

Introduction

To understand what Canada and 34 other countries had hoped for when they signed the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe at Helsinki in 1975 and what we were all doing in Belgrade two years later, one has to try first to understand the *détente* framework within which the CSCE operates and to which it tries to contribute. Essentially, *détente* is a process that seeks to establish a climate of greater confidence between countries through better understanding. It applies to relations between all countries but, in terms of current preoccupations, it has its most immediate expression in an East-West context.

During the two years we were in Geneva, from 1973 to 1975, negotiating that monumental document called the Final Act that was eventually signed at Helsinki, Canada as well as the other Western countries tried to accomplish something that would make *détente* meaningful for individual citizens in all our countries. We tried to accomplish something that would give *détente* a human dimension — something that would turn an abstract concept into a vital reality with meaning and relevance for the day-to-day concerns of our people. Canada was particularly active in promoting the practical down-to-earth expressions of human rights, such as the freer movement of people and the freer flow of ideas. We pursued these subjects with special vigour, not because we considered these areas of *détente* the only ones worthy of attention but because all too often they have been lost sight of in the concern of governments to deal with the problems of military security and the material needs of life. As we saw it, the CSCE offered some hope of solving a whole host of problems, not the least of them the human problems, stemming from the difficulties that arise at the points of practical interaction between the different political, economic and social systems under which the participating states live.

At Helsinki the participating states entered into no treaty obligations by which governments were legally bound to behave in certain ways. The Final Act that we signed was a declaration of intention to follow certain