

1) Harmonising obligations

The FSC's first priority was to harmonise the arrangements under the Vienna Document on CSBMs and the CFE Treaty in order to reduce the inefficiencies of overlap and to create a common set of rights and obligations to promote security across the continent. In practice, the process involved aligning the "exchange of information" system in the 1992 Vienna Document with the more rigorous standards set out in the CFE Treaty. Although harmonisation has proved more challenging than anticipated⁸, it can still be considered as an important focus for initial FSC activity.

2) Creating a Code of Conduct

Another key task for the FSC was to develop a politico-military Code of Conduct for the participating States. France had proposed the idea of a code as a prelude to a legally binding security treaty among OSCE states. Although initially the United States and Turkey opposed the Code, it was included in the Forum's "Programme for Immediate Action" at Helsinki and was formally adopted at the Budapest Summit in 1994.

The Code of Conduct reaffirms the continuing validity of the comprehensive and co-operative concepts of security outlined at Helsinki, and commits participating States to defend the common values of the OSCE. But the Code also breaks new ground by formulating additional norms for the organization. Its specific goal, given the context of the transition from communism in Eastern Europe, is to guide the role of armed forces in a democratic society. The main principles of the Code include: non-recognition of territorial acquisition through violence; inviolability of borders; respect for the peaceful evolution in the constitution of states; prohibition of stationing foreign forces without the consent of the host state; recognition of the principle of military sufficiency; restraint and transparency in arms transfers; democratic control by civilian authorities of military and paramilitary armed forces; and the commitment of states to resort to OSCE machinery in the field of conflict prevention, crisis management and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

At Review Conferences in 1997 and 1999, participating states were extremely supportive of the Code's implementation, and several delegations credited it with helping them to achieve democratic control of their armed forces. In addition, the Code of Conduct has come to be viewed as an innovative instrument for conflict prevention, based on setting up norms for acceptable behaviour in the OSCE area. In the future, the Code could develop new salience with the expanded involvement of armed forces in international peacekeeping and crisis management.

⁸ The principal objections came from those countries not party to the CFE – particularly the neutral countries – who were concerned that the Treaty's arms limitation and verification measures disadvantaged those whose forces were primarily non-active and defensive. In addition, it was initially difficult for Soviet successor states to report on existing weapons systems or to determine defence budgets.