

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.

Each year one participating State takes over the Chairmanship of the OSCE to provide political guidance and manage its work. The chairing country closely co-ordinates its work with the previous and future Chairmanships; together they make up the so-called “Troika” which guarantees the continuity of the OSCE’s work. In 2014, the Troika is represented by Switzerland (the Chairmanship in 2014), the Ukraine (the 2013 Chairmanship), and Serbia (the Chairmanship in 2015).



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 2012–2015, 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 all countries in Europe, Central Asia, as well as the USA and Canada. Switzerland actively participates in OSCE conferences and meetings, supports projects in the field of human rights and politico-military security, and seconded experts from Switzerland for short-term civilian projects; these people work as election observers, policing consultants, and specialists on constitutional issues, mediation, rule of law, and human rights.

2014 Chairmanship

Switzerland will take over Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2014; throughout the year, Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter will act as the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

During its Chairmanship, Switzerland's main focus will be on the following:

- **Fostering security and stability:** Switzerland aims to contribute to conflict resolution, namely in the Western Balkans and South Caucasus, through dialogue and confidence-building measures. In addition, the Swiss Chairperson-in-Office supports agreements concerning greater transparency in and reform of the security forces.
- **Improving people's lives:** Switzerland seeks to ensure that all OSCE States fully implement their obligations to protect and uphold human rights (in particular, freedom from torture, combating terrorism, promoting free and democratic elections, protecting human rights defenders and minorities).
- **Strengthening the OSCE's capacity to act:** Switzerland supports the ongoing reform process intended to help the OSCE react faster and more effectively to crises, also by building up the Organization's capacities in conflict mediation. The Swiss Chairperson-in-Office also seeks to involve civil society on a more regular basis.

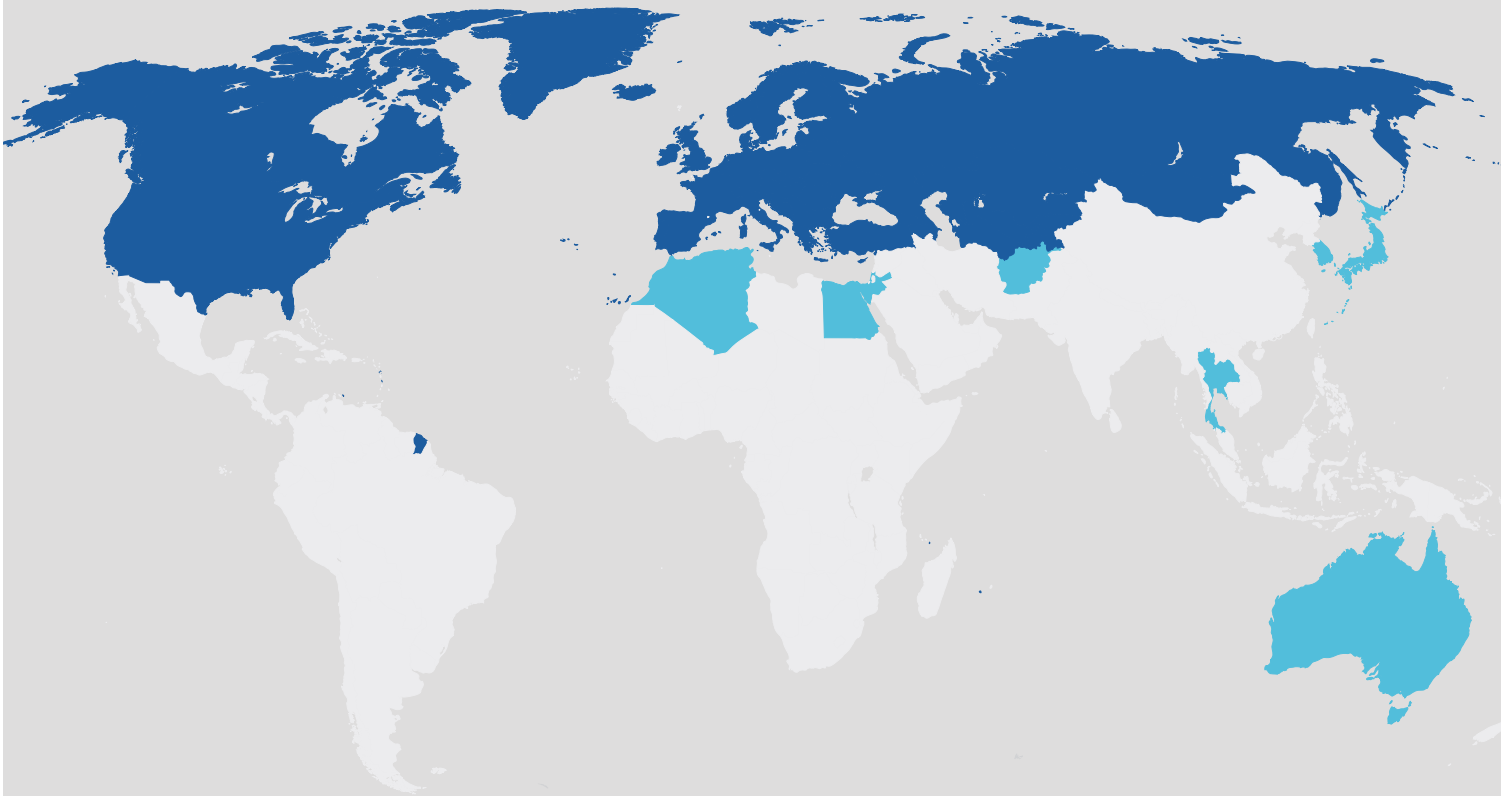
The OSCE Ministerial Council will take place in December 2014 in Basel. Some 1,200 delegates from the 57 participating States will take part in this major, four-day event that will conclude the Swiss Chairmanship of the OSCE.

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, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 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



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