**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

The **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe** (**OSCE**) is a regional security-oriented [intergovernmental organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intergovernmental_organization) comprising member states in Europe, North America, and Asia. Its mandate includes issues such as [arms control](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arms_control), the promotion of [human rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights), [freedom of the press](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_the_press), and [free and fair elections](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_and_fair_election). It employs around 3,460 people, mostly in its field operations but also in its secretariat in [Vienna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vienna), [Austria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austria), and its institutions.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization_for_Security_and_Co-operation_in_Europe#cite_note-galbreath-3) Most of its 57 participating countries are in [Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe), but with some members in [Asia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia) or in [North America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_America). It has observer status at the [United Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations).[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization_for_Security_and_Co-operation_in_Europe#cite_note-4)

The Organization has its roots during the era of the [Cold War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War), in the [Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conference_on_Security_and_Co-operation_in_Europe" \o "Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe) (CSCE). The CSCE opened in Helsinki on 3 July 1973 with 35 states sending representatives to form a forum for discussion between the [Western Bloc](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Bloc) and the [Eastern Bloc](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Bloc).[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization_for_Security_and_Co-operation_in_Europe#cite_note-5)Stage I lasted only five days. Stage II was the main working phase and was conducted in [Geneva](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geneva) from 18 September 1973 until 21 July 1975. The result of Stage II was the [Helsinki Final Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helsinki_Accords). This was signed by the 35 participating states during Stage III, which took place between 30 July – 1 August 1975.

The concepts of improving relations and implementing the act were developed over a series of follow-up meetings, with major gatherings in [Belgrade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgrade) (4 October 1977 – 8 March 1978), [Madrid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madrid) (11 November 1980 – 9 September 1983) and [Vienna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vienna) (4 November 1986 – 19 January 1989).

The [fall of the Soviet Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Soviet_Union) required a change of role for the CSCE. The [Charter of Paris for a New Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Charter), signed on 21 November 1990, marked the beginning of this change. The process was capped by the renaming of the CSCE as the OSCE on 1 January 1995, in accordance with the results of a conference held in [Budapest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budapest) in 1994.