The assumption that underlay Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko’s approach to international relations in the mid 1970s was that the sovereignty of states was paramount. In his view, the inviolability of frontiers and non-interference in internal affairs were fundamental principles for the future of peace. These issues could determine war and peace. However, having access to foreign newspapers, reunifying with a foreign spouse or having the ability to travel abroad to visit a sick relative were not seen as key questions in international relations.¹ According to the approach outlined by Gromyko in July 1974, each state should have the right to model its own society at will and protect itself against external interference. Such thinking shaped the Soviet strategy at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which assembled the representatives of thirty-five European and North American countries between July 1973 and August 1975.

Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev was even more categorical when he met French president Georges Pompidou to talk about the CSCE and other East–West issues a few months before Gromyko’s statement:

First and foremost, I declare that the Soviet Union is in favour of the most extensive relations and contacts permissible in the current conditions, for the improvement of cultural exchange and so on, for all measures which favour a better understanding between peoples. But if these issues are raised with the intention to shake our social regime, our answer will be a strong ‘no’.²

Brezhnev’s remarks illustrate perfectly Moscow’s desire to maintain the Westphalian system of international relations, which was based on
the domination of the states and respect for frontiers in international relations and had existed in Europe since the seventeenth century. In contrast to the Kremlin’s intentions, the CSCE eventually contributed to overcoming the Westphalian system. Although there are dissenters, many historians agree that the ‘Helsinki process’, or all of the diplomatic meetings that followed the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, influenced the events that led to the end of the East–West conflict and to the collapse of the Soviet bloc. In this sense, the CSCE, its evolution and the issues it raised were at the centre of the international relations of the second part of the twentieth century. Born of Soviet willingness to freeze the European political and territorial situation in order to preserve Moscow’s stranglehold over Central and Eastern Europe, the CSCE became during the 1970s the main forum of discussions between East and West and, consequently, a Western tool to observe the evolutions in the communist bloc and try to influence them.

Thus far, most accounts of the CSCE have emphasized diplomatic aspects of the Helsinki process. Scholars have examined the diplomacy that produced the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent CSCE documents from various national, regional and chronological perspectives. This book highlights instead the links among diplomacy, societies and human rights. The collected chapters analyse the broader political and societal context of the CSCE.

**Negotiating the Helsinki Final Act**

The CSCE negotiations did not begin favourably for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Community (EC) countries. When the multilateral preparatory talks (MPT) of the CSCE started in November 1972 in Helsinki, the United States was still entangled in Vietnam, the difficulties of the dollar were harming transatlantic relations, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which had severely repressed the Prague Spring in August 1968, seemed more powerful than ever in Central and Eastern Europe. But it was precisely those elements that allowed the Western Europeans and their North American allies to shape the Soviet project of a conference on European security according to their views. On one hand, the United States’ obsession with Southeast Asian issues and its relative lack of interest in Europe convinced the European members of NATO that the CSCE offered an opportunity to assert themselves against the two superpowers. In addition, the Soviet will to avoid any development inside the Eastern bloc led the same countries to think about ways to help the
peoples trapped on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain. Henceforth the CSCE appeared as an ideal tool to satisfy both objectives. Between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the West Europeans accepted the Soviet idea of a conference on European security, if the issues of respect for human rights, cultural exchange, contacts between peoples and cooperation in the field of information would be included on the agenda of the conference.

These themes reflected the priorities of Western societies during the 1960s and 1970s. In most West European and North American countries (including neutral countries like Switzerland, Sweden and Austria), young people born just after the Second World War had yearnings for the new. Sexual liberation, the augmentation of individualism, overconsumption and hedonism, the weakening of traditional values like family, work, frugality, religion, the reduction of the working class and mistrust of the state, all of which was intensified by media coverage and the omnipresence of images, redefined the populations’ perceptions of their societies, their countries and the world. The Western and Neutral CSCE agenda reflected these new impulses and cannot be considered outside this broader context. Hundreds of diplomats who took part in it were immersed in the atmosphere of change that characterized those years. Even representatives of the Eastern bloc, who were exposed to the Western world at different junctures, were not cloistered from these social influences. For example, the Soviet diplomat Lev Mendelevich took advantage of his presence in Helsinki during the MPT to attend a showing of Pasolini’s Decameron, a film forbidden in the East because of its sexual nature.4

One of the novelties of the CSCE stemmed from the fact that EC and NATO countries as well as the Neutral states managed to insert themes into the conference’s agenda that reflected those evolutions, including cultural cooperation (opening movie theatres and reading rooms as well as eliminating barriers that prevented the circulation of cultural objects and artists), science and education (enhancing scientific exchange), diffusion of information (improving journalists’ working conditions as well as distributing the press) and human contacts (reunifying families as well as facilitating bi-national marriages and tourism).5 From 1973 onwards, these issues constituted the so-called third ‘basket’ of the CSCE, meaning a group of issues negotiated together.

In basket three, concrete measures complemented the principles of the ‘first basket’, among which respect for human rights figured prominently. The first basket also addressed inviolability of frontiers, state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. The Helsinki Final Act proclaimed that the principles guiding the relations between

participating states were equal and interdependent, putting respect for human rights on the same level as the Westphalian principles that were at the heart of the USSR policy aiming to freeze the European political and territorial status quo. Whereas the Soviets considered human rights as bourgeois privileges in contradiction of a communist ideal in which the collective good prevailed over the individual, the Westerners and the Neutrals managed to introduce into the Final Act some references to the non-Marxist conception of these rights by defining them as factors of peace. By including human rights among the principles guiding relations between states, the West weakened the value of sovereignty and non-interference. This aspect is key to the importance of the CSCE in the history of international relations.

The CSCE’s Surprising Significance

The CSCE, which brought together hundreds of diplomats during thousands of hours of meetings about diverse topics, might have failed. Yet it did not. Part of the success of the conference owes to the Western and Neutral use of traditional diplomatic methods – such as official multilateral discussions and unofficial bilateral meetings – to which the Soviets were attached. During these conversations, representatives of the European democracies tried to promote innovative themes corresponding to the realities of the European societies of the 1970s and later the 1980s. A second factor in the success of the Helsinki process was its long-term logic. The follow-up mechanism, or put differently a commitment to hold subsequent talks, was essential to understanding the impact of the conference during the last years of the Cold War. The follow-up meetings in Belgrade (1977–78), Madrid (1980–83) and Vienna (1986–89) not only evaluated the implementation of the CSCE provisions in the participating countries, but they also formed an excellent barometer of East–West relations. These follow-up meetings and the parallel processes and organizations they inspired ensured that during the last decade of the Cold War, social issues were at the forefront. Especially in the socialist bloc, it was increasingly difficult for people to endure the established political and economic system and for the authorities to face protest movements in, for example, Poland and the GDR. From 1972 to 1980, the CSCE embodied a permanent link between diplomats and society, which explains why the Helsinki process and its follow-up meetings could contribute to the end of the Cold War. First, the CSCE created a set framework of negotiation and cooperation by tackling constituent issues of East–West competition,
like borders, economy, science and industry, human contacts and culture. Signing the Helsinki Final Act should have meant that the leaders of each participating state accepted the legitimacy of a dialogue about human rights. In the Eastern countries such recognition was slow, which encouraged the development of independent political movements, exerting real pressure on their political authorities in favour of the implementation of the Final Act. Established in Eastern Europe and across the Soviet Union, groups such as the Ukrainian Public Group of Assistance to Implementation of the Helsinki Agreements in the USSR, the Working Commission to Investigate the Use of Psychiatry for Political Purposes and Charter 77 highlighted the gap between the promises of the agreement and actual government practice. They mobilized to measure implementation of the Helsinki Final Act and worked closely with sympathetic politicians, diplomats and activists to press for meaningful change.

Publication of the Helsinki Final Act in Soviet newspapers spurred non-governmental activity in the Soviet bloc. Several months later, the Soviet physicist and dissident Yuri Orlov announced the creation of the ‘Public Group to Promote Fulfillment of the Helsinki Accords in the USSR’. Constituted to ensure that the principle of human rights and the provisions of the third basket would be implemented in the USSR, the committee gathered numerous dissidents, including writer Alexander Ginzburg, historian Andrei Amalrik, writer and mathematician Anatoly Shcharansky, historian Lyudmila Alexeyeva and human rights activist Yelena Bonner. Similar groups were launched in other Soviet republics as well as in satellite countries, the most important and the most famous being Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. These groups soon came into contact and, in the USSR, formed a network with pre-existing religious and nationalist organizations.

The Kremlin observed with some concern a growing movement for human rights after Helsinki, beginning with the Committee for State Security (KGB) declaration that the group was illegal on 15 May 1976. The main response of the KGB was to use ‘psychiatric’ and ‘prophylactic measures’ against some dissidents. The authorities progressively increased arrests and sent activists into exile. Orlov and Ginzburg were arrested, as well as other members of the committee. Suppression also occurred in Czechoslovakia against the spokespersons of Charter 77, starting with Václav Havel. The repression of Helsinki monitors spurred support in the United States and Western Europe, eventually leading to the creation of a transnational Helsinki network.

Despite crackdown and renewed East–West tensions after 1977, the struggle for human rights in Central and Eastern Europe continued,

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and the Helsinki Final Act had unexpected influence in the transformation of Europe. During the last fifteen years of the Cold War, diplomats and activists at the successive meetings of the CSCE tried to maintain the tie between diplomacy, society and individual rights. In addition, Western embassies to Warsaw Pact states produced numerous reports on implementation (or non-implementation) of the societal provisions of the Final Act in those countries. This synergy between diplomatic activity and societal transformation within the Helsinki process peaked in 1986 when the non-governmental organizations were authorized to attend the official CSCE discussions in Vienna. This relationship persisted amidst the transformation of Europe between 1989 and 1992 when the CSCE evolved into the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

After the end of the Cold War, the CSCE remained a player in the field of cooperative security. Due to its role in overcoming the Iron Curtain, some states have even sought to transpose the CSCE model to other regions or continents, for example to the Mediterranean or East Asia.13

Changing Perceptions of the CSCE

As soon as the Final Act was signed, the CSCE was disparaged by numerous Westerners who saw in the conference merely an acknowledgement of the European status quo by the leaders of the West. Suppression of the Eastern dissidents who engaged in monitoring the Helsinki Final Act also created a negative perception of the CSCE. Since the 1990s, however, many researchers have been interested in how the Helsinki process contributed to the end of the Cold War. In particular, historians in Europe and the United States have worked to challenge such a perception. They took advantage of the opening of the archives of the former East, West and Neutral member states to start a historical investigation into the CSCE. Thus, national policies towards the Helsinki process have been thoroughly studied concerning the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the United Kingdom, France, the EC and Neutral countries like Sweden, Austria, Finland and Switzerland.14 Their work has led the CSCE to be regularly mentioned alongside more traditional explanations for the end of the Cold War such as Ronald Reagan’s arms buildup, Mikhail Gorbachev’s attempts at reform, the deterioration of the economic situation in the Eastern bloc, the role of the dissidents and the impact of Western culture on socialist societies.

A number of works, including by Daniel C. Thomas, Vojtech Mastny and Sarah B. Snyder, have sought to demonstrate the significance of the first and third basket provisions of the Helsinki Final Act. The chapters collected here build upon those earlier efforts while simultaneously pushing the analysis of the social and political context into new and fruitful areas.

What Follows

This book raises the question of the relationship between European and North American diplomacies and Western and socialist societies in the framework of the Helsinki process and of the debates of the late twentieth century about human rights. The goal is to show that, far from being a closed-circuit diplomatic machine, the CSCE resulted from the diplomatic, political and societal evolutions of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and that, at the same time, it had an influence on those evolutions. The authors of the chapters collected here look beyond diplomatic history to highlight the ways in which leaders and diplomats who had been committed from the outset to the Helsinki process construed the CSCE and, more importantly, the societies in which its provisions had to be implemented. Essential too is the issue of reception and implementation of the Final Act as well as the influence that NGOs, intellectuals, the media, dissidents, associations, artists, political parties and movements, parliamentarians, churches etc. had on diplomatic practices. Examining these ‘deep forces’, to use the language of historian Pierre Renouvin, is essential to understanding international relations. Analysing the ‘deep forces’ of the 1970s–1980s requires a focus on transnational networks committed to the defence of human rights and their involvement in the CSCE and the implementation of its provisions. The term ‘transnational’ refers to phenomena or histories that transcend national boundaries. Given that the nation state is not the primary unit of analysis in transnational histories, scholars focus more frequently on nonstate actors. Since the 1990s, scholars have shown that transnational networks, which participated in the promotion of a model of cooperative security embodied by the CSCE, played a determining role in ending the Cold War. Such a process was linked to the intensification of globalization at that time and to the increasing contestation of state monopoly in relations with the rest of the world.

This volume brings together fifteen researchers of nine nationalities, all experts in the Helsinki process. Their chapters form a coherent

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book that demonstrates collaboration and common reflection about the interaction between diplomacy, societies and human rights in the CSCE framework.

The book begins by analysing the role of diplomats and diplomatic machineries in the CSCE negotiations from Helsinki to Vienna and in the implementation of the Final Act as well as how these CSCE diplomats were shaped by their education, societies and generation. First, Andrei Zagorski presents the stakes and the evolutions of the CSCE human dimension, from the Helsinki negotiations to the post-Cold War period. His chapter provides an overview of the issues faced by the Western diplomats of the CSCE. Subsequent chapters by Martin D. Brown and Angela Romano, Nicolas Badalassi and Stephan Kieninger analyse British, French and American cases to show how Western diplomats committed to the Helsinki process experienced and perceived the CSCE. They highlight the ways in which the educational background of the diplomats, their career paths, their political opinions and their public commitments influenced the negotiations. The authors examine the diplomats’ room to manoeuvre vis-à-vis central administrations, their personal visions of the CSCE in comparison to the official stance of their country and the influence they had on political leaders and their relations with their foreign counterparts. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which the diplomats considered the CSCE and its consequences, the themes and strategies of negotiation they favoured, their level of knowledge of the European socialist societies, their potential links with political opponents or dissidents, their insertion in intellectual networks and their relations with the defenders of human rights or the NGOs that specialized in this field.

The transnational movements that defended human rights and the role of dissidence are the focus of the book’s second section. The chapters by Elisabetta Vezzosi, Christian P. Peterson and Jacek Czaputowicz analyse transnational debates on human rights stimulated by the Helsinki process. They show how networks organized on both sides of the Iron Curtain to obtain a genuine implementation of the decisions of the successive conferences from Helsinki to Vienna. They highlight how these groups perceived the CSCE and its follow-up meetings during the last fifteen years of the Cold War; they seek to evaluate the place the CSCE had in the discourse of opponents and dissidents from the East and their supporters from the West. These chapters clarify the different levels of transnational cooperation (East–West, East–East, West–West) that were central to the implementation of the CSCE provisions, via information sharing, mutual aid, international meetings or diffusion of ideas and writings.

Douglas Selvage’s chapter complements this picture by tackling the attitude of the security services of the Warsaw Pact towards Helsinki groups. He gives a detailed study of measures of suppression used by the Soviet and East German authorities against defenders of human rights. In this way, he demonstrates how the socialist regimes attached to the old Westphalian order and to the principles of non-interference and sovereignty of states faced the emergence of the transnational phenomenon.

Considerable research has shown how the Final Act’s liberal orientations influenced the Soviet bloc. Carl Bon Tempo takes a new approach in his chapter, showing that Western societies could also seize upon the Helsinki principles to underline the violations of human rights in the West. He analyses how the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the most important US civil rights group, and several organizations and personalities struggling for the liberalization of US laws on immigration used the participation of the United States in the CSCE to push national authorities into taking more concrete measures on their respective issues.

The final section of the book consists of four case studies on the different ways in which European countries tackled the stages of the CSCE and their consequences for both European societies and international relations. Each of the chapters by Maximilian Graf, Mathias Peter, Oliver Bange and Hamit Kaba considers a type or a group of countries whose foreign policy illustrates a special relationship with the Helsinki process, including the Neutral countries, NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Specifically, the chapters examine Austria, the FRG, Hungary, Poland, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and, finally, Albania. The inclusion of Albania is notable as it was the only European state not to take part in the CSCE.

Maximilian Graf presents the evolutions of the Central European countries towards the CSCE between 1975 and the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Subsequently, Mathias Peter demonstrates how the FRG managed to use the Helsinki process as both a tool of internal policy and a means of applying pressure on Moscow in the context of East–West tensions between 1977 and 1984. In his chapter, Peter pays particular attention to the fundamental break of Mikhail Gorbachev’s ascension in 1985 and how it was reflected in the CSCE process, especially in Vienna from 1986 to 1989. Oliver Bange focuses on the shift between Moscow and East Berlin in the second part of the 1980s, when Gorbachev showed his willingness to implement all the Final Act provisions in the USSR. Hamit Kaba explains the reasons for the non-participation of Albania, which have not previously been well understood. Each chapter locates

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the diplomatic process of the CSCE within the social and political contexts of their specific cases.

Overall, this book seeks to show that the CSCE was more than a diplomatic process. It was first and foremost a reflection of a time, linked to empowerment of individuals on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Western diplomats understood during the 1960s that the human rights rhetoric had to be used with subtlety if they wanted to change the Eastern bloc. The CSCE and the human contacts provisions of its third basket embodied such a subtlety. Henceforth, the CSCE appeared as a rupture within the long period of the Cold War by allowing international relations during the détente years to focus on the rights and the security of peoples rather than states’ prerogatives.

At the end of the Cold War, the will of the Europeans to institutionalize such a model of cooperative security explains why they sought, as early as 1989, to make the CSCE the privileged security framework within which reunification of the continent would occur. Although NATO finally became the cornerstone of European security after the Cold War, the CSCE texts continued to be reinforced after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, especially via the Charter of Paris for a New Europe (1990), the CSCE Helsinki Document of 1992 and the Budapest Document of 1994. As the CSCE transitioned to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), control instruments like the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights or the High Commissioner on National Minorities were created. Under the new OSCE the human dimension prevailed over its security aspects. Most importantly, the end of the Cold War and the pace of globalization in the 1990s meant the triumph of the transnational logic on which the Helsinki process had been founded. The CSCE’s progressive interaction between multilateral diplomacy, societal issues and transnational networks proves that the CSCE constitutes a fundamental step in the history of contemporary international relations.

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**Notes**

7. For example, the negotiations of the Follow-up Meeting in Belgrade were difficult because of renewed East–West tensions in 1977. The Madrid meeting was suspended in 1981 after the imposition of martial law in Poland.


19. For example, this is what Chancellor Helmut Kohl foresaw in the ‘ten points plan’ he presented on 28 November 1989 in view of the forthcoming German reunification.

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