

Origin and development of the OSCE

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Origin and development of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

The origin of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) goes back to the time of the 'Cold War', the term used from 1947 onwards to describe the ideological antagonism between two blocs of countries, the liberal West under the influence of North America and the Communist East under Soviet domination. When it was set up in 1973, the OSCE was called the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and its remit, as an ongoing process of diplomatic dialogue between countries from both camps and neutral and non-aligned countries, was to act as an instrument of political and military *détente* in Europe. Its role as a negotiating forum continued for almost 20 years until the tearing down of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the collapse of the Communist bloc.

From 1990 to 1994, the former Conference underwent a major transformation. Its aims and methods needed to be adapted to the new geopolitical environment. The CSCE defined its priorities in a new Europe which now had shared values but where the break-up of earlier federations (Yugoslavia, the USSR) revealed a whole series of open or potential conflicts. It developed an institutional structure and adopted a determinedly operational role, focusing on the establishment and monitoring of crisis-prevention and crisis-management missions. In 1995, the CSCE changed its name and became the OSCE.