commentator] In the early '90s, World leaders were in a state of euphoria at the promise of a new, peaceful era. They were ill-prepared for the rapid and devastating emergence of nationalism, separatism and ethnic conflict. Bloody scenes of war from the Caucasus to Central Asia topped the evening news. In response, the international community began seeking new tools to stop these wars and prevent new ones from starting. The Conference was transformed into an organisation strengthened with newly-designed instruments to better handle Europe's security threats.