

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)



What is the OSCE?

The history of the OSCE dates back to 1975, a time heavily impacted by political polarization of the Cold War, the East-West conflict involving the USA, the USSR, and their allies. To create a forum for dialogue and negotiation between the nations, heads of State and government from 35 States in Europe and North America initiated the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) that met for the first time in Helsinki, Finland, in 1973.

Two years later the Helsinki Final Act was agreed upon. It contained ten fundamental principles, the Helsinki Decalogue, governing the behavior of States towards their citizens, as well as towards each other. Although the agreement is not legally binding, the political declaration of goodwill made in the document set the benchmark for the continued process of détente, political rapprochement and co-operation in Europe.

In 1990, all participating States of the CSCE signed the Paris Charter for a New Europe, where they solemnly proclaimed that „the era of confrontation and division of Europe has ended“. In 1994, to provide additional political impetus, the CSCE was renamed the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Its objectives remained: addressing conflicts, post-conflict rehabilitation, socio-economic advancement and well-being of people, and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms. Today, 57 participating States in Europe, Asia, and North America are working together to strengthen security and stability in the OSCE States.

What does the OSCE do today?

The OSCE takes a comprehensive approach to security. Rather than limiting its involvement to traditional military security, it looks at other areas or “dimensions”. Lasting security cannot be guaranteed when rivers are contaminated, people cannot enjoy their rights, minorities are excluded, and trafficking in human beings, drugs, and weapons thrives. To pave the way for peace and stability, the OSCE works in the following fields:

- **Politico-military dimension:** arms control, countering transnational threats, including terrorism, ensuring border security, preventing and resolving conflicts, carrying out military reform, and policing.
- **Economic and environmental dimension:** promotion of economic co-operation and development, sustainable use of natural resources, facilitation of ecologically-friendly ways to dispose of hazardous waste, shared use of natural resources, responsible governance.
- **Human dimension:** advocating respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; assisting in holding elections, dispatching election observers to participating States, promoting gender equality, media freedom, minority rights, rule of law, tolerance, non-discrimination and combating human trafficking.



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Each year one participating State takes over the Chairpersonship of the OSCE to provide political guidance and manage its work. The chairing country closely co-ordinates its work with the previous and future Chairpersonships; together they make up the so-called “Troika” which guarantees the continuity of the OSCE’s work.

The OSCE’s central decision-making and management body is the Ministerial Council, an annual meeting at the level of foreign ministers of all participating States that usually takes place in December.

The day-to-day work is carried out behind the scenes and in the weekly meetings of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna made up of ambassadors from each participating State.

Delegations from national parliaments discuss security issues in the OSCE region at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and report back to their respective national parliaments. Switzerland has six seats at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly occupied by members of the National Council and the Council of States.

The OSCE also has 16 field operations in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia. The main focus of their work is providing early warning, preventing and managing conflict, building democratic institutions, and providing other types of assistance to the authorities to ensure their compliance with OSCE commitments. Each field operation works in accordance with its mandate. The spheres of their work range from building democratic institutions and strengthening participation of civil society representatives in decision-making to curbing violence against women and combating human trafficking. The OSCE field presences work to contribute to post-conflict rehabilitation and facilitating democratic transformation.

Equally important to supporting the participating States in implementing of their commitments are three autonomous OSCE institutions: the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Warsaw, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in Vienna, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities in The Hague.

Why is Switzerland part of the OSCE?

Commitment to peace and security in Europe, its neighbouring regions, and the rest of the world is one of Switzerland’s foreign policy priorities. According to the Federal Council’s Foreign Policy Strategy 2024–2027, this commitment is based on international co-operation, on one hand, and on activities to promote peace, human rights, rule of law, and international security on the other.

For Switzerland, the OSCE is an important platform for discussions within the European-Transatlantic co-operation framework, a forum where it can discuss security policy issues with the 56 other participating States covering an area from ‘Vancouver to Vladivostok’. Switzerland actively participates in OSCE conferences and meetings, supports projects in the field of human rights, environment, economy and politico-military security, and sends experts to the OSCE Secretariat and the current Chairpersonships.

OSCE participating States

Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Uzbekistan

OSCE Partners for Co-operation

Afghanistan, Algeria, Australia, Egypt, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Morocco, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Tunisia

