

# Latvia and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

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Latvia became a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on 10 September 1991. Membership in the OSCE ensures Latvia with an opportunity to defend its national interests by participating in the political and political-military decision-making process and by strengthening its role in international affairs.

During the first half of the 1990s, at the request by Latvia, the OSCE was involved in the implementation of the agreement of the withdrawal of the Armed forces of the Russian Federation and the closure and liquidation of Skrunda radar station. OSCE continues to monitor the implementation of the treaty on social security of Russian military pensioners in Latvia. At the end of 1993, an OSCE mission to Latvia was established. Its mandate stated that it should address citizenship and related issues. Since 1993, there have been regular visits to Latvia by experts of the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities, as well as a regular correspondence with Latvian officials on the fulfillment of the issues included in the mandate. Latvia has complied with virtually all recommendations by the OSCE on citizenship and language matters, which is why the OSCE Permanent Council decided to close the mission on 31 December 2001.

The OSCE's origins date back to the early 1970s, to the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the creation of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which during the Cold War served as an important multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiations between the US-led Western states and the Soviet-led Eastern block.

In the early 1990s, the CSCE established its own permanent structures, including a secretariat and institutions, and became an organization - the OSCE. Its headquarters are located in Vienna (Austria), where the permanent representation of Latvia to the OSCE also operates.

OSCE comprises 57 participating States and works towards conflict prevention, including through the use of rapid response instruments, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in the continental Europe.

The OSCE has a comprehensive approach to security encompassing three dimensions:

- the politico-military, centered on arms control and confidence-building measures;
- the economic and environmental, promoting good governance, tackling corruption and raising environmental awareness;
- the human dimension, in which the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law are promoted.

OSCE focuses on preventive diplomacy through:

- the permanent political dialogue in Vienna;
- the work of the Chairmanship of the OSCE;
- mediation activities (for example, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the OSCE Minsk Group, the Transnistrian conflict and the Ukrainian crisis);
- the role of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM);
- OSCE's field operations deployed in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

All OSCE participating states have equal status, and decisions are made by consensus. The OSCE chair is assumed at yearly intervals by one participating State, which then plays the central role in managing the Organization's work and in its external representation. The 2021 OSCE Chairmanship has been assumed by Sweden, but in 2022 it will be handed over to Poland.

The OSCE's agenda continues to be influenced by the protracted conflicts within the OSCE area, as well as the ongoing crisis in and around Ukraine. The Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMMU) is OSCE's most expanded mission. This unarmed, civilian mission observes and reports in an impartial and objective way on the situation in Ukraine, and facilitates dialogue among all

parties to the crisis. Latvia participates in and provides financial support to SMMU.

Latvia sees the OSCE as a regional platform for States to co-operate in order to prevent escalation of conflict and strengthen stability by adhering to basic OSCE commitments. Conflict prevention and resolution in Europe must remain as the main objectives of the organization. Respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and safety of journalists, as well as monitoring of elections should remain important priorities in the mandate and work of the OSCE. Latvia engages in a constructive dialogue with OSCE institutions. Latvia has joined an informal OSCE Group of Friends of Environment.

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