

OPEN SKIES: BASIC ELEMENTS

I. Introduction

1. On 12th May 1989, President Bush proposed the creation of a so-called "Open Skies" regime, in which the participants would voluntarily open their airspace on a reciprocal basis, permitting the overflight of their territory in order to strengthen confidence and transparency with respect to their military activities.

This proposal expanded on a concept that had already been proposed during the 1950s but had failed to reach fruition because of the unfavourable international political climate prevailing at the time.

Today, this new initiative has been made in a very different context as openness becomes a central theme of East-West relations and the past few years have been marked by important advances in the areas of confidence-building and arms control.

2. The provisions for notification and observation of military activities specified in the Helsinki Final Act were strengthened and made obligatory by the Stockholm Document concluded by the CDE in 1986.

With respect to arms control, in 1987, the INF Treaty, apart from its immediate goals, represented a very important precedent because of the extent of its verification provisions.

All this leads one to expect today that even more spectacular advances will be achieved in the near future. In particular, a two-pronged effort is under way in Vienna: on the one hand, to deepen the measures for confidence-building and transparency among the 35 countries of the CSCE, and on the other, to reach an unprecedented agreement between the countries of the Atlantic Alliance and the Warsaw Treaty Organization on the elimination of large numbers of conventional arms.

Furthermore, one awaits important developments in other sectors of disarmament such as chemical weapons and the Soviet-American strategic arms negotiations.

3. All of these agreements will naturally require their own verification regimes, often of a highly intrusive nature. Moreover, the specific provisions of