

From the CSCE to the OSCE

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Gorbachev's policy of opening up to the West and the emancipation of the countries of the former Soviet bloc paved the way for the construction of a 'Greater Europe'. This was begun in three areas: security, the development of democracy and economic integration.

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which had met periodically since it was established in Helsinki on 1 August 1975, bringing together 35 countries — all the European countries (including the USSR) except Albania, plus the United States and Canada — was to offer a framework within which to welcome the countries created following the dissolution of the USSR. In accordance with the objectives set out in the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act laid down the 'principles guiding relations between participating states': sovereign equality for all States, renunciation of force, inviolability of frontiers, peaceful settlement of disputes, territorial integrity of States, non-intervention in internal affairs, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the right of peoples to self-determination. With the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, the CSCE became active in three areas of security which were known at the time as *baskets*.

- 1) cooperation in the political and military field
- 2) cooperation in the economic and environmental field
- 3) cooperation in the field of human rights

The CSCE contributed to the *détente* between the two blocs and played a useful role in the progress of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Communist countries, referring in particular to the *third basket*. It was, however, an organisation without permanent structures, which, at its periodic meetings, adopted declarations by consensus which had no value in law, although they did have some political impact, provided that oppositions between East and West were not too marked.

With the collapse of the Marxist camp, which strengthened the conversion to Western values (political pluralism, market economy, the primacy of law), the CSCE's role could increase. At the request of Mikhail Gorbachev, a revival took place that was intended to consolidate democracy and accelerate disarmament. The Summit of the Heads of State or Government held in Paris on 19–21 November 1990 adopted the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, recalling the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. The Charter welcomed the end of an 'era of confrontation and division' and proclaimed the desire to 'build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government'. It was decided at the Summit to make the CSCE into a permanent institution, without extending its powers and responsibilities. This would be achieved at the CSCE Council in Budapest in December 1994 with the creation of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which would be given a Council of Foreign Ministers, a Secretariat in Vienna, a Parliamentary Assembly and a Conflict Prevention Centre.

The OSCE was a useful framework — seen as a regional organisation of the United Nations — but had limited effect. Expanded to include the Republics of the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, it formed, with its 56 States, a vast and very mixed group, spanning Asia, Europe and the United States, and had difficulty reaching a consensus on important issues. At the same time, the OSCE was competing with other organisations such as the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. It aimed to facilitate the emergence of a 'European security identity', which caused some dispute among its members. It sought to practise 'preventive diplomacy' in its handling of the crises and conflicts arising from the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the USSR by sending in observation teams. In the context of the OSCE, and in agreement with the European Union, the Pact on Stability in Europe (21 March 1995) aimed to reduce the risks of tension arising from the problems of minorities and frontiers in Central Europe.