

It is no secret that there is scepticism by many about the value of the CSCE process. When the leaders of 33 European countries, as well as Canada and the United States, subscribed in 1975 to the Helsinki accords, they knew they were not signing a perfect or legally binding agreement. Rather, the Helsinki Final Act is a political document which, inevitably, embodies a balance of interests, of East and West, of small countries and large, of those in alliances and those who are non-aligned, and of societies which are open and others which are closed. The fact remains, however, that what the Soviet Union and its allies had originally proposed as a European security conference became, in fact, a conference not only on security but also on cooperation in Europe.

What the CSCE process was attempting to do was to break the cycle of intermittent wars in Europe which have become increasingly destructive in the course of the last couple of centuries, and which could be terminal the next time. It is an attempt to get to the roots of tension which have generated the wars in Europe by establishing a climate of confidence between the parties involved -- so that they might acknowledge their differences, understand each other better, and draw on a common set of standards in resolving their problems.

The Helsinki Final Act, as you know, contained undertakings in the fields of economic cooperation and on the freer flow of people and information across borders. Among its principles were those dealing with human rights and fundamental freedoms. The states that participated in the conference freely entered into political and moral obligations to implement all the provisions of the Final Act. They agreed to participate in follow-up meetings not only to develop further the process of détente, but also to engage in a review of the manner in which they had implemented their undertakings at Helsinki. This was particularly important, because the special character of the CSCE lies in the fact that standards were set for reviewing the actions of participating states, and this review became the legitimate activity of an international forum, such as the one that will take place in Madrid.

We recognize now that the states participating in the CSCE -- and some in particular -- have fallen sadly short in implementing the provisions of the Final Act. The first Review Conference, held in Belgrade in the latter part of 1977 and early 1978, pointed up so many of these failings. In the embittered atmosphere of the Belgrade Conference, CSCE was considered by many to be a failure.