**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**, organization of representatives of virtually all the states of [Europe](https://www.britannica.com/place/Europe), as well as the [United States](https://www.britannica.com/place/United-States) and [Canada](https://www.britannica.com/place/Canada), committed to formalizing decisions on important questions affecting the security and [stability](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/stability) of the European continent as a whole. Its headquarters are in [Vienna](https://www.britannica.com/place/Vienna).

The organization was established in 1972, and its first conference (1973–75) was attended by all 33 countries of Europe (with the exception of Albania) and by the United States and Canada. The conference culminated in the signing on August 1, 1975, of the [Helsinki Accords](https://www.britannica.com/event/Helsinki-Accords), in which the American- and Soviet-led alliances (the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization](https://www.britannica.com/topic/North-Atlantic-Treaty-Organization) and the [Warsaw Pact](https://www.britannica.com/event/Warsaw-Pact), respectively) recognized the inviolability of the post-World War II frontiers in Europe and committed themselves to respect [human rights](https://www.britannica.com/topic/human-rights) and fundamental freedoms. Follow-up conferences were held in [Belgrade](https://www.britannica.com/place/Belgrade), Yugoslavia (now in Serbia), in 1977–78; Madrid, [Spain](https://www.britannica.com/place/Spain), in 1980–83; and [Ottawa](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottawa), Ontario, Canada, in 1985. Heads of state or government meet every two to three years.

After communist governments collapsed across eastern Europe in 1989 and the reunification of [Germany](https://www.britannica.com/place/Germany) became [inevitable](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/inevitable) in 1990, a second major summit meeting was held in November in Paris to formally end the long-standing confrontation between the Western and Soviet blocs in Europe. The number of members was reduced from 35 to 34 by the reunification of Germany that October. The [Paris summit](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Paris-Summit) was marked by the adoption of a [Charter of Paris](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Charter-of-Paris) for a New Europe, which expanded the organization’s role and established permanent institutions. In 1991 [Estonia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia), [Latvia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Latvia), and [Lithuania](https://www.britannica.com/place/Lithuania) became members, and [Russia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia) assumed the seat held by the former [Soviet Union](https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union). In 1992 the other republics formerly of the Soviet Union also became members, as did [Albania](https://www.britannica.com/place/Albania).