

2. TURNING FENCES INTO GATES: THE CSCE TO 1989

Security is not gained by erecting fences, security is gained by opening gates.
- Finland's President Urho Kekkonen at the first CSCE Foreign Ministerial Meeting,
Helsinki, June 1972

The CSCE was born as a bargain between East and West, in which the former gained Western recognition of the postwar European political status quo and the prospect of East-West economic cooperation and the latter gained a *droit de regard* in the East's treatment of its citizens.² The CSCE's founding document, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, consists of three main sections, known as "baskets."³ Basket I enumerates ten principles guiding relations between participating states and covers matters related to security. Basket II deals with cooperation in trade, industry, science and technology, and environmental protection (and is followed by a declaration of intent regarding questions related to security and cooperation in the Mediterranean). Basket III covers cooperation in humanitarian fields, to wit, human contacts, information, culture and education, collectively called the "human dimension." A fourth "basket" deals with follow-up to the conference. The Final Act principles include, inter alia, respect for sovereign equality, renunciation of the use or threat of use of force, inviolability of frontiers, non-intervention in internal affairs, the peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for human rights.

The Helsinki Final Act is not a legally binding text. Rather, it is a politically binding document, as signified by the phrase "mindful of the high political significance which they attach to the results of the Conference," found in the paragraph immediately preceding the signatures. It was a major Western objective throughout the negotiations to ensure that the non-judicial nature of the text was explicitly recognized by the Soviet and East European parties, who instead hoped to produce a postwar peace treaty and territorial settlement. Adherence to CSCE commitments is thus primarily an indication of political trustworthiness.

The Helsinki Final Act established the CSCE as a process, not as an organization or an institution. The procedure for ensuring that decisions were executed took the form of periodic comprehensive "follow-up" meetings, supplemented by experts meetings and ad hoc conferences on specific subjects. There were no permanent administrative or political organs attached to this process. The host country for each CSCE event set up a secretariat in turn.

The CSCE was not intended to play a large or direct role in conflict prevention and management in Europe. These tasks fell to NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Though it was hoped that the CSCE would further cooperation and trust between the two blocs and thus help lessen conflict in an amorphous way, the CSCE was not expected to interfere in prevailing security arrangements. In practice, the CSCE did not much deal with security issues. It was most active in the third basket, setting important standards of state behaviour

²The West also gained an agreement to begin, parallel with but not linked to the CSCE, negotiations on mutual and balanced force reductions in Europe, known as MBFR.

³The term comes from a British diplomat, who recalled that his mother used to sort balls of wool into different baskets according to their colour.