

Presentation of the OSCE (2000)

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[Commentator] Stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok, with 55 participating States, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe can claim to be the largest regional security organisation in the world. Its members in North America, Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia together form a unique enterprise: the OSCE.

Heads of State and Foreign Ministers meet regularly to assess the situation in the OSCE area and strengthen the capabilities of the organisation for the years to come. Additionally, parliamentarians from all OSCE countries have formed a Parliamentary Assembly to promote OSCE commitments across Europe. What began in 1975 as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe had evolved by the mid-1990s into a multi-faceted security and human rights organisation. Originally composed of 35 States, the OSCE now embraces all successor States of the former Eastern bloc as equal members.

Situated in the Austrian capital, Vienna, is the OSCE's administrative headquarters. The imperial Hofburg is the scene of regular diplomatic activity between the representatives of the OSCE's 55 participating States. The decision-making body of the OSCE, the Permanent Council, addresses the pressing issues affecting security in Europe at its weekly meetings. The chairmanship is led by a selected country's Foreign Minister who, together with a team of diplomats, provides the overall political direction to the Council and the organisation at large.

[Ján Kubiš] What this organisation stands for? I would say human dignity, first of all, but in a cooperative way. It's not just a criticism. We are together and we are working together with our participating States and we are trying through this cooperation to influence their decisions and their situations which eventually should be focused on the improvement of lives of normal people, common people in disordered countries. And we, as the participating States but also as the organisation, we are accountable to every and each citizen of this organisation.

[Commentator] Starting from the premise that security is indivisible, participating States share a common stake in the security of Europe. They cooperate to prevent crises from breaking out and strive to reduce the escalation of already existing crises. The OSCE's philosophy is that cooperation is stronger than confrontation. And insecurity in one region affects the security of all. Like a seismograph, the Permanent Council records even the slightest eruptions among its participating States, and immediately raises concerns or sets its institutions or missions into action.

[Ján Kubiš] We have one very big comparative advantage: it's our flexibility; flexibility which is given by the political nature of the organisation. This is a major distinction between us and a good number of other partners in the international community. We can act, we can act very rapidly, we can act in a very cost-effective way and the consensus principle is, in my opinion, the strength of the organisation because whenever then there is a decision to move ahead, it's a decision supported by everyone and it means that we can rely and count on their cooperation.

[Commentator] Promoting confidence and military information exchange between States is also a key OSCE endeavour. Monitoring operations like this one in the Georgian-Chechnya border serve to ease tensions. Extensive arms control agreements enforced by intrusive inspections have brought down concentration and levels of conventional arms across Europe. High-profile operations in the field have thrust the OSCE into the international spotlight. With over 20 field missions, the OSCE is now judged as much for its operational effectiveness as for its political role and commitments.