

International parliamentary assemblies

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

What is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)?

The OSCE is a collaboration between 57 “Participating States” in Europe, North America and Central Asia.

Creation

The OSCE, which came about through the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, was originally called the “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.” The Charter of Paris of 1990 gave the Conference permanent bodies. In 1994, the Conference evolved into the “Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.”

Main objectives

The OSCE aims to strengthen security and cooperation among the participating states in an area stretching from “Vancouver” to “Vladivostok”. The Organization focuses collaboration among its members on the “three key areas of the Helsinki Final Act”, namely:

- Political and Security Affairs (including the prevention of conflict, the “treaty on conventional forces in Europe”, weapons inspections, exchange of information on military exercises, confidence building measures)
- Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment (including the fight against money-laundering, management of water, security of energy supplies)
- Democracy, human rights and humanitarian questions (including the rule of law, human rights and freedoms, observation missions to elections).

Structures

- Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE (cfr. below).
- The Chairperson-in-Office is appointed for one year from a participating state, which is designated by a decision of the Ministerial Council.
- The Ministerial Council, comprising the ministers of Foreign Affairs of the participating countries, meets once a year at the Summit, held at the end of the term of the “Chairperson-in-office” and at which a declaration is adopted.
- The Permanent Council, with its headquarters in Vienna, is a body consisting of diplomats, which meets weekly to analyse issues that are relevant in the OSCE area.
- The Secretariat, headed by a secretary general, supports the cooperation at the operational level. The secretariat is based in Vienna. Besides the secretariat in Vienna, there are also field missions that are active in Eastern Europe, South-East Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The field missions promote the development of the rule of law and are organised for the purpose of prevention and settlement of conflicts.
- The institutions that assist the OSCE in the context of carrying out its mandate, such as the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative for the freedom of the press and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which is responsible in particular for long-term electoral observations.

For more information:

www.osce.org

Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Creation

In April 1991, the delegates of the parliaments that participated in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe decided to set up a parliamentary assembly (OSCE PA). The OSCE PA Secretariat is based in Copenhagen.

Composition and objectives

The OSCE PA has 323 MPs designated by the national parliaments of the 56⁽¹⁾ participating states. The Belgian delegation to the OSCE PA consists of five permanent members of the House of Representatives and three senators. An equal number of reserve candidates can be designated.

The OSCE PA oversees the implementation of the OSCE's objectives and examines the topics raised at the meetings of the Ministerial Council and the Summits of Heads of State and Government. The OSCE PA develops and promotes mechanisms with a view to the prevention and settlement of conflicts. The OSCE PA supports the strengthening and development of democratic institutions in the OSCE area.

Workings and powers

Besides a Standing Committee consisting of the President, the members of the Bureau and the presidents of the national delegations, there are three committees: the Political Affairs and Security committee, the Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment committee and the Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions committee.

The OSCE PA meets three times per year in plenary session. Besides the summer session, the OSCE PA organises a winter session and an autumn session.

The summer session is the most important plenary session of the OSCE PA, because in each committee, a draft general resolution and several "supplementary points" relating to topical issues in the OSCE area are adopted. After being amended, these texts are merged into a Declaration.

The election observation missions form an important part of the work of the OSCE PA. The Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is responsible for long-term electoral observations, whereas the OSCE PA is responsible for short-term electoral observations, under the leadership of an OSCE PA Special Coordinator. Only members of OSCE PA national delegations can take part in these short term election observation missions. At the end of each electoral observation, a declaration concerning the holding of free and fair elections is drafted.

For more information:
www.oscepa.org

¹ The Holy See sends one delegate as a guest of honour.