

## The Helsinki Final Act: Historical Context

The Helsinki Final Act, signed on 1 August 1975, is both an historically significant document, and the basis for cooperative security in Europe.

The idea of convening a conference on European security was already floated in the 1950s, both by Winston Churchill in 1953, and then by the USSR in 1954. The idea was promoted by the Warsaw Pact, particularly as a way of maintaining the status quo in Europe – which is precisely why it was opposed by NATO countries.

In April 1969, the USSR again proposed that all European countries would take steps to summon a European security conference. Finland sought to generate support for the idea, and undertook shuttle diplomacy to organize a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. However, the West insisted on talks to reduce conventional armed forces in Europe, and substantial progress on the questions of Germany and Berlin. As time went on, some Western countries also pushed for consideration of the issue of the free movement of people, information and idea – what became known as “the human dimension”. Sufficient progress on these issues was made by late 1972, which enabled planning to begin on preparatory meetings for a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Helsinki Consultations took place in three stages between July 1973 and July 1975. A Summit, attended by the Heads of State and Government of the 35 CSCE countries, was held in Helsinki between 30 July and 1 August 1975. The Final Act was signed on 1 August 1975.

The Helsinki Final Act is regarded as a keystone of the European security architecture, particularly because of its ten principles guiding relations between states.