


**Conference on the
50th Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act,
held under the auspices of
the President of the Slovak Republic**

**THE HELSINKI PROCESS
IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER:
SECURITY, COOPERATION,
AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

**Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia
2025**



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SECURITY, COOPERATION, AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Proceedings from the conference held on the occasion of
the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Helsinki
Final Act

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia

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SECURITY, COOPERATION, AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Conference on the 50th Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act

Auspices: President of the Slovak Republic

16 September 2025, Bratislava

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The recording of the conference is available at:

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FOREFRONT

Dear Readers,

It is with great honour and sincere gratitude that we present to you, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, these proceedings from the conference *The Helsinki Process in the Context of a New World Order: Security, Cooperation, and Human Rights*.

The principles of the Helsinki Final Act – the peaceful settlement of disputes, international cooperation, and the protection of human dignity – have shaped the European security order for decades. Today, however, they are being subjected to profound and serious tests. This anniversary therefore serves not only as an important historical milestone, but also as an opportunity to reflect on its legacy and contemporary relevance.

The conference, held on 16 September 2025 at the Zichy Palace in Bratislava, Slovakia, under the auspices of the President of the Slovak Republic, could not have taken place without the support, generosity, and dedication of many individuals and institutions. We therefore take this opportunity to acknowledge their intellectual, organisational, and financial contributions.

First and foremost, we wish to express our gratitude to the President of the Slovak Republic Peter Pellegrini, for granting his patronage to this event. His address, delivered on his behalf by Mr Ján Kubiš, Foreign Affairs and International Politics Advisor, reminded us that the Helsinki principles remain an irreplaceable foundation for cooperation in a time of increasing geopolitical tension.

My profound appreciation extends also to our institutional partners: the civic association Misia 89 for its professional and dedicated attitude; the Office of the Public Defender of Rights for its invaluable work in safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms; and the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, within the grant programme for the promotion, support and protection of human rights and freedoms, and for the prevention of all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and other manifestations of intolerance for the year 2025, made both the organisation of the conference and the preparation of this volume possible. I likewise wish to acknowledge the financial

contribution of the travel agency TUCAN, which afforded us important flexibility and contributed to the smooth course of the event.

My sincere thanks are due to all speakers, moderators, and participants—representatives of diplomacy, international institutions, public administration, academia, civil society, and the media. Your thoughtful insights brought depth and clarity to the discussions, reaffirming the significance of the Helsinki process at a time when the resilience of democracy, the protection of human rights, and collective security are confronted with new and difficult challenges.

A special expression of gratitude goes to the representatives of the Helsinki Committees and partner organisations from the Visegrad Group countries. Their participation underscored our shared regional responsibility for the protection of human rights and the principles of the rule of law. The spirit of cooperation—so essential in the early days of the original Helsinki process—remains a fundamental precondition for our common future.

I also wish to thank our international guests, online participants, media representatives, and all those present, whose thoughtful questions and contributions enriched the debates. Your engagement confirmed that the Helsinki Process continues to inspire dialogue and cooperation across borders and generations.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all authors of this volume, whose contributions preserve the intellectual value of the conference. My gratitude also goes to our editorial and coordination team for their meticulous work and professional standards.

Finally, I express my personal gratitude to my colleagues at the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia. Without your integrity, dedication, and daily efforts, neither the conference nor this publication would have come into being.

Special thanks are owed to our students and volunteers, whose energy, responsibility, and thorough work greatly contributed to the success of the event and stand as an example of civic engagement at the heart of the Helsinki tradition.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, we are reminded that peace and respect for human dignity do not arise of their own accord; they require courage, vigilance, and sustained effort. I trust that this volume will serve not only as a record

of an important gathering, but also as a contribution to strengthening human rights protection, revitalising multilateralism, and reinforcing democratic resilience in Europe.

Sylvia Tiryaki

Chair

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia

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INTRODUCTION

The fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act offers a valuable moment for reflection. It allows us both to recall the significance of one of the key milestones of post-war Europe and to reassess the foundations of European security, cooperation, and human rights protection at a time when these principles face renewed strain. The Helsinki process emerged in an environment marked by tension, mistrust, and deep ideological division, yet it developed into a framework that contributed meaningfully to the peaceful conclusion of the Cold War, shaped the events of 1989, and influenced the post-1991 European security architecture. In 2025, many of the commitments undertaken in Helsinki are again being challenged, questioned, or openly disregarded.

The Helsinki Final Act was negotiated in a Europe divided by the Iron Curtain and embedded in the rivalry between two political-ideological and politico-military blocs: the Western bloc, represented by France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and the Eastern bloc, led by the Soviet Union and its satellite states. These four victorious powers of the Second World War shaped the post-war order, dividing Europe — including Germany and Berlin — into four occupation zones. Over time, the Western powers recognised the expansionist tendencies of Soviet policy. President Truman's declaration of the containment doctrine in 1947, followed by developments such as the marginalisation of communist parties in Western Europe. The division of Germany soon became a central symbol of this confrontation. The establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in May 1949 and, in response, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in October 1949 confirmed the political split. The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961–62 then solidified the separation not only of two states but of two opposing systems.

Despite the risk of escalation, a historic opportunity emerged in the 1960s: a growing conviction that stability required predictable rules and space for dialogue. *Détente* – the process of the easing of tensions began. From this context arose the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), bringing together states that differed in almost everything except their shared interest in preventing conflict and establishing a clear framework for mutual relations. The negotiations produced the Helsinki Deca-

logue — ten fundamental principles governing interstate behaviour — and organised co-operation into three “baskets”: security, economic and environmental issues, and human rights. The third basket proved especially influential. It affirmed that human rights were not merely an internal matter, but a legitimate concern of the international community. Although not legally binding, this principle had profound normative effects. Civic initiatives began documenting violations, creating transnational networks, and giving voice to those facing repression. Helsinki committees were established, starting with the Moscow Helsinki Group in 1976, followed by similar organisations across Eastern Europe. In Czechoslovakia, Charter 77 became a defining force; in Poland, the Solidarność movement. Slovakia, as part of Czechoslovakia, was naturally woven into this broader transformation, which culminated in the events of November 1989.

The Helsinki process continued to evolve in the post-1989 era. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the democratisation of Central Europe, and the end of the Cold War marked a second major turning point. The 1990 Copenhagen Document codified standards for democratic elections, minority protection, the rule of law, and civil liberties. The Charter of Paris for a New Europe declared the end of ideological division and opened the way to a new model of cooperation. In 1994, the CSCE became the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The Helsinki process remains a continuous story: 1975 provided its foundations; 1989 demonstrated their transformative potential. The year 2025 invites reflection on how this legacy can be sustained. Although the principles of the Helsinki Final Act have in recent years been eroded in several contexts and multilateral institutions face political, financial, and geopolitical pressures, the discussions at the conference reaffirmed that cooperation remains essential.

This volume, *The Helsinki Process in the Context of a New World Order*, brings together contributions and discussions from the international conference held on 16 September 2025 at the Zichy Palace in Bratislava under the auspices of the President of the Slovak Republic. Organised by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia in cooperation with the civic association MISIA 89 and the Office of the Public Defender of Rights, the conference reflects the commitment of Slovak public institutions and civil society to strengthening human rights protection, democratic governance, and multilateral cooperation. We hope that this volume will contribute to ongoing dialogue on the future

of European security and support the effort to preserve and develop the legacy of the Helsinki process. The principles adopted in 1975 are not only part of Europe's historical heritage but also serve as guidance for its future.

The chapters of this volume address these themes from multiple perspectives. The first examines diplomatic and analytical approaches to the origins of the Helsinki framework, its security philosophy, and its relevance in the present geopolitical context. The second considers the role of civil society and the Helsinki committees, whose work translated the process from declarations into practical action, including within the V4 region. The third focuses on human rights — the ethical core of the Helsinki philosophy — analysing the rule of law, minority protection, institutional independence, democratic governance, and emerging challenges related to technology, hybrid threats, and climate change.

The history of the Helsinki process demonstrates that dialogue is possible even during periods of profound uncertainty, and that even non-binding commitments can shape history when they become part of civic engagement. Although today's Europe faces challenges that differ from those of half a century ago, the fundamental principles — the peaceful resolution of disputes, respect for human dignity and human rights, and the value of cooperation and trust — remain as relevant as ever.

LIST OF USED ABBREVIATIONS

CSCE – US Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe (so-called U.S. Helsinki Commission)

HVS – Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia

HFA – Helsinki Final Act

CSCE – Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe

KGB – Committee for State Security, the security and intelligence body of the Soviet Union in the years 1954 – 1991

FRG – Federal Republic of Germany

OCEEA – Office of the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities of the OSCE

ODIHR – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

UN – United Nations Organization

ŠtB – State Security

V4 – Visegrad group (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia)

ADDRESS OF THE CHAIR OF THE HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SLOVAKIA

Ladies and gentlemen, Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, colleagues, dear friends,

It is my great honour and privilege to welcome you all to today's conference, *The Helsinki Process in the New World Order: Security, Cooperation, and Human Rights*.

This conference marks the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and is held under the auspices of the President of the Slovak Republic. Today's event is organised by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia, in cooperation with the civic association Misia89 and the Office of the Public Defender of Rights of the Slovak Republic. It is also supported financially by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic and by Travel Agency Tucan.

Let me begin by sincerely thanking H.E. Mr Peter Pellegrini, President of the Slovak Republic, for his support and patronage. We are also deeply grateful to all our institutional partners, and to each of you who accepted our invitation to join us, whether here in person or online.

Exactly fifty years ago, thirty-five states gathered in Helsinki to sign a document that would redefine the very meaning of peace, cooperation, and sovereignty. The Helsinki Final Act not only eased Cold War tensions; it laid the foundation for a new understanding of security as inseparable from human rights. In doing so, it empowered civil society—especially in Central and Eastern Europe—to become a genuine force for democratic change. Many institutions we now take for granted—independent media, ombudspersons, and human rights organisations—were built on that momentum.

But history does not end with declarations. It demands sustained commitment. Today, we gather not merely to commemorate a treaty signed half a century ago. We gather

to reflect on a living legacy: a commitment to dialogue, peace, and the indivisibility of security and human rights.

On 31 July this year, the *Helsinki+50 Conference: Respecting the Legacy, Preparing for the Future* reminded the international community that the Helsinki Final Act was not only a diplomatic milestone but also a civic spark—one that gave rise to movements for human dignity across Europe and one that continues to inspire those who stand against oppression, war, and injustice.

Yet the message from *Helsinki+50* was clear: we must respond not with despair, but with renewed conviction, reclaiming the Helsinki Principles as a compass for our time. And it is in precisely this spirit that we convene here today in Bratislava.

We meet today in a unique setting, especially in these challenging times. Here together are representatives of civil society, international organisations, states, and governments, united by a common aim: to revisit the legacy of the Helsinki Principles in light of today's geopolitical and democratic challenges; to renew cooperation among civil society actors—not least the Helsinki Committees of Central Europe and the V4 countries; and to reaffirm the essential connection between active citizenship and security in an increasingly uncertain world.

Before we begin with our first panel, it is my honour to introduce a special message. Although he could not be with us in person, His Excellency Mr Peter Pellegrini, President of the Slovak Republic, has kindly prepared an address, which will now be presented by his Foreign Policy Advisor, Mr Jan Kubiš.

Thank you.

Sylvia Tiryaki
Chair
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

It is my honour to address you on this special occasion, the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Although I cannot be with you in person, I am grateful that Slovakia can host this conference under my auspices.

Fifty years ago, the Helsinki Final Act showed that even in times of mistrust, nations could choose dialogue over division. It was not a treaty in the legal sense, but it became a moral compass. It affirmed values that remain timeless: respect, cooperation, and human dignity.

For Slovakia, these values are not abstract. We are a nation that regained freedom after years behind the Iron Curtain. We know that liberty and democracy must never be taken for granted. Like the heroes of our own history, who resisted oppression, we must also carry forward their message: that peace and freedom depend on courage, unity, and responsibility.

Today, we live in a world of new challenges. We see polarization, disinformation, and a loss of trust in institutions.

Hostility can grow quickly, and divisions can weaken even strong societies. History reminds us where such steps may lead. That is why we must stand firm in protecting dialogue, tolerance, and cooperation.

The Helsinki process taught us that real security is not only about armies and borders. It is also about trust between nations and respect within societies. It is about creating a space where governments and citizens work together, where differences do not divide us but inspire us to find common ground.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, born from this process, still provides such a space. It continues to unite states and societies, even in difficult times.

It facilitates exchange, monitors elections, and protects fundamental rights. Its work remains indispensable for multilateralism and underlines the need for stronger international and regional organizations. Because only when dialogue and cooperation are based on respect for international law, and supported by strong multilateral institutions, can we create a safe and secure environment for our citizens.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act is more than a commemoration. It is a call to responsibility. We owe it to the generations before us - and to the generations after us - to defend the principles of peace, dignity, and solidarity.

Let us not allow mistrust and hostility to shape our future. Let us keep alive the spirit of Helsinki, just as we keep alive the memory of those who fought for freedom in our own history.

Fifty years later, the Helsinki Final Act is still a promise: that dialogue and cooperation can prevail over conflict and mistrust. It is our duty to make sure this promise remains real - for our citizens, for Europe, and for the world.

Thank you.

Peter Pellegrini
President of the Slovak Republic

Chapter 1

THE HELSINKI IMPULSE FOR EUROPEAN DIALOGUE

Bakyt Dzhusupov

Co-ordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA)

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

President Pellegrini,

Excellencies,

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the name of the OSCE Secretary General, Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu, let me first and foremost thank you, and Slovakia, for paying attention to this important anniversary, and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia for organizing this conference.

Your country has played a crucial role in our Organization, from its chairing in 2019 that is still fondly remembered, the Ministerial Council in Bratislava of the same year, as well as of course the strong legacy of Slovak diplomats in the OSCE – best embodied by Ján Kubiš, as one of our former Secretary Generals.

Throughout 2025, the OSCE and its supporters have reflected at numerous times about this anniversary, with a view to draw lessons for the future. Such as your country, the world has fundamentally changed in these past decades. We stand at a critical moment in history, one that will be studied and remembered by the generations that will follow.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Helsinki Final Act remains as relevant today as in the day it was signed, and I would hereby provide some arguments.

First, the Helsinki Final Act was a watershed moment in inter-state relations in Europe. It enshrined a set of ten guiding principles for relations among states – the so called Helsinki Decalogue. These principles, such as respect for sovereignty, non-use of force, the peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for human rights and others, created a shared

code of conduct accepted by all participating States. Beyond being a diplomatic compromise of its time, it established a framework through which profound differences could be addressed by dialogue, rather than confrontation.

And here I get to my second point. The Helsinki Final Act codified a revolutionary security concept – the comprehensive approach to security. The idea that security is not defined by ‘hard security’ considerations alone, but it entails economic, environmental, and human aspects. These elements affect each other, and only together create – in the vision of the signatories - true security.

I was just in Prague last week in my role as Coordinator of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, where in the framework of the annual Forum on economic and environmental aspects of security we also discussed the situation of the so-called second basket today. It was again confirmed that there was not only great potential in this dimension, and that we successfully delivered effective activities and results in this area fostering trust and confidence, but also that it is deeply interlinked, and should be, with the other two dimensions of security.

I am glad that my colleague Tea will thereby bring ODIHR’s perspectives into discussion later on as well. I am certain that my colleague will also stress that for men and women to live in security, they must enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as have economic opportunities, live in a healthy and thriving environment. One cannot underestimate the importance of this idea.

Now looking back to the early days of “*our OSCE history*”, it is crucial to recall that within just a few years after the Helsinki Final Act was signed, movements like *Charter 77* or *Solidarność* were re-shaping the landscape of political and civic participation in Eastern Europe.

I am glad that the organizers of today’s conference, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia build their work on the legacy and values of this movement, as these values remain highly relevant. And as you know very well in Slovakia, the influence

of the Helsinki Final Act on the events in the late 70s and 80s in Eastern Europe was very strong.

Finally, my third point. What the Helsinki Final Act did, beyond establishing principles for peaceful co-existence, dialogue and introducing a new era of political participation with the 'comprehensive approach to security', was to establish a path towards cooperation among States.

After Helsinki, "security" and "cooperation" go hand in hand, because the idea was, at the height of the cold war and of the fear of 'Mutually Assured Destruction', that deterrence alone was not going to keep us safe, we needed cooperation too. We needed to have a common stake into each other's business - that is the essence of cooperation, and that is the key legacy of Helsinki.

These three ideas - that principles of conduct among states must be respected, that security must be seen comprehensively, and that peace can be ensured via cooperation - are as true today as they were in 1975, when 35 States in Europe signed them.

Today, there is an urgent need to go back to those ideas. In Helsinki 50 years ago, participating States understood that principles alone cannot govern the world, they needed a home. The Act institutionalized the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which then became the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1994. The CSCE and OSCE are critical chapters in the last 50 years of the history of Europe, but what I want to say is that we will need them to be equally central in the next 50 years.

We do stand at a critical moment in history. As geopolitical divides deepen, we desperately need a forum for serious multilateral diplomatic engagement. We need a place, just like we needed in 1975 at the height of the Cold War and the 'bipolar disagreement', where we can talk. With all countries that share our destiny on our continent, whatever the political, economic and social path they choose.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our collective security architecture, which our founding fathers and mothers built, over decades of hard work and high prices, risks crumbling before us.

The principles enshrined in Helsinki have been violated and challenged. Trust among participating States has eroded. Consensus is harder to achieve than ever before. This cannot become the new normal.

Let me reiterate the OSCE Secretary General's call on participants at the recent Anniversary Conference in Helsinki.

We must start rebuilding a security dialogue that can slowly put the basis for a new security architecture. In order to do this, we need three crucial steps:

First: we need to end the wars. It is our duty to support efforts towards a negotiated settlement to end the war in Ukraine; and encourage the sides to continue meeting, and agree on further confidence building measures, including the release of prisoners – among them OSCE officials, Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov and Dmytro Shabanov.

Secondly: we need to recommit to the fundamentals. Our shared Helsinki principles must continue to live and guide us through these difficult times.

Thirdly: we need an honest discussion on how we got here - what went wrong. A meaningful security discussion will need to include an honest assessment of what we did wrong; what we condoned, which we should not have; and, what we underestimated. We need to go through that together, and listen to each other.

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

We are under no illusion that relaunching a multilateral diplomatic process today will be easy. And yet, precisely in such times, the logic of Helsinki remains essential. Security

is indivisible and, even if it is difficult, to rebuild trust it has to be through dialogue and cooperation.

What we need today is a forum for a serious multilateral diplomatic engagement. The OSCE retains the capacity and the tools to be that, and we stand ready to use our longstanding unique expertise and experience to support this.

Our work spans across a wide range of mandated areas in all three dimensions. We have plenty of existing dialogue platforms and cooperative tools, supported by concrete activities on the ground, at our disposal.

And here let me use this opportunity, and as the Co-ordinator of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, say a few words on my mandated area. By fostering economic, scientific, technological and environmental cooperation, “second basket” built interdependence that helped reduce mistrust. It created habits of dialogue in areas less politically sensitive, but deeply relevant to stability. And reminded us that economic prosperity and environmental sustainability are indispensable to long-term peace. Issues such as climate change, energy security, connectivity or fight against corruption are transnational by nature. They can not be addressed by one state alone, and they require exactly the kind of a dialogue and cooperative approach.

Today, this dimension is as relevant as ever, offering a unique opportunity to sustain dialogue by focusing on practical cooperation in above mentioned areas where interests converge. Hence serving as potential entry point for rebuilding trust.

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

The Helsinki Final Act was a bold achievement in an era of confrontation. It showed that even when trust is absent, the dialogue is possible. Even when interest diverge, principles can be agreed upon. As we look to the future, let us use Helsinki+50 to reaffirm it, to adapt it to new realities, and to ensure that dialogue and cooperation remain the heart of the security order.

I do hope with the contribution of our other panellists and in the course of the discussions today, we will further elaborate what the OSCE has done, is doing and could do for making the European security architecture more solid again.

Thank you for the invitation and your attention.

Tea Jaliashvili

First Deputy Director

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Human rights and democracy are fundamental for comprehensive security

The OSCE is grounded on the understanding that protection and respect for human rights are key ingredients of comprehensive security and stability in our region. This understanding was central to the Helsinki Final Act back in 1975; and it must be central to addressing today's challenges in our region.

Human rights violations, injustice, marginalization, discrimination and exclusion are contrary to human security, meaning they are contrary to genuine security that places the individual and their well-being and dignity at the center of security. But human rights violations and injustice also have further knock-on effects. They fuel grievances, instability and conflict. A lack of respect for human rights undermines trust within societies. It undermines trust between people, the state and its institutions; and it undermines trust between states. But without trust there can be no co-operation within and between states. And such co-operation is indispensable to be able to address the global challenges of our days effectively: from climate change to global health crises, from socio-economic instability to poverty, from political polarization to outright conflict.

This vision of security provided by the Helsinki Final Act has always included democracy and the rule of law. Genuinely democratic elections, respect for fundamental freedoms, and meaningful participation are not optional extras, but core elements of security and stability. They help build predictability and trust among states and ensure that institutions enjoy legitimacy at home.

It is no coincidence that ODIHR was first established as the Office for Free Elections. Election observation and assistance remain practical expressions of the Helsinki spirit, testing whether participating States live up to their commitments and helping them to address

shortcomings. In this way, our work on elections places human rights firmly within the security framework and demonstrates that democratic resilience is directly tied to peace and stability in our region.

In order to counter challenges and adverse trends, ODIHR's work is designed to strengthen the foundations of democratic resilience through the OSCE/ODIHR's comprehensive mandate. This mandate encompasses democratic institution-building, democratic law making, rule of law, and the protection of human rights, such as freedom of movement and migration with a strong focus on inclusion and equality. ODIHR is able to offer timely and comprehensive assistance and support to pSs, not only responding effectively to their needs but we are able to react and provide support to unforeseen emerging needs. Through targeted support states can be more resilient against internal and external interference and erosion of an institution's significance and integrity. The Helsinki Final Act promoted that human rights are inseparable from security, and this aspect remains critically relevant.

ODIHR, through comprehensive and strategic engagement with relevant public institutions of pSs, and in partnership with various key stakeholders, provides tailored support in an efficient, impactful and cost-sensitive way, supporting pSs in their efforts to effectively address existing and emerging challenges.

Thank you for allowing me to share ODIHR's work, I look forward to speaking more with all of you about the way forward.

Walter Kemp

Director of Communications

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime

Geneva Centre for Security Policy

Thank you very much for the invitation, Mrs. Chairman.

I have to say I am here today as representative of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, but also as a big fan of the OSCE. I had to think, seeing Ambassador Kubiš, that I started in the OSCE in 1992 when Czechoslovakia was in the chair. And it's great to be seeing him again today.

On the 31st of July this year, there was a big event in Helsinki for the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. You have to imagine it was in the Finlandia hall where the heads of state signed the Helsinki final act on 1st August 1975. There were about a thousand people in the room. The lights went down. I don't know if anyone else was there, but there was a choir of 50 men dressed in black. I think everybody was waiting for the Finnish national anthem or Finlandia or something. The director raised his baton and these men started shouting out the 10 principles of the Helsinki Final Act. And people were wondering what the heck is going on, because they didn't sing a note. We were told after they're called the choir of screaming men and they have never sung a note, they only scream. But I think this was symbolic of how we really need to remember and keep shouting out the 10 principles of the Helsinki Final Act. And also to remind us that 50 years later, these principles are probably more relevant than ever.

For many years after the end of the Cold War, I think many of us believed that there would be a kind of linear progression. I don't think we quite believed in what Francis Fukuyama described as the end of history. When you read the Charter of Paris from 1990, it looks like the end of divisions in Europe. I think as a result the Helsinki Principles were very much taken for granted. But in the past 15 years, most if not all of those principles have been violated, and not only by the Russian Federation. And it's only then that we realise how important they are.

Indeed, imagine putting the word not in front of every one of the ten principles and you would have a situation more or less like the way we find ourselves in today, and that is highly unstable. Therefore, to get out of this mess and restore order in Europe, states will need to go back to respecting those principles. But that will not be easy.

Some people around the time of this anniversary say let's go back to something like the CSCE, an open ended conference on the future security of Europe. However, the situation today is significantly different than the early 1970s. For at least five reasons.

First of all, back then, if you read even the first sentences of the Helsinki Final act, there was more or less broad agreement on the importance of detente. Now that's more or less gone. And there's no broad acceptance of shared rules that govern international relations, as Ambassador Kubiš mentioned. This also is apparent in the UN, as it celebrates its 80th anniversary.

Second, there's limited leadership or creative diplomacy. Compare the leaders in those black and white photos of 1975 or the leaders of the at the Charter of Paris in 1990 and those of today. Leadership is vital because security orders are built by design, not simply by muddling through. You hear a lot of people today talking about the importance of let's just muddle through, but there are limits to how long we can do that.

The third big difference is that there's an unclear balance of power, unlike in 1975 or in 1945 or even in 1918.

Today, there's also a limited role for civil society, which is why it's quite encouraging that there's so many people here today and that the V4 Helsinki Committees are keeping the flame alive. But generally you don't hear a lot of discussion in civil society about the enduring relevance of the Helsinki Final Act.

And finally, there's no shared sense of direction of where we go in the future. We're stuck in the present. We also have to acknowledge that there are inherent tensions between certain principles, such as self-determination on one hand, and territorial integrity

on the other. We need to figure out how to reconcile them. And we have to acknowledge that there are certain threats and challenges today which the drafters of the Helsinki Final Act didn't have to think about too much.

So climate change, the impact of technology and transnational threats. Furthermore, there's a significant backsliding towards illiberal democracy in several OSCE states, not least those west of Vienna, and has been mentioned this shrinking space for civil society.

Will these principles remain relevant for the next 50 years? I think we need to think of them as what they're called. They're not called founding principles; they're called guiding principles. Therefore, we need to put them at the core of any kind of forward looking orientation. Even though we're focusing very much on the Helsinki Final Act, we can't forget all of the other commitments that were made after 1970 in the human dimension, but also in other dimensions. We also need to keep in mind this close link between security and human rights, which was one of the key innovations of the Helsinki Final Act.

We reminded today, when people talk about the unviability of security, it's not only geographic; it's also this comprehensive linking of the various dimensions of security. Thus, in the current geopolitical environment, what could be a forward looking agenda?

If we can't go back to Helsinki and we probably can't move forward in something like a CSCE arrangement, I think we need to be realistic. Rather than rebuilding trust and cooperation, which is not likely anytime soon, we need to focus on a practical set of measures to manage distrust, promote restraint, reduce risks and work towards peaceful coexistence, at least in the short term. The focus is very much on the 1000 kilometre line of contact between Russia and Ukraine. But there's also a 5,000 kilometre line between NATO and Russia where we need to manage relations more predictably.

Also, I would argue that there are three things going on at the same time, three relationships or collisions that we need to manage. One is between Russia and the West, second one is between Russia and Ukraine, and the third is between Russia and the United States, and they're very much interlinked.

I would argue that you can't focus on the European security order without stopping the war in Ukraine, but vice versa, you won't be able to stop the war in Ukraine without a discussion on the future of European security. This is realpolitik. Talking about cooperation is not liberal internationalism. In the current context, it's all about putting down guardrails that we don't go over the edge even more. This will require dialogue.

Until recently, there hasn't been much dialogue. I have to say, actually, President Trump broke the ice in this respect. If Russia is quite rightly perceived as a big part of the problem, ignoring them is not going to go away. And as has been pointed out not least by Ambassador Kubiš, the OSCE is a logical place to have that discussion. The main mantra in the next few years will be deterrence, and obviously deterrence is vital. However, there is still a small space for dialogue and the need for managing de-escalation. That is to say, the OSCE could have its niche in that respect.

Indeed, it's precisely because there's so much instability in the OSCE area that we need to make more cooperative approaches. And let's not forget, we're talking not only about divisions between Russia and the West, between Russia and Ukraine, but there are other walls and barriers being erected in the OSCE area these days that we need to be careful of. Not only physical ones, but between truth and lies, between rich and poor, between leaders who follow the rules and leaders who break the rules and also divisions caused by fear. If we don't overcome these divisions, we face a future that's even more dangerous and unstable than the situation that we find us in at the moment.

Therefore, I encourage us all to use this Golden Jubilee of the Helsinki Final act to recall the importance of that document, but not only as an historic event, rather to use the principles as an impulse and an inspiration to guide us towards a more stable future.

Thank you, Mrs. Chairman.

Ján Kubiš

The Third Secretary General

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Distinguished Participants,

Allow me to begin by emphasising a single fact: this meeting is convened with the joint participation and support of the Helsinki Committees of the Visegrád Group countries (V4). I consider it highly significant, and I am very pleased that the Helsinki Committees of the V4 states reaffirm their commitment to the Helsinki process through their past activities and mutual cooperation – and, it is to be hoped, through future endeavours, which it would be desirable to strengthen.

In my brief intervention, which is intended to complement the message of the President, I wish, on the basis of personal experience, to recall a number of moments from the past and to offer a few reflections on the present and future.

I have actively followed the Helsinki process at many stages of my life. During the previous regime, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague, I was also engaged with the then Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). I participated in numerous ministerial and expert-level meetings. In 1992, Czechoslovakia chaired the CSCE, and its Secretariat was established in Prague – prior to the transformation of the CSCE into the OSCE – and subsequently relocated to Vienna.

The Helsinki process, in the context of East-West relations characterised by a combination of deterrence and détente, was received in socialist Czechoslovakia with a mixture of hope and apprehension, particularly regarding the CSCE commitments to human rights and civil society. Participating states reserved the right to raise and respond to such issues as needed, rather than regarding them as strictly internal affairs beyond external scrutiny. Consequently, these questions often became, at times even as a priority, subjects of critical assessment. I can unequivocally affirm that this constituted one of the principal concerns of the Czechoslovak authorities at the time.

I recall Western visitors coming to Prague to meet with dissidents, to converse with them, to encourage them, and thereby to send a clear signal to the entire society that fulfilling these CSCE commitments was of crucial importance. I am gratified that many of us continue to recognise and value the significance of such actions in the history of the OSCE and our states.

A particularly momentous development of that period was the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, the Soviet Union, and the former Yugoslavia. At that time, questions arose as to whether some of the former Soviet republics should even be incorporated into the CSCE process, whether they would accept its commitments, or pursue an alternative course. I recall, as a representative of the Czechoslovak CSCE Chairmanship, travelling with other diplomats and foreign experts to the newly independent states of Central Asia for consultations.

We asked: How do you envision your future and internal development? With whom do you wish to cooperate, within what framework, and on the basis of which principles and commitments? I recall discussions in certain European capitals, where it was suggested that there was no need to engage with Central Asia, that attention could suffice at Russia, a so-called traditional partner. We, however, were convinced – and I was pleased to hear this also from the highest representatives of all Central Asian states – that it was important to extend the validity of the Helsinki Final Act and all CSCE commitments to this region, integrating it within the framework of pan-European cooperation.

This experience proved invaluable in later stages of my life, when I served within the CSCE, and subsequently the OSCE, whether as Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre or as Secretary General. In numerous countries, I repeatedly conveyed the message that the Helsinki process, including its commitments relating to fundamental freedoms and rights, constitutes an integral part of the heritage and obligations undertaken by all OSCE participating states, obligations from which they cannot shirk.

We frequently engaged in challenging discussions. I held meetings with various leaders, which were not always pleasant. I recall instances in which meetings were concluded abruptly because I raised issues of human rights or the implementation of other commitments, such as elections. We also debated security-related matters, including

the reduction of armed forces and the establishment of new military structures in post-Soviet states, as well as developments in the Western Balkans. These discussions encompassed questions of conflict prevention and cessation: on what principles? What model of post-conflict cooperation should be established?

These were not easy tasks; often we proceeded against the prevailing currents, even during the OSCE's most successful periods. Many issues arose concerning elections, enabling the activities of opposition and civil society, fundamental freedoms and rights, and the rule of law. Several post-Soviet states opted to close OSCE missions with comprehensive mandates and replace them with Offices of the Special Coordinator for Projects, considering this a "depoliticised" solution focused on specific practical areas, which allowed the state greater control over activities and ensured no deviation from the narrow mandate towards the comprehensive fulfilment of OSCE commitments.

Of course, there were numerous successes. Among them was the Charter for European Security, adopted at the Istanbul Summit in 1999, which I attended as OSCE Secretary General. Regrettably, even commitments made there were not always fully implemented, which undermined trust in the OSCE.

Nevertheless, the OSCE retains the potential to endure as a pan-European platform for security and cooperation oriented toward the future. Following the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the OSCE is, in many respects, paralysed. Is it dead? Certainly not. The OSCE remains relevant. Its tools, institutions, missions, and engagement in addressing new security threats – including cybersecurity, organised crime, human trafficking, terrorism, and extremism – remain pertinent and continue to develop.

The OSCE can also serve as a model or framework for promoting measures to enhance mutual trust and cooperation, for example in the Middle East. Such discussions were already underway during my tenure: as Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre, I visited many countries in the region and engaged in discussions regarding what measures were acceptable to them. Recent developments in the region could reinvigorate this idea.

I am confident that the OSCE, and indeed the United Nations, can continue to provide advice, support, and expertise in the present era. We are witnessing a historic transformation of international relations in all dimensions, marked by the dismantling or at least weakening of frameworks and instruments of cooperation and security in Europe and beyond, and by the relativisation of international obligations, norms, and principles of international law.

The UN, in certain respects, is likewise paralysed, as the Security Council often fails to reach decisions on critical matters of peace and security. Fortunately, the UN General Assembly, though unable to confer operational or binding mandates, can provide political and moral authority. Its efficacy, however, depends on the member states and the Secretary-General, who cannot act without their financial and political support, against the will of the Security Council.

The OSCE has, in some respects, become a victim of its own prior successes and activities within its mandates and commitments, which have not always been agreeable to all parties. Nonetheless, I remain convinced that the OSCE constitutes one of the key platforms capable of contributing to the restoration of stability, predictability, and cooperation in Europe; to the revival and reconstruction of a pan-European security architecture.

No other regional pan-European organisation exists. Despite statements occasionally emanating from Moscow – for instance, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov once described the OSCE as obsolete – I do not share this view. The OSCE remains important even for Russia. While Russia today prioritises the creation of a Euro-Asian security system, it cannot bypass the Euro-Atlantic security and cooperation architecture without generating even greater instability, with significant confrontational potential given the new division of East and West by a figurative new Iron Curtain.

Reviving the pan-European security and cooperation architecture can only be considered in parallel with a political resolution of the war in Ukraine, encompassing security guarantees both for Ukraine and, to some extent, for Russia. An agreement cannot be reached without addressing the concerns of both parties. This will mark the beginning of the OSCE's restoration. Both countries, as well as all others, require a pan-European

security system – from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The key cornerstone must be an agreement between Ukraine and Russia, paving the way for the cessation of this tragic war and for stable, sustainable peace founded upon mutually acceptable compromise.

In conclusion, the OSCE has a future and will continue to do so. The situation will be analogous, though not identical, to that of the past. The OSCE's multilateral and comprehensive commitments in all its domains, as well as agreements aimed at enhancing transparency, predictability, trust, and security, including arms control, will need to be revitalised and brought back into practice. Deterrence and détente will once again function as two interlinked factors in shaping a new architecture and system of cooperative and comprehensive security and cooperation within the OSCE framework.

Thank you for your attention.

Jordan Warlick

Political Officer

Commission for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to join you today under the auspices of the President of the Slovak Republic, as we mark fifty years since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. I am especially grateful to speak as a representative of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, a body created by our Congress precisely because of the impulse the Helsinki Process set in motion.

When the Final Act was signed in 1975, many in the United States initially saw it with skepticism. Critics worried that it legitimized post-World War II borders and offered too much to Moscow. Yet others – particularly some members of Congress and human rights advocates – saw something else: an opening. The Final Act fundamentally reframed the idea of security and introduced human rights as a legitimate international concern. It declared that true security is inseparable from human dignity.

That insight is what led the U.S. Congress to create the Commission on Security and Co-operation in Europe – the “U.S. Helsinki Commission” – in 1976. Members of Congress wanted to ensure that the United States would take seriously its obligations under the accords – especially in the third dimension which didn’t seem to be as much of a priority for the Executive Branch – and create a bipartisan, bicameral commission that would hold other signatories to account and monitor compliance with the Helsinki principles.

Over time, the Commission became not only an oversight body, but also an engine for advancing human rights and democracy in U.S. foreign policy. During the Cold War, our Commissioners met regularly with dissidents, religious leaders, and civil society activists from across the region. These brave people understood the power of the “third basket,” the human rights commitments, and the Commission worked to amplify their voices on Capitol Hill and in U.S. diplomacy.

The human dimension truly inspired civil society across this region. And it was civil society that ultimately led their nations out of communism. Movements like Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, Solidarity in Poland, and the refusenik campaign in the Soviet Union all drew strength from the recognition that their struggles were not “internal affairs” but legitimate international issues. The Helsinki Final Act planted the seeds, but it was the courage of citizens, journalists, trade unionists, and activists that brought democracy to life. It is inspiring that some of the organizations that trace their roots to that period are represented here today.

I’ve had the privilege of traveling through this region with our Commissioners, Members of Congress, in recent years. I’ve seen how moved they are by what has been achieved. They remember meeting dissidents in the 1980s. Today, they visit free and thriving societies—NATO Allies, EU members, vibrant democracies. It is deeply inspiring for them, and a reminder of how ideas written on paper in 1975 helped empower people to change history.

Of course, the work is not finished. Russia’s war on Ukraine is not only an assault on sovereignty and territorial integrity; it is also an attack on the Helsinki principles themselves. Russia’s war of total aggression violates all ten of the principles in the Decalogue. We often repeat these words in conference rooms – but we cannot lose sight of their real meaning: the devastation this war has inflicted on Ukrainian families, schools, communities, and entire ways of life. It is so horrific that it forces us to ask: what is the point of this work, if we cannot prevent such senselessness?

But the answer is that the work is for the future. It is for the possibility of preventing the next war, the next atrocity, the next attempt to erase human dignity. The Final Act did not stop conflict or repression overnight. What it did was create space – space for ideas, for accountability, for civil society to grow strong enough to challenge authoritarian systems. And that is what we must continue to do today.

The institutions that grew out of the Helsinki Process are more important than ever. The OSCE and ODIHR provide platforms for dialogue, tools for monitoring, and a framework for cooperation. They are not perfect institutions, but they are vital ones. They give

voice to civil society, they shine light on abuses, and they remind governments of the standards they themselves agreed to uphold. At a time when multilateralism is under pressure, these institutions are a reminder of why we built them in the first place.

For the U.S. Helsinki Commission, our work today builds directly on that legacy. We continue to call out human rights violations in Russia, Belarus, and elsewhere. We press our government to support free media, protect civil society, and stand with political prisoners. And we remind policymakers in Washington that America's security is bound to Europe's security – and that neither can be separated from the protection of fundamental freedoms.

This summer, on August 1st, Senator Roger Wicker, our Commission Chairman, together with all of our Senate Commissioners, introduced Senate Concurrent Resolution 20. The resolution recognizes the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and reaffirms the United States' commitment to its principles. Importantly, it is bipartisan. At a time when divisions are real in Washington, there is unity on this point: that the principles of Helsinki – sovereignty, human rights, cooperation – remain at the core of our foreign policy and our vision of European security.

So, as we commemorate this anniversary, we should remember: the Final Act planted the seeds, but it was people who made them grow. Civil society, dissidents, ordinary citizens – they were the ones who transformed this region into the vibrant democracies we see today. And now it falls to us, across governments and institutions, to carry that work forward.

That means defending the sovereignty of Ukraine. It means supporting the next generation of journalists, activists, and parliamentarians. It means recommitting to the idea that security and human rights are inseparable. And it means keeping alive the spirit of Helsinki: that even in moments of deep division, cooperation based on principles can create the conditions for change.

The U.S. Helsinki Commission is proud to be part of this effort. And I am honored to join you here in Bratislava to say, fifty years on, that the promise of Helsinki endures – and that together, we must make sure it continues to do so for the next fifty years. Thank you.

Chapter 2

**THE HELSINKI PROCESS & ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP
PLATFORM**

Miroslav Krutina

Chair

Czech Helsinki Committee

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address this conference, which commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. A document that brought with it a commitment to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms – and one that changed history. The Helsinki Act became a source of inspiration for civic initiatives across Central Europe, and ultimately for the creation of our Czech Helsinki Committee.

The Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee was established in 1988 – at a time when speaking about human rights meant risking one’s freedom and future. Its founders – building on the work of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted, Charter 77, and other initiatives – sought to confront the regime with its own international obligations and to defend the victims of communist repression.

After 1989, the Committee continued its work. The transformation of a totalitarian justice system did not happen overnight. On the contrary, the onset of the free market and the transfer of parts of the former communist structures into this new environment created the harsh atmosphere of the so-called “nineties.” It was during these years that the battle was fought over whether our republic would fall into clientelism and corruption, or whether it would become a state governed by the rule of law. The Czech Helsinki Committee was intensely engaged in this democratization process. Our annual reports on the state of human rights, public statements, and concrete interventions in cases of injustice built a reputation for the CHC that has endured to this day. At the end of 1992, the Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee – like the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic itself – divided into two independent entities.

From 1992 to 2004, the process of preparing for the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union was the central framework for our arguments, legislative proposals, and initiatives. This was a period of the Committee's greatest public engagement. As a proud member of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, the CHC was one of the most prestigious and influential NGOs in the country.

Our staff had extraordinary authority – including free access to prisons and police facilities without prior notice. The CHC organized expert conferences and symposia with the participation of leading state officials and judges. Our presence in the media was virtually permanent.

The accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union in 2004 was a historic milestone. In terms of human rights, it meant above all that our standards had to align with those of Europe. The CHC became not only an observer but also a partner – monitoring whether Czech laws and their application corresponded with European and international commitments.

At the same time, it became necessary to adapt our agenda to the new conditions. Space opened for new priorities: gender equality, minority rights, and the rights of migrants. The Committee engaged in European debates, cooperated with partner organizations in Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, and continued the tradition of monitoring domestic issues – from prison conditions to discrimination against Roma to the scandal of forced sterilizations.

In the past decade, much of the CHC's work was devoted to social counselling. This project, funded annually by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, allowed us to employ lawyers and social workers who helped people in need navigate the system and overcome difficult life situations. Yet from the beginning, the natural role of the Czech Helsinki Committee has been independent oversight, critical monitoring, and speaking out when the state or its institutions fail to respect human rights.

We therefore chose to leave social counselling to other NGOs, and at the end of 2023 brought this activity to a close – while simultaneously launching new projects rooted

in our traditional mission. The illusion that EU accession had solved the core human rights issues has slowly dissolved. More and more, the CHC is being called upon to address questions of the rule of law and criminal justice. In 2024, we immediately began a new generation of projects:

- Compensation for Unlawful Sterilizations – providing qualified legal aid to women sterilized between 1966 and 2012. This project not only helps victims directly but also raises public awareness and promotes cooperation across the NGO sector.
- “Being Together is Healing” – currently our largest project, building on the earlier campaign
- “Being Together is Normal,” which exposed the ongoing practice of separating children from their parents during hospital stays. Today, the project works to expand good practice standards in hospitals and raise awareness among healthcare professionals.
- Prison Monitoring – a long-standing project of the CHC. Our staff visit prisons, communicate with prison personnel as well as inmates and their families, and investigate complaints. Our most recent findings highlight problems of overcrowded dormitories, inadequate healthcare, the need for continuous rehabilitation work with prisoners, and broader penal policies – since recidivism rates remain extremely high, and the Czech prison population is two to three times larger than in Western European democracies.
- Children of Incarcerated Parents – we are now seeking support for a project that will improve the collection and recording of data concerning this highly vulnerable group.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Helsinki Final Act was signed fifty years ago by statesmen, but it was given real life by citizens – by those who believed that human rights are not just words on paper, but a shared commitment to every individual. The Helsinki Committees offered to carry this commitment forward within civil society, and they continue to do so. The Czech Hel-

sinki Committee has embraced this tradition since its very beginning and intends to remain faithful to it. I believe this meeting will provide new momentum for cooperation among the Helsinki Committees of the Visegrád countries.

Our deep gratitude goes to the Chair of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia, Sylvia Tiryaki, who has devoted immense personal energy and time to organizing this gathering. And let me also thank to the host and all the partners of this extraordinary event.

Thank you for your attention.

Maciej Nowicki

Chair

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Poland

Thank you very much.

I know András well, as our committees have worked very closely together for many years. It is, however, a genuine pleasure to sit at the same table with you, Dagmar, and likewise with Sylvia and Miroslav. It is not that we have not cooperated with Slovak and Czech partners — we work with Via Iuris, Jeden Svet, and the Prague Civil Society Centre — but it is good to be together as one family, to sit down and explore what we can achieve collectively.

I usually do not write down my speeches. Today, however, I did so for translation purposes, and I shall refer to that text. Let me begin by noting that when I introduce myself abroad and say that I represent the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, I often have to explain that we are a Polish organisation with no connection to Finland; our name refers to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, invoked by our founders. This illustrates how little known the Helsinki Process has become, and at the same time confirms that conferences such as this one are genuinely necessary.

Aside from foreign countries we give this very explanation even in Poland. One of the theories that has circulated in recent years as to why we did not become the target of attacks during the propaganda campaign against supposedly foreign-funded organisations was that some people in government may have believed that we were openly financed from abroad, or that we were simply a foreign organisation. I do not believe, however, András, that you could rely on anything similar in your government's case, unfortunately. But enough joking — let us turn now to the Helsinki Final Act and to human rights activism.

The negotiators of the Helsinki Final Act did not intend it to become a catalyst for human rights activism. As Professor Samuel Moyn, one of the leading scholars of the history of human rights, has noted — and as was rightly mentioned in the first panel — the aim

of the Western bloc was to ease tensions with the Soviet bloc, while the USSR expected, among other things, the confirmation of the incorporation of the Baltic States through the inclusion of the principle of the inviolability of borders.

Let us recall that the Helsinki Process was, for precisely this reason, heavily criticised. The Act itself became the object of sharp criticism, including from Jimmy Carter, who was otherwise an absolutely pivotal figure in the international rise of the human rights idea. Politicians, therefore, were not thinking seriously about fostering human rights activism. Yet, as we know, the Act became, in the long run, an extraordinarily important pillar of dissident movements in Central and Eastern Europe, contributing to the fall of totalitarian rule in this region. This happened because dissident groups were emerging in ways that sought support in international documents affirming the authorities' commitment to respect human rights. This was how they existed.

What does this history teach us? Above all, I believe it demonstrates a certain mutual dependence. On the one hand, international human rights agreements are empty without civil society — without people who take them absolutely seriously and put them into practice. On the other hand, human rights movements, including the Helsinki committees, need international law and political commitments, even when those in power do not take them seriously. This holds true even today, in a period of deepening crisis of international law and multilateralism.

The founders of the Helsinki committees and other dissident movements of the 1970s and 1980s were fully aware of the cynicism of the authorities, but it was enough that they themselves were not cynical. Their work derived its legitimacy from invoking the commitments that the authorities had themselves undertaken. They took those commitments seriously and monitored whether they were fulfilled — or, more often, pointed out that they were not.

Dissidents lived as though human rights were genuinely applied, because they believed that, in a fundamental moral sense, they were. In this context, one of the rights listed in the Act is particularly noteworthy: the right of the individual to know and to act upon

his rights and duties. The text speaks of his rights and duties; over time, this has fortunately evolved.

Allow me to return briefly to the lessons of the Helsinki Final Act. The inclusion of the principle of the inviolability of borders in the so-called Decalogue was presented by Soviet propaganda as a major diplomatic victory. But we should remember that this was during the Cold War, at a time when neither side was willing to resort to armed aggression, and when there were, on the contrary, prospects for *détente*.

Today, we live in a different world — one in which a state border in our neighbourhood has been violated by force, leading to the gravest breaches of human rights. While a degree of dialogue is important for achieving peace, we — even as human rights movements — should be extremely careful not to confuse a cold war with a hot one. Nor should we confuse *détente* with appeasement, which history teaches us would be a tragic mistake.

Let us return to the dissidents of the 1970s. What remains inspiring today in their attitude and manner of action? It is not only their strategy. It is their understanding of human rights themselves. To borrow a phrase from Václav Havel, in this interpretation the “power of the powerless” is a moral critique of politics rather than a practical political tool. It is a concept of human rights that quietly revolutionised the world in the 1970s — a concept to which dissident movements in our region contributed significantly. It was born out of despair, from the belief that the political system was entirely closed and unreformable, and that nothing could be achieved within it. It is a concept of human rights designed for dark times.

Today, in a period of acute crisis, this concept may speak to us with even greater urgency. After the peaceful revolution of the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a widespread sense that the system had opened, that we could help shape it, and that fundamental rights and freedoms had become cornerstones of our reborn states. As we know, that period is now behind us — at least for the time being. It is not clear how deep the current crisis will become, or to what extent the idea of human rights will be pushed out of the political mainstream. One current public official in Poland has described the

broad coalition of organisations focused on protecting human rights, including the Helsinki Foundation, as *“idealists detached from reality”*.

If the crisis deepens further, we do not know to what extent we may have to return to our roots — to the realisation that all our strength lies in our independence. We may develop new forms of activity arising from different goals and tactics. However, I believe that certain experiences of those who remember the Helsinki Process in its “golden age” after the fall of communism remain relevant for us as Poles.

First, although today we use various working methods, we can still say that we are, above all, a non-governmental organisation monitoring respect for human rights. It ranges from monitoring and research to advocacy and legal action, including strategic litigation, as well as education and shaping public debate. One of our founding stories is the so-called Madrid Report, which the underground Helsinki Committee in Poland smuggled inside a candle to the CSCE conference in Madrid in 1983. This report documented human rights violations in Poland. The committee’s hallmark, established in 1982, was its precise and professional documentation of violations. It is important to note that the role of independent monitoring was, and remains, closely connected with political independence — independence from political parties and from participation in partisan power struggles. Otherwise, human rights become political in themselves.

In 1989, many members of the Helsinki Committee entered the first non-communist government, parliament, or senior judicial bodies. The committee subsequently decided that all those members should leave (with a slight delay in the case of the judiciary), and that the committee should not use government funding. This rule was eased only slightly in 2004, and not in relation to monitoring human rights violations or legislation. These principles, entirely understandable in light of our history, are far from self-evident.

Today, there is no shortage of opinions suggesting that now is the time for political action in support of human rights, and for forming close — even partisan — alliances. I do not consider these views unreasonable. However, I believe that there are different ways to achieve our goals, and that we need organisations like ours which maintain complete political independence, so that they can credibly fulfil the role of human rights watchdogs.

I must say, however, that our most recent experience since the change of government in Poland at the end of 2023 does not inspire great optimism. What was once self-evident is no longer so: that to be a human rights watchdog is to scrutinise those in power. For example, in today's era of rising political polarisation, our first critical statements regarding the current government were perceived by many of its voters — who loudly defend the principles of the rule of law — as a betrayal of ideals.

We quickly realised that we must, in a sense, begin anew and explain what our ideals are and how we seek to uphold them. I even hear arguments that the era of apolitical human rights watchdogs is over. I do not believe this. I believe that, at worst, the tides of history have once again placed us in a position in which we will be attacked from all sides more often than we will be praised. But we are not here to be popular or praised, especially in official narratives.

I am, however, curious how my colleagues from our sister Helsinki committees view this vital issue of political independence, and whether they agree that taking it seriously remains one of the hallmarks of organisations deeply rooted in the legacy of the 1970s. Miroslav touched on this slightly.

Thank you.

András K. Kádár

Co-Chair

Hungarian Helsinki Committee

The role of civil society in the Helsinki process

There are three main points that must be emphasised when we talk about the relationship of the Helsinki process and civil society in the context of democratic backsliding and illiberal regimes.

1) Human rights are not contrary to security, but an integral part of any arrangement aimed at guaranteeing security. In the preamble to the Helsinki Accords, the signatories reaffirmed “their objective of promoting better relations among themselves and ensuring conditions in which their people can live in true and lasting peace free from any threat to or attempt against their security”.

“Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” was included in the Helsinki Declaration as part of this endeavour stemming from the understanding that the human dimension of security, i.e. the existence of a resilient society allowing citizens to freely engage in public matters is a key to global security.

Unfortunately, this truth is increasingly questioned even in established democracies, or countries with regard to which we have thought for a long time that their democratic commitment has been sealed, that they have been on the “right track” in this regard.

We see more and more examples of illiberal backsliding, governments trying to undermine their checks and balances often behind the smoke screen of fear, using a certain specific logic. According to this logic, there is a (usually external and usually non-existent or artificially magnified) threat from which society must be protected, the governments offer protection from this threat, but in return they ask us to give up some of our freedoms.

A perfect example of this mechanism is the ban of the Budapest Pride march, where you have all the ingredients: the non-existent threat that according to the hateful government rhetoric the LGBTIQ community poses to children, the foreign element (the European Union’s “gender propaganda”), and the inevitable attack on freedoms: the freedom of speech

(LGBTIQ themed books sold in protective wrapping) or the freedom of assembly (the ban of the Pride March on the basis that content portraying homosexuality may become available to persons under 18 years of age).

This is completely contradictory to the above described approach and spirit of the Helsinki process and the Helsinki Decalogue, and we must find a way to reinstate that spirit worldwide.

2) The second, closely related point is that the human rights situation in any given country is not an “internal affair”, rejecting valid criticism of human rights violations on the basis of sovereignty arguments is unacceptable, as is the refusal to implement the decisions of international human rights bodies and courts on the basis of constitutional identity and similar concepts.

Understanding the importance of human rights protection in security and mutual trust, the signatories of the closing document (and other international treaties) voluntarily signed up to respect and enforce these rights. When called on to account for human rights violations, they are simply called on to live up to the promise that they made with a view to guaranteeing peace, mutual trust and regional security.

3) And this takes me to my third and last point: the role of civil society in the implementation of the Helsinki principles.

The history of Helsinki Committees is an ample illustration of how civil society started to apply the principles that were agreed on by states as part of a political process, how the brave members of the Moscow Helsinki Group decided to take the declaration “seriously” and call on the Soviet government to do as they preach and respect the human rights of the citizens.

The Soviet government did not like this at all. The founders of the Moscow Helsinki Group were persecuted, imprisoned, exiled. Today’s illiberal governments also do not like the NGOs that criticise them and call them to account for their wrongdoings. The methods, at least within the European Union, are of course much more sophisticated, but intimidation and harassment of critical civil society actors do occur in the EU as well.

From the point of view of those government that try to get rid of the shackles of control, that do not want to be bound by the checks and balances and other rule of law requirements, this response has a certain evil rationale for a number of reasons.

First: by talking truth to power, CSOs are an obvious – and vitally important – obstacle to the uncontrolled exercise of power. In addition, many of them have the ability to take issues to international levels and forums, so undermining the domestic system of checks and balances will not eliminate their ability to effectively challenge government actions.

Second: several CSOs work with those marginalised groups that are often targeted by the illiberal hate and threat campaigns. For example, the Helsinki Committee has provided legal assistance to asylum seekers for over 30 years. Therefore, it is easy to link the CSOs to those “threats” that serve as the justification for eliminating democratic controls. The same happens now in Hungary to CSOs providing assistance to LGBTIQ people.

Third: since the most obvious way to weaken the “undesirable”, critical segments of civil society is their exclusion from state funding, these organisations will necessarily seek at least some of their funding outside the domestic scene, and will have to apply for foreign funding. This way it will be easy (especially in a distorted media and social media market) to depict some CSOs as not only being part of the threat, but also being paid from abroad for it, which allows the illiberal governments to bring in the “foreign interference”, “sovereignty” and “transparency” aspects that can be presented as legitimate grounds for restriction.

This is why we see a series of “foreign agent” or “foreign funded CSO” laws across the board. These are aimed at undermining both the credibility and the funding of CSOs by creating distrust vis a vis them and exert a chilling effect on both the organisations and their potential donors.

However, we must understand the crucial difference between foreign interference (pursuing illegitimate aims often through covert means, including covert financing) and the influence that stems from the interconnectedness of democratic countries, where it should be perfectly acceptable for instance for the European Union or its Member States to finance projects that promote those values that this alliance we all signed up for joined voluntarily are built on including the rule of law, human rights and democracy.

Civil society has a crucial role in enforcing the Helsinki values and holding governments accountable against the undertakings made in Helsinki 50 years ago. And this is not just the view of a civil society representative here – this position is shared by democratic governments too. For instance, in her Closing Remarks at the Helsinki+50 Conference on 31 July 2025, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Elina Valtonen, said the following:

“Governments alone cannot create a vision that meets the expectations and needs of society as a whole. Civil society actors are essential partners for governments in many respects. They help shape policies and actions. They act as drivers of societal change. They hold governments accountable.” This is why, she concluded and I conclude too, civil society must be engaged in the discussion on emerging threats to security and the reaffirming of the Helsinki principles.

Thank you for your kind attention!

Sylvia Tiryaki

Chair

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia

I didn't actually plan to dwell on this in my speech today, but somehow the other panellists prompted me to do so – funding. It's not that we are not foreign-funded; we are simply not funded as the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia.

One of the first questions I usually get is: "Who is funding you?"

And I say: "Nobody."

They reply: "Hmm, but that's impossible. Either you're stupid if nobody is funding you, or there's something strange about you."

And I say: "No, seriously, we have no core funding. That's why we don't have a rented office – we can't afford it. We do everything pro bono. But, as you can see, we are capable of organising a conference like this purely from project-based resources. And you can imagine what we could achieve together as Helsinki Committees in a V4 alliance.

You can also see that we have turned to the private sector – the travel agency Tucan – as one of our sponsors. We have also approached the dm drogerie markt, s.r.o. for sponsorship for another of our projects. I saw the Director of Dual Education at dm drogerie markt, Mr Blaščák, here today, with whom we are coordinating one of these projects. So, Tucan Travel Agency and dm drogerie markt are our two main sponsors from the business sector. So, that's much for funding.

Also, when I tell people that I work for the Helsinki Committee, they often say: "Oh, I've never been there – it must be beautiful."

My contribution today will not be a national report – Mr Krutina has done that beautifully for both our countries, as the Czech and Slovak Helsinki Committees share a common history, at least up to a certain point. Therefore, I will not go into that.

I would like to address something that we share across the border – the responsibility to protect civic space itself and to ensure – as all of you [previous panellists] have mentioned – that the values underpinning the Helsinki Process are not only commemorated, but truly practised.

As we reflect on where we come from and where we must go, I believe there is no better guide than Miroslav Kusý, whose name this audience knows very well. Miroslav Kusý was a political philosopher, Charter 77 signatory, dissident, prisoner of conscience, and one of the founding figures of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia. We have to realise – and it goes without saying – that we might not be here today without him. Professor Kusý's life embodied a unique civic trajectory: from resistance to institution.

As has already been mentioned, the Helsinki Final Act was drafted as a diplomatic agreement, but it gave birth to something that diplomacy alone could not achieve. By recognising human rights and fundamental freedoms as part of international peace and security, the signatories inadvertently handed citizens a powerful tool of accountability. In Czechoslovakia, this tool was taken up – as Mr Krutina already noted – not by politicians, but by dissidents, philosophers, writers, and students. Miroslav Kusý was one of them.

He also wrote: “When human rights are spoken of only in abstract terms, without context, they lose their urgency. Rights must be anchored in lived experience.” I believe that is one of the main challenges of this moment – to re-anchor human rights, not only in institutions, but also in civic experience.

Mr Kemp said today – he almost directly asked us, civil society, to engage. We can do that; we are ready to do that. But we need help. The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia, like its Czech, Polish, and Hungarian counterparts, was born out of this ethos. That is to say, we are not representatives of the state; we are observers, facilitators, critics, educators. We work from within civil society, yet we are also connected – to broader structures, both national and international. Importantly, this position also gives us a certain responsibility.

We are not in 1989. Our institutions are much more developed, we are part of the European Union, we have constitutional protection – but we would be naïve to think that this

trajectory is always forward. Civic organisations across our region face increasing restrictions – legal, financial, rhetorical. And while the pressure does not always take the form of bans or censorship, it appears in other ways, accompanied by a deeper erosion of trust in expertise, belief in pluralism, and respect for factual debate. In that sense, this gathering is rare.

What can we do, then, as Helsinki Committees? We are not mass movements; we are not political parties. But we are stable platforms. We have history, networks, and a unique regional identity that links us. This is why I would like to propose a focused effort to strengthen cooperation among the Helsinki Committees of Central Europe through the establishment of what I would call a Civic Helsinki Platform – of course, we can discuss the name. This would not duplicate what already exists; rather, it should build upon other Visegrad-related platforms and efforts.

So, where to start? It's just a suggestion, just an idea. Although we already do much of this, at the beginning we could focus on:

Closer monitoring – a coordinated approach to tracking civic space across the region.

Youth – and youth is very dear to me. Creating spaces for young people to engage through programme design, participation, and representation is, in my view, *sine qua non* for a peaceful future. For instance, a Youth Helsinki Forum could be a starting point.

At the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia, we have already created a platform that is an organic part of our structure, called *Helsinský výbor mladým* – which translates as “Helsinki Committee to Youth.” Our young colleagues are not only here with us today – you have met them all – they are co-organisers of this event: Pauli, Naty, Hanka, Salma, Riško, Sofi, Klára, Kaja, and Miro. Thank you to all of you.

Last but not least, we should focus on memory. Our own institutional memory as a Helsinki Committee deserves better documentation and reflection. People like Miroslav Kusý did not just act – they taught, wrote, argued, built. I believe we owe that generation the effort to make their legacy visible and usable.

The Civic Helsinki Platform does not need a building – at least not at the beginning. We don't need a logo. What it needs is commitment, coordination, and a clear sense of purpose.

Let me close on a personal note. I have learned one thing: when rights begin to weaken, it doesn't always happen with a bang. It happens quietly, the shift so subtle that you only realise it when it affects you personally – and then it hurts as much as you can imagine. It's as bad as you can imagine. In those moments, it's not enough to simply defend, argue, shout, or complain – by then, it's too late.

So this is an invitation I extend today – not to protect the legacy for its own sake, but to use it to shape something together, something capable of responding to the moment we are in.

I would like to close, Dagmar, with your father's words: "Democracy is not a state of comfort, but a field of struggle." Professor Kusý knew that. Memory without action risks becoming ritual; rights without protection dissolve into slogans; and institutions, unless renewed, become fragile.

Thank you.

Chapter 3

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE HELSINKI PROCESS

Róbert Dobrovodský

Public Rights Defender in Slovakia

Office of the Public Rights Defender

Thank you very much. Allow me once again to express my gratitude to Ms Tiryaki for enabling both myself and the Office of the Public Defender of Rights to be a partner to this valuable event.

It is exceptionally meaningful for me to be here with you—not only for me personally, but also because you have allowed my colleagues from the Office of the Public Defender of Rights to be here with you, as we have today heard, in the most authentic way, the legacy we are tasked with protecting.

Our Office strives intensively to be a strong element within the system of checks and balances—within that which Montesquieu and John Locke had already warned about: that in entrusting power, we must be cautious, we must divide and supervise it, for it is in human nature to abuse power the very day after obtaining it.

As Public Defender of Rights, I am increasingly aware of the foresight of the Slovak constitutional legislator of the 1990s, and later of the year 2000, when the institution of the Ombudsperson was anchored within the constitutional order and equipped with strong balancing competences. It is becoming clear that this was a wise choice. If the executive begins to tilt power in its favour, and the legislature, under its influence, starts restricting human rights, the ombudsman's method has proven highly effective in practice. After two and a half years—exactly halfway through my mandate—I can say that it is necessary to alert Parliament in good time whenever I see that one of the branches of power is beginning to deviate from its constitutional framework.

It is particularly important for me and for my Office that I have the competence to submit laws for review before the Constitutional Court. When I meet colleagues from Western Europe, they envy this competence greatly. They, too—whether in the West, the Balkans, or in the Caucasus, which we recently visited—praise the prudent decision of our constitutional legislator to equip the Ombudsman with such a strong authority. I would therefore like to briefly comment on this in today's contribution.

Protection of the Rights of Children and Prisoners of War

The Helsinki Process—and today we have heard references to ongoing armed conflicts, including the Russian aggression on the territory of Ukraine—also touches our Office. You may ask: how, if the Public Defender of Rights is a constitutional actor operating solely on the sovereign territory of the Slovak Republic?

One of the messages of the Helsinki Process was the principle of humanity and the protection of victims of potential armed conflicts. Approximately a year ago, a request from a Ukrainian mother landed on my desk; her son had fallen into Russian captivity. Under normal circumstances—if I were to take a strictly formalist approach—I would declare the case inadmissible, as it lies outside territorial jurisdiction. But beyond the formal concept of the Ombudsman and the strict delineation of competences, there is also the Helsinki Final Act, which calls upon participating States to uphold humanity. Human life is worthy of protection wherever its rights are violated or endangered. And beyond that, there is the Old Testament principle that whoever saves even a single life has saved the whole world. So I said: no, colleagues, let us look into this case and find out what can be done.

I see that the Ambassador of Azerbaijan is no longer present. Nevertheless, I wish to express my gratitude to Azerbaijan, and in particular to the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ms Sabina Aliyeva, my partner ombudsperson in Azerbaijan. During the summit of ombudspersons in Baku, she enabled me to meet the Turkish Ombudsman, whose assistance proved essential in this case. The Ukrainian mother had written: “Mr Ombudsman Dobrovodský, please try the path of our Turkish colleague.” The Turkish Ombudsman succeeded in bringing representatives of the Russian Federation and Ukraine to one table, which subsequently led to the exchange of prisoners of war. He also facilitated the restoration of contact between Ukrainian parents and children who had been transferred to the territory of the Russian Federation.

Thanks to these negotiations in Baku, we succeeded—after six months of preparation, I can now say so—in obtaining recognition of our Office as a neutral actor. Since we are apolitical and constitutionally established, falling under neither the legislative nor the executive branch—we are a power *sui generis*—both the Russian Federation and Ukraine

have officially recognised our Office as an intermediary to serve as a channel of communication between the two sides. We are now working towards holding the technical talks—we are very close. I have already held discussions with Professor Moskalkova, Ombudsperson of the Russian Federation, as well as with Dmytro Lubinets, Ombudsman of Ukraine. We are also in communication with the Office of President Zelensky, from which I have received official letters of authorisation.

We currently have a list of forty-seven children. We possess their photographs, personal details, and know their locations. We will now proceed to submit this information to the Russian Federation. Should the Russian Federation acknowledge that these children may be returned to their Ukrainian biological parents, two paths are possible. The first is hand-over on Russian territory, under the condition that parents are granted guaranteed entry and immunity from any consequences. The second is handover on Slovak territory; for this, I have the assurance of support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, although the Ministry itself does not intervene in the process and leaves it entirely within my competence. This is one significant chapter of our work: the protection of the rights of children and prisoners of war.

Civil Rights and Freedoms

The Helsinki legacy has also left us civil rights and liberties. Recently, however, I have observed several attempts—and indeed completed legislative steps by the National Council—that restrict rights forming part of the gains of 1989, which Ms Orgovánová also mentioned. These include the laws on assembly and association—rights won by our parents in 1989. These laws had not undergone any doctrinal amendments; if you look at the Collection of Laws since 1990, they remained virtually unchanged until 2022. This is why I and my colleagues decided to include in the annual report of the Public Defender of Rights a special chapter titled *The Rights of Civil Society*, as we see that the executive and legislature frequently interfere with them and attempt to restrict or curtail them.

A trend seen also in the West—on which fellow ombudspersons have warned me—is the growing securitisation of human rights. If an attack or an assault on a constitutional actor occurs, the executive understandably “sticks its foot in the proverbial human-rights door,” which can no longer be closed. After the attempted assassination of Prime Minister Fico, the so-called *Lex atentát* reached Parliament within days. As Public Defender of Rights,

I naturally respect the sovereign authority of the National Council to enact laws, but I try to alert it in good time when it approaches the edge of constitutionality or risks lowering the level of human-rights protection.

In this case—thanks to the swift analysis by my colleagues—we managed to establish dialogue with the government very quickly. As the Prime Minister was in hospital, his competences were assumed by the First Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Kaliňák. Within a few hours, we negotiated an amendment removing all vague provisions that would have allowed the executive or the police to dissolve assemblies. As our Hungarian colleague Mr Kádár, Chair of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, mentioned, Hungary introduced similarly vague terms enabling dissolution of public assemblies “in the name of public morality” or the “protection of children’s decency.” In my view, it is most unfortunate that the Hungarian legislator permitted this. Fortunately, we did not follow that path, and *Lex atentát* did not enter into force in its originally intended form.

The Freedom of Information Act

The right to information—one of the most important political rights—is exceptionally strong in Slovakia. The Slovak Republic has one of the most progressive Freedom of Information Acts in the world. No other country provides access to information within eight working days and on such a scale. No other country has such advanced open governance and open-data systems as Slovakia has had since 2010, when mandatory publication of contracts was introduced.

Unfortunately, an amendment introduced by a governing coalition party has created new vague concepts that restrict citizens’ access to information. As a constitutional actor, I sought to coordinate a response, and I acknowledge the approach of the President, with whom I communicated and who exercised the veto. Although it was subsequently overridden, we immediately prepared a constitutional complaint requesting the suspension of the law’s effect. We did not expect much—since the Constitutional Court intervenes so decisively only rarely—but to our great surprise, we persuaded it. While the Court has yet to rule on the merits, it has suspended the law’s effectiveness. In its decision, the Court even described the law as—and I quote—“harmful law”. This is an important achievement.

As for the right of association—one of the essential rights adopted shortly after 1989—these laws enabled people not to fear associating, assembling, speaking publicly, or, if they wished, remaining anonymous within a legal entity. Individuals often fear criticising their mayor or minister for fear of consequences. By adopting these laws, Czechoslovakia told its citizens: associate, do not be afraid, speak with the voice of a legal entity.

Unfortunately, this construct was disrupted by a law originally referred to as *Lex foreign agent*. Hungary adopted a similar law. However, Hungary failed to defend it before the EU Court of Justice—despite it being *less* strict than the Slovak version. Therefore, I decided—given the socio-cultural and political importance of this right—to challenge this law before the Constitutional Court. We submitted the complaint on 11 August after thorough analysis and negotiation. The reaction from the Office of the Government was negative; both I and my Office were accused of siding with the opposition. That is perfectly fine.

What surprised me somewhat was that the website of a central government authority—maintained, I presume, by civil servants bound by political neutrality—published a message directed at a constitutional actor. Such a message might belong on the website of a political party, but not on that of a state-administration body. But no matter—every Ombudsman who performs their duties properly must be in a certain natural tension with the executive. If there were no such tension, one might succumb to the temptation of seeking re-appointment or avoiding conflict with the governing party or parliament.

Let me summarise briefly what we consider unconstitutional in the law; we presented the details at a press conference. *Lex agent* was originally proposed in an even more intrusive form. We managed to negotiate with the sponsors the removal of some of the most problematic provisions. Within two weeks, we met Mr Adam Lučanský, one of the signatories, and secured mitigation of the gravest concerns. Nevertheless, three problematic points remained, which we raised before the second and third readings.

Regrettably, between the second and third readings, “riders” were introduced within hours—amendments that significantly tightened the law and increased doubts about its constitutionality. Thus, we turned to the Constitutional Court. Just as the Helsinki Committees cooperate closely, so do we, ombudspersons—we exchange experience

and know-how. We visited our Georgian colleague—Georgia has a similar law—and obtained insights into how he challenged it. My Berlin colleague advised me to monitor police interventions in assemblies, given the tension between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli demonstrations in Berlin, which has led to incidents of disproportionate police force. I thought I would not need to supervise police interventions in Slovakia—but when major anti-government protests were announced in January, we decided to monitor the use of force, for those who possess weapons can violate human rights the most.

Even the Roman poet Juvenal, writing 75 years after Christ, asked: *Who will guard the guards?* It remains relevant today.

Let us guard the guards. Let us watch those who hold a monopoly on legitimate force. We, citizens, are disarmed; we cannot legally carry weapons, except for hunting or sport. Weapons are held only by the uniformed services. This is why I am especially sensitive to police excesses. They tell me: “Mr Ombudsman, you are exaggerating; you analyse every intervention down to the last screw and criticise the Police Force.” Today it may be merely a slap given by a police officer to a homeless man in Gabčíkovo. Next week, it may end in tragedy—as in Košice, where a homeless man was beaten to death outside a police cell.

We therefore challenged the Assembly Act and the Inspection Act. This has resonated widely internationally. The Venice Commission was recently here for consultations, and we await its conclusions.

Let me summarise briefly the objections contained in the constitutional complaint:

1. Protection of privacy and anonymity. The law is a surveillance tool. It allows monitoring donors of NGOs—organisations that often compensate for the shortcomings of the state, and which will now be forced to disclose donor identities. What legitimate reason does the state have to know the names of your donors—especially when, as you said yourselves, you have very few?
2. Violation of EU law. We see an interference with the free movement of capital—the very issue for which the Court of Justice struck down the Hungarian law.
3. Transformation of small associations into obliged entities under the Freedom of Information Act. The FOI Act was designed to supervise public authorities, not to create the potential for harassment of NGOs.

That is, in brief, the essence of our submission. Anyone interested is welcome to discuss it bilaterally. Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to assure you that the Office of the Public Defender of Rights remains vigilant; we strive to react to every millimetre of decline in the human-rights standard, and in this way honour the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act.

Thank you.

Klára Orgovánová

Director

Roma Institute

When reflecting on my contribution, I came across a fitting folk joke from the Radio Yerevan series: a student calls in to ask whether the radio can predict the future. “Yes, we can tell what the future will be,” came the reply. “It’s only the past we have trouble with — it keeps changing.”

Since 1990, when I stopped practicing my profession and became involved in civic activities in Slovakia, 35 years have passed. That’s not too much, but enough time to view the era of building democracy in Slovakia in a broader context and to recognize where we made mistakes. To put it briefly — we already have democracy, but we still need a bit more justice. Courage alone is not enough; it does not automatically bring quality. To build a better future, we therefore need to unify our “European memory” — through better education, not through efforts to twist the past.

I therefore appreciate that the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia organized this event and reminds everyone of such an important act of international politics. Processes like the Helsinki Final Act should make us think. It is necessary to recall its impact and significance — signed 30 years after the end of World War II, during the Cold War, when massive political and military blocs sought peaceful solutions to disputes through mutual understanding and adherence to jointly recognized principles.

Thirty-five countries signed it, acknowledging, among other things, that lasting peace and security can only be achieved through the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We live in a world of artificial intelligence — but also of targeted disinformation, misinterpretation of facts, and even deliberate distortion of events. This happens in the interest

of manipulating or exploiting public opinion for political goals, economic gain, or even intelligence operations.

We must know as much of the truth as possible about the power of propaganda and its impact on history, because that helps us navigate the flood of information more effectively. For example, reading about how fake documentaries were filmed during the world war to glorify the successes of the Nazi army once felt very distant to me. Far more real were the interpretations of teachers during my high school years, when we were told that Czechoslovakia experienced a “counterrevolution” and that the intervention of “friendly armies” had been necessary.

Even as a young person, I could — thanks to my parents and the emigration of most of my family to Canada and the USA after 1968 — classify these events correctly and remain immune to this kind of propaganda and manipulation.

For the former Czechoslovakia, the Helsinki process was especially significant, as it provided an impetus for the creation of domestic opposition and gave citizens a chance to stand up to the regime. Initiatives like Charter 77 and movements such as the “Underground Church” gave rise to open communities of people committed to upholding the principles of the Helsinki Accords and human rights.

One of the early Charter 77 documents was the first to draw attention to the discrimination and stigmatization of Roma people. As a result of Roma activists who signed the Charter, the Union of Gypsies and Roma was established in 1968 — though it existed only until 1973, when it was dissolved.

After the fall of communism in 1989, it was not easy for everyone to accept that what had been the official truth for decades was suddenly completely discredited and generally labeled a lie. I am sure you are all familiar with dangerous examples of propaganda today — and even if not everyone sees them clearly, many at least feel their destructive nature.

It is illusory to believe that the past can be changed retroactively. It must be accepted in all its contradictions and conflicts.

A few days ago, Slovakia commemorated the anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising — a significant historical act by Slovaks during World War II. While watching the celebrations, I realized how quickly time passes — I still remembered the speeches from the 80th anniversary last year — and I listened with dismay as all our political leaders repeated that “fascism and Nazism have not disappeared, they are still among us.”

And yet, in all our struggles with those who hold different opinions, “we must remain sovereign, magnificent, and Slovak.”

I cannot judge whether such slogans, repeated often enough, can shape the opinions of the younger generation traveling the world — but I am convinced that most people who have even an average understanding of history recognize the danger of such rhetoric.

I believe instead that our shared duty is — and remains — civic courage, truth, honor, responsibility, and compassion.

These values have always been my greatest support throughout more than 35 years of work in the field of minority rights, particularly concerning the status of Roma. I have never been an advocate of one-sided views. Especially in pragmatic regional policy, I have always tried to see the responsibility of both sides in the enormous problem Slovakia faces.

Knowing all the context, one must clearly say that the history of discrimination and persecution has pushed Roma to the margins of society, making them one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged minorities in Europe. Many still face widespread racism and discrimination, limited access to basic rights and services, and inadequate representation in public and political life.

They are often targets of populist statements, repressive measures, prejudice, and stereotypes — tools too often exploited by some politicians to gain votes during election campaigns. Verbal hatred and violence are often precursors to physical hatred and violence.

In both the NGO and state sectors, we experienced this several times. Yet thanks to international standards — and to the emphasis that these are not empty phrases but tools for defending freedom and human dignity — Slovakia managed the process of integration into EU structures quite successfully.

However, it must be said that this essentially successful modernization of Slovakia took place without the inclusion of Roma. Slovak elites at the time did not consider Roma as part of the political community. One reason was that transformation had not only economic, political, and social dimensions, but also a national one — and its ideological and political framework did not include genuine minority integration.

At the time of Slovakia's EU accession, I served as the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Affairs. What mattered most was that addressing Roma issues was among the political criteria for membership. We had to take many serious and demanding steps.

I attended numerous negotiation meetings, where Slovak representatives would often say, "We can't possibly enter the Union like this," to which I would reply jokingly, "Come on — we're already here waiting for you." I found that funny, since Roma live all across Europe.

The accession process established all the key governmental policies, created a system of financial support from EU and Slovak sources, and — through international agreements — fostered cooperation that helped us share best practices and avoid dead ends.

Today, Roma are on the agenda of many international institutions. The OSCE — as the successor to the Helsinki process — plays a particularly important role. It was founded as a security organization, but with a broad understanding of security that goes beyond traditional military matters, disarmament, and borders.

The OSCE's concept of security also includes human rights and democracy. All member states have committed to a comprehensive catalogue of human rights and democratic standards — forming what the OSCE calls the "human dimension" of security.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) provides support, assistance, and expertise to member states and civil society — and plays a major role in Roma inclusion.

“Every nation must first remember something before it can begin to forget.”

I believe that today, in a time of growing crisis of trust — both domestically and internationally — it is crucial to recall that dialogue, legal obligations, and civil society can together influence the course of history.

In recent years, our lives have been marked by real armed conflicts. From close proximity, we witness the cold-blooded use of lies and deceit at a time when people are dying, and homes, buildings, and nature are being destroyed. I must admit — this affects me deeply, and I ask myself every day how it is possible.

Tragic situations awaken fear for our own safety. Many of us feel threatened because our certainty is shaken — the certainty that the principles of humanity and the rule of law will prevail over the desire for domination and the vanity of powerful leaders.

Dušan Rozbora

Ambassador

Diplomatic Academy of Karol Rybárik, Comenius University in Bratislava

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me first to express my sincere gratitude to Mrs. Sylvia Tyriaki and the other organisers for their kind invitation. It is my honour to address you on this solemn occasion marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the signing of its Final Act.

This historic event culminated in Helsinki on 1 August 1975, when the Heads of State and Government, or other leading representatives of thirty-three European countries, together with the United States and Canada, solemnly signed the Final Act. The process had begun with its first phase in November 1972, when experts from the participating countries gathered at Dipoli, the former Olympic village and student centre near Helsinki. I had at that time been assigned to the Czechoslovak Embassy, serving as Deputy Head of Mission and Coordinator of the Czechoslovak expert delegation. My wife and I were accommodated, together with the delegation, in one of two villas on the island of Kuu-sisaari.

These negotiations laid the groundwork for the continuation of the process and were concluded by a meeting of the foreign ministers of the participating countries in June 1973. They agreed to proceed with the second phase in Geneva. The then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bohuslav Chňoupek, expressed his satisfaction with the outcome of the discussions, with the performance of our experts, and kindly congratulated me on the birth of my first son, Robert, in Helsinki.

The task of the second phase was to negotiate and prepare the final document for signature by Heads of State, Heads of Government, or other senior representatives during the third phase of the CSCE, again to be held in Helsinki, without the participation of Albania.

The Czechoslovak Ambassador in Helsinki was appointed as head of our delegation, and I had the honour of representing him in Finland. Two years of negotiations produced a positive outcome in the form of the Final Act, ready to be signed during the high-level forum – the third phase of the CSCE – held in Helsinki from 30 July to 1 August 1975.

The Czechoslovak delegation, consisting of nearly twenty members, was led by the then President of the Republic, Gustáv Husák. As the youngest member of the delegation and being stationed in Helsinki, I was entrusted with the organisational and protocol arrangements for our participation. Allow me therefore to share with you a few personal recollections.

Prior to the delegation's arrival, we arranged for ten vehicles from the Saab company to be made available for transport. Unfortunately, one of them broke down due to a leaking fuel tank, but we promised not to publicise the incident so as not to harm the reputation of the renowned brand. Accommodation for the delegation and its entourage was secured by renting an entire floor of the Hotel Marski, including technical and security arrangements. I also participated, on behalf of our delegation, in welcoming other delegations at Helsinki Airport, where I vividly recall President Gerald Ford of the United States losing his footing on the lower steps of the aircraft staircase and momentarily finding himself in an awkward position on the tarmac – fortunately without injury, though to the visible alarm of the welcoming officials.

I should note that I am now the only surviving Slovak member of that delegation. President Gustáv Husák, Minister Bohuslav Chňoupek, and others such as Mikuláš Beňo, Roman Nárožný, Emil Keblůšek and Milan Kadnár have all since passed away. I have no information about our Czech colleagues.

The atmosphere within the magnificent Finlandia Hall, designed by the world-renowned architect Alvar Aalto, was one of decorum and mutual respect. The participating leaders behaved towards one another with varying degrees of cordiality, reserve or neutrality – but always diplomatically – whether during speeches, intervals, social functions, or bilateral meetings. One of the highlights was the private meeting between President Ford and General Secretary Brezhnev. I also recall that our delegation chose not to attend the

speech of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, whom our representatives pointedly ignored due to a past personal incident considered in Prague to have been a “legal abduction of a Czechoslovak citizen.”

Each head of delegation delivered an address, having agreed to the text of the Final Act. The first session was chaired by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Holy See, Cardinal Monsignor Agostino Casaroli, representing His Holiness Pope Paul VI, who invited all present to observe a minute of silence for reflection. The role of initiator and host was performed with great distinction by the Finnish President, Urho Kaleva Kekkonen, who had long striven for the recognition of Finland’s neutral status. In his opening address he described the CSCE as an unprecedented forum and, in his closing remarks, emphasised Finland’s commitment to ensuring its citizens’ access to information about life beyond its borders.

The significance of the process was also underlined by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kurt Waldheim, who, as guest of honour, regarded his participation as a great privilege. He described the CSCE as an important step within the framework of the UN Charter – a stimulus for the rest of the world and for humanity as a whole.

Particularly noteworthy were the words of U.S. President Gerald Ford, who described the Final Act as a compromise, yet one embodying principles of great importance – the affirmation of fundamental human rights: freedom of thought, civil and political rights, and the rights of minorities. He also referred to his agreement with Leonid Brezhnev on reducing the number of strategic weapons. Almost all representatives of the Western countries focused on the provisions of the third “basket” of the Final Act. Norwegian Prime Minister Trygve Bratteli, for instance, spoke of the essential importance of respecting fundamental human rights and freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and political belief.

By contrast, the Czechoslovak President concentrated on issues of détente and security, avoiding any direct mention of human rights, as did other leaders of the socialist countries. He spoke in general terms of our support for cultural exchange, the expansion of personal contacts, and mutually beneficial cooperation among the participating states.

Every country possessed the right of veto – the power to bring down several years of effort – which for small nations such as Malta, San Marino, Liechtenstein, the Vatican, Luxembourg, or Monaco, represented a great honour, granting them equality with the major powers.

It is also worth noting that, prior to the CSCE, certain states sought to normalise their bilateral relations as a prerequisite for a comprehensive agreement. Thus, Czechoslovakia and the Federal Republic of Germany concluded a bilateral treaty, despite the latter's refusal to recognise the nullity of the Munich Agreement. Critics claimed this hindered the success of the Helsinki process and represented a victory for revanchism, yet our government viewed it as essential groundwork for the CSCE.

Between the second and third phases, several multilateral meetings were held to create political conditions conducive to the CSCE's success. Of particular importance was the Diplomatic Conference on the Protection of the Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, held in Helsinki in March 1974, attended by seven states and with observer participation by Czechoslovakia, Norway, and nine international organisations. I represented Czechoslovakia at that conference on behalf of Minister Chňoupek.

During the second phase of the CSCE in Geneva, from summer 1973 to July 1975, the Turkish military intervention in northern Cyprus occurred. The guarantor powers – the United Kingdom, Greece and Turkey – together with Cyprus itself, all took part in the CSCE process, culminating in the establishment of a system of security for the European continent. Though the Cyprus invasion did not undermine the overall success of the Conference, it inevitably influenced its proceedings.

At the Helsinki Summit from 30 July to 1 August 1975, representatives of all participating countries spoke. Only those of Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey referred to the invasion, each accusing the other. The Turkish delegation secured an annex to the Final Act on the Cyprus issue, to which the Cypriot delegation responded with its own. Both annexes became part of the official CSCE documentation. In accordance with Article 65 of the Conference's Rules of Procedure, all states participated as sovereign and independent equals.

The events in Cyprus, though directly concerning four states, did not derail the collective efforts of thirty-five countries to reach consensus. Ultimately, the Heads of State and Government, together with other senior representatives, solemnly signed the CSCE Final Act,

which included a Declaration of Ten Principles governing relations among the signatories: sovereign equality, refraining from the threat or use of force, inviolability of frontiers, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in internal affairs, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, equality and self-determination of peoples, cooperation among states, and fulfilment in good faith of obligations under international law.

In Helsinki, the spirit of broad European cooperation and security prevailed, rendering the Cyprus issue peripheral. The Cypriot President, the Greek Prime Minister, and subsequently the Turkish Prime Minister eventually recognised that it would be addressed on other fora and within a different timeframe.

At the closing reception, I had the opportunity to greet many participants, including the Cypriot President, Archbishop Makarios III, and Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel – unaware at the time that, twenty-two years later, I would return to Cyprus as Ambassador of the Slovak Republic, serving six years on the island and focusing on facilitating bi-communal meetings of political leaders. Slovak diplomacy continues this effort today. We also organised bi-communal meetings of human rights representatives under the auspices of the Council of Europe, one of them in Bratislava, where we were received by Professor Milan Kusý. I later published my experiences in the book *The Cyprus Problem: An Endless Story?* in both Slovak and English. Incidentally, from Helsinki I also brought home my second son, Richard, born during the third phase of the CSCE.

The experience gained throughout this process has served me well in subsequent years – as Ambassador on several occasions, as State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, and as Chief of Protocol under two Presidents of the Slovak Republic, His Excellencies Rudolf Schuster and Ivan Gašparovič. My book on this period, *Protocol under Two Presidents*, is currently in print.

Today, I serve as President of the International Club of the Slovak Republic – a politically neutral educational association founded in 1993 – as a university lecturer at the Faculty of Law of Comenius University, and as Honorary President of its Diplomatic Academy.

I wish all participants in this conference much success in fulfilling the legacy of the Helsinki process, which opened the door to cooperation in many fields and laid the foundations for the promotion of human rights. In Czechoslovakia, it inspired the emergence

of dissent and Charter 77; in Poland, the birth of Solidarity – developments that ultimately brought about fundamental changes not only in Europe but, in time, also in Asia.

Thank you for your attention.

Jerguš Sivoš

Chairman of the Board

Nation's Memory Institute

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Honourable Guests,

As the Chairman of the Board of the Nation's Memory Institute, I shall, in my contribution, acquaint you with topics and sources of information from an area that has, thus far, not received attention during today's proceedings. My approach stems from the statutory mission of the Nation's Memory Institute, which also administers documents originating from the State Security Service – the political police of the communist regime.

These records make it possible, as it were, to look into the very “kitchen” of the communist regime and to answer, either fully or partially, questions such as how it regarded the Helsinki Process, whether and how it influenced decision-making processes, and in what ways it implemented the conclusions of that process. Such answers are made possible primarily through the materials of the Czechoslovak intelligence and counter-intelligence services – the former operating predominantly abroad, and the latter within the territory of the state.

In response to the adoption of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Czechoslovak intelligence launched an operation codenamed SYNONYM, within which, over the following years, it carried out dozens of so-called “active measures” aimed at influencing the decisions of individual national delegations, disinforming politicians, diplomats and the public, as well as criminalising and restricting the activities of émigrés, émigré organisations, dissidents, and independent movements in Czechoslovakia.

The planning and implementation of these active measures were coordinated by Czechoslovak intelligence with the Soviet KGB and the secret services of the Hungarian People's Republic and the German Democratic Republic.

A joint meeting between representatives of the Czechoslovak Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Soviet KGB took place prior to the subsequent session in Belgrade, from 30 March to 1 April 1977. From its conclusions it follows that the focus on the CSCE Final Act ranked third in order of priority – immediately after issues concerning the USA and NATO, and ahead of operations directed against the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, other Western countries, China, and additional matters.

The activities of both intelligence services were to concentrate on two principal areas:

- 1) To support the implementation of the CSCE Final Act in accordance with the demand for adherence to human rights in capitalist countries; and
- 2) To create favourable conditions for the Belgrade talks by limiting the influence of so-called Western intelligence agencies and critical organisations.

In the first area, intelligence services were instructed to launch a broad campaign regarding human rights violations in the West:

- a) In the case of the United States, through existing or artificially established activist organisations worldwide that ostensibly focused on human rights protection in the West (including protests, campaigns, and demonstrations);
- b) In the case of the Federal Republic of Germany, by drawing attention to the ban on the exercise of certain professions; and
- c) In the case of the United Kingdom, through materials related to the Strasbourg trial.

In the second area, the services were to:

- a) Conduct pressure operations on the Yugoslav government to tighten security measures and prevent anti-socialist demonstrations; and
- b) Publicise information and materials on the intentions and actions of Western countries shortly before the meeting, in order to disrupt the prepared course of proceedings and prevent the development of new negotiation strategies.

By way of illustration, one may mention Active Measure HARPUNA – the dissemination of disinformation to the Yugoslav government concerning the alleged preparation of provocative and terrorist acts by émigré organisations, with the aim of ensuring tightened

security measures. The intelligence service drafted and dispatched from Augsburg to the Yugoslav consul in Germany an anonymous letter from a fictitious Slovak émigré expressing disapproval of a supposed terrorist plan by émigré groups of Slovaks, Croats, Poles, and Cossacks during the Belgrade meeting in June 1977. The information was subsequently confirmed to the consul by the Czechoslovak intelligence resident in Bonn. The Yugoslav government thereafter requested from Czechoslovakia a list of émigrés likely to travel to Yugoslavia and expelled several protesting West German women.

In a similar manner, Active Measure HEREC was carried out, through which intelligence sought to discredit Belgian Member of Parliament Willy Kuijpers, Chairman of the International Committee for the Implementation of the Final Act, who intended to present evidence in Belgrade in October 1977 regarding its violations in the Soviet Union.

Active Measure AUTOR was an influence operation intended to justify the refusal to admit a United States Congressional Commission into socialist countries during its European tour monitoring the implementation of the CSCE Final Act, by exploiting the Commission's final report.

Active Measure DEBATA sought to discredit *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. During the conference on the role of the media in the Helsinki Process held in Tampere, Finland, in November 1977, the regime published an article in *Rudé právo* and broadcast a youth television segment portraying the radio as a tool of the American CIA, falsely claiming, among other things, that it employed 18 American agents.

Active Measure IMAGO aimed to counter statements made by Arthur Goldberg, head of the US delegation in Belgrade in November 1977, who had criticised Czechoslovakia for violating the so-called "third basket" by impeding the independent work of foreign journalists. In mid-November, Czechoslovak radio broadcast negative reports alleging that foreign correspondents were publishing articles hostile to the government and interviewing Charter 77 signatories.

Before the Madrid meeting, consultations between the Czechoslovak security organs and the Soviet KGB were held in mid-September 1979 to discuss the scope and orientation

of new active measures. These were to continue deepening ideological divisions within Western countries, eliminate dissident activities, and encourage third countries to exert pressure concerning racial discrimination in the USA, occupational bans in the FRG, and the suppression of Palestinian rights. Active measures were also intended to steer the Madrid meeting away from human rights issues towards military questions.

In November 1979, a meeting took place in Berlin with the East German STASI, which, in cooperation with the Cuban secret service, produced a Spanish-language book on human rights violations in the USA in an edition of 5,000 copies, as well as materials on the violation of rights of foreign workers in the FRG. Hungarian intelligence informed the Czechoslovak State Security of its brochure on human rights violations in Western Europe and a film exposing alleged “anti-socialist” activities of RFE and Hungarian émigrés. At the request of the KGB, the Hungarian service was also to implement measures downplaying the significance of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Czechoslovak State Security requested Hungarian assistance in limiting émigré activities in connection with the Madrid meeting.

According to contemporary documents, Czechoslovak intelligence pursued these objectives through the statements of a cooperating Italian Member of Parliament in his national legislature, a cooperating scholar during a debate at the French Institute for International Relations in Paris, the provision of manipulative materials for biased articles in Austrian, Greek, Cypriot, French, and Luxembourgish newspapers, as well as university and public events in Belgium and the United Kingdom. It even contributed to shaping the positions of the Austrian delegation at the Madrid meeting.

Czechoslovak intelligence also carried out tasks unrelated to national interests, directly supporting the imperial policy of the Soviet Union. Among such actions was the creation of a forged questionnaire of the American Chamber of Commerce in Argentina to provoke criticism of US interference in Argentina’s internal affairs, and the fabrication of a counterfeit American magazine containing texts on human rights abuses in the USA, distributed during the December 1980 negotiations to weaken American criticism of human rights violations in socialist countries.

By 1982, active measures under Operation SYNONYM accused the United States of attempting to disrupt the further progress of the Helsinki Process and blamed NATO countries (the USA, the United Kingdom, the FRG, and the Netherlands) for prolonging the Madrid meeting and for its problematic outcomes.

Naturally, concrete measures were also undertaken by Czechoslovak counter-intelligence. Already in January 1976, the State Security anticipated, as a consequence of the Final Act's adoption, increased activity by émigré and religious organisations, interest by banned writers in publishing abroad, greater imports of ideologically unsuitable films, books, and magazines promoting the Western way of life and influencing youth, as well as growing efforts by dissidents to travel abroad for emigration or to misrepresent the domestic situation.

The counter-intelligence service was instructed to:

- 1) Mobilise Czechoslovak citizens in support of state policy and the socialist way of life;
- 2) Recruit émigrés for repatriation;
- 3) Influence the selection of experts assigned abroad to advocate socialism;
- 4) Complete the “normalisation” purge of culture, science, education, and the economy; and
- 5) Allow certain dissidents to travel abroad, subsequently revoking their citizenship.

This was in direct contradiction to the commitment to respect human and civil rights undertaken by the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic as a signatory of the Final Act. The State Security also carried out numerous coordinated actions against domestic critics and opponents of the communist regime to neutralise their activities and prevent the emergence of independent movements or their links abroad. These operations bore significant code names such as DISPERSION, EARTHQUAKE, and WEDGE.

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, the State Security implemented Operation CLEARANCE, coercing selected dissidents—sometimes through physical and psychological violence—to leave the country. Common methods included repeated summons for interrogation, open surveillance, expulsion from study, conscription, dismissal from employment, and denial of work even below one's qualifications, as well as harassment of family

members, house searches, police visits to relatives and acquaintances to isolate individuals socially, employer interviews, prosecutorial warnings, and criminal prosecution.

Czechoslovakia also violated Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees everyone the right to leave any country, including one's own. The Nation's Memory Institute records more than 13,000 persons convicted in Slovakia under §109 of the Criminal Code ("unlawful departure from the Republic") between 1977 and 1989, and the database remains incomplete.

It should be noted that only following the Vienna Follow-up Meeting in 1989 were proposals drafted to amend laws on association, travel, family reunification, freedom of religion, and the import of religious literature, as well as the treatment of citizens residing abroad without permission.

Czechoslovak party authorities consistently refused to engage with representatives of independent movements, whose number grew rapidly—from six in 1986 to forty-seven in 1988 and sixty in 1989. Unlike the Hungarian and Polish communists, they continued to suppress them harshly until the collapse of the regime in November 1989. For example, during the "preventive security measures" marking the 21st anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1989, 81 persons were imprisoned, 166 were conscripted, 1,159 were subjected to preventive measures, and 13 received official warnings. At the borders, 405 Polish, 46 Hungarian, and 36 Italian citizens were turned back for allegedly intending to participate in anti-state actions. Only ten days later, upon signing a new cooperation agreement with the KGB, Czechoslovak representatives reiterated their political stance in Moscow.

Unchanged positions of the Czechoslovak political leadership amid a shifting geopolitical environment are evident from the tasks set for State Security in the latter half of 1989, including:

- preventing ideological, organisational, and operational integration of anti-socialist forces;
- establishing a group of 500 to 5,000 citizens, primarily workers, to issue petitions countering independent initiatives as part of counter-propaganda;
- creating State Security-controlled "independent structures" within opposition groups to serve as their own internal opposition;

- publishing pseudo-independent samizdat materials to manipulate public discourse about the true objectives of independent movements;
- diverting youth interest from samizdat literature by founding a Centre for Unpublished Literary Works under State oversight; and
- applying covert measures against key opposition figures to restrict their activity and financial support networks.
- by December 31, 1989, to process nationwide projects against the connection of opposition forces in Czechoslovakia with the Hungarian Democratic Republic and Polish Democratic Republic.

Conclusions

Czechoslovak intelligence regarded meetings within the Helsinki Process as the only truly significant forum for East–West dialogue. In this context, it undertook measures to defend the policies of the Soviet Union, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and the socialist bloc. Together with counter-intelligence units, it acted systematically against émigrés, dissidents, and their organisations, in deliberate violation of international human rights commitments.

Minor changes in policy and regulation occurred only in the late 1980s under the influence of social transformations and the political and economic reforms in the USSR. These were, almost without exception, a reflection of changes introduced by the “Big Brother”. For instance, shortly after the Soviet Union ceased jamming Radio Free Europe in 1988, Czechoslovakia followed suit. Yet, the character of the domestic communist regime—persistently refusing dialogue with independent groups and reinforcing the political police’s campaign against internal opposition—precluded any such reform from arising autonomously.

The Helsinki Process contributed to the establishment of organisations advocating for the observance of human rights and exposing their violations. It also influenced the course of “perestroika”, which unfolded inconsistently across socialist states, revealing the absence of unity within the bloc. Above all, it demonstrated that the respect for human rights was the weakest aspect of the socialist system.

Chapter 4

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

This volume concludes with a set of recommendations intended to strengthen the work of the Helsinki Committees and enhance the effective use of OSCE instruments in the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic principles, the rule of law and societal resilience. These recommendations arise from the contributions of guests representing international organisations, the diplomatic community, experts and civil society. They focus on reinforcing security and cooperation in Europe, with a particular emphasis on human rights. Their overarching objective is to contribute to the revitalisation of the Helsinki process and to the more effective functioning of both regional and international human rights architecture, as well as national actors.

Recommendation No. 1: Support systematic cooperation among Helsinki Committees

- The Helsinki Committees of the V4 countries should significantly strengthen their cooperation and coordinate their activities, particularly in areas concerning marginalised groups, migration, and the protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.
- The network of Helsinki Committees should be expanded to additional OSCE participating States where such structures either exist or are still absent, thereby enhancing regional cooperation and promoting a coherent approach to human rights issues.
- The Helsinki process should be revitalised through the creation of a network of actors who regard the OSCE as an essential instrument for addressing contemporary security and societal challenges.

Recommendation No. 2: Strengthen linkages between the Helsinki Committees and OSCE structures

- The Helsinki Committees should intensify cooperation with key OSCE structures—particularly the Secretariat and institutions such as ODIHR, the Office of the High

Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, as well as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly—and take an active role in consultations, working processes and expert discussions.

- They should also clearly identify shared areas of interest and common priorities that naturally connect them with actors in international organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and their parliamentary bodies where they exist, and utilise these connections to pursue more coordinated advocacy.

Recommendation No. 3: Enhance cooperation between the Helsinki Committees and research organisations

- The Helsinki Committees should develop closer partnerships with research centres and think tanks capable of providing analytical support and expert knowledge.
- The revitalisation of the OSCE should be closely linked to the work of the Helsinki Committees, enabling them to serve as drivers of proposals to modernise the organisation's tools and mechanisms.
- Within the V4 countries, joint projects—including those relating to funding—should be intensified to strengthen regional resilience and improve coordination in the protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic values.

Recommendation No. 4: Address the challenges faced by civil society organisations

- The financing of civil society organisations should be stabilised through the establishment of transparent, accountable, long-term and multi-source mechanisms—both national and international—that go beyond short-term project-based funding and support the sustainable development of human rights initiatives.
- It is necessary to ensure the fair, transparent and effective functioning of grant programmes, with appropriate accountability measures that do not result in excessive overregulation which could impede their work.

- The design, monitoring and evaluation of funding instruments should consistently uphold the principle of partnership between public authorities and all relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations.

Recommendation No. 5: Ensure meaningful engagement of young people and students in the Helsinki process

- It is important to strengthen the involvement of young people in the activities of the Helsinki Committees and in OSCE processes by creating opportunities for participation, internships and advisory mechanisms.
- The Helsinki Committees should actively make use of existing OSCE platforms—particularly the OSCE Structured Dialogue and ODIHR review conferences.
- The Helsinki Committees should also seek regular participation in multilateral UN forums, including meetings of the Security Council, when permitted by the international context.

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR OF MISIA 89

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address you at the conclusion of today's international conference and to extend my greetings also on behalf of the civic association *Mission 89*, which is a co-organiser of this event.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all of you who accepted our invitation and, through your presence and your contributions to the discussions, have supported this important gathering.

We highly appreciate that the President of the Slovak Republic, H.E. Mr Peter Pellegrini, granted his auspices to this event and contributed his opening address.

The purpose of organising our conference was to commemorate the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, in the context of the current geopolitical challenges, placing emphasis on the observance of human rights and democracy worldwide.

Advocacy and promotion of the values of democracy, freedom, and the respect for human rights form the core mission of the civic association *Mission 89*. Central to our activities is also working with young people to advance these very values. It is precisely these values that laid the foundations for our cooperation with the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia. The active participation of Mission 89 in today's event is therefore by no means accidental.

Throughout today's conference, many words have been spoken about the importance of human rights and democracy for the development of our society. I believe we all share the wish that everything we have heard today will be reflected in real life. Whether this happens will depend on the will, ability, and commitment of each and every one of us.

Fifty years ago, at the conclusion of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, representatives of thirty-five countries adopted the document known as the Helsinki Final Act. By signing this act, a space for dialogue and cooperation was established, and states committed themselves to adhering to certain principles—both in the area

of security cooperation and in humanitarian matters, including the observance of human rights.

The CSCE later transformed into the OSCE, which has since become a key agent in diplomatic conflict resolution. We are therefore especially pleased that today's conference was attended by representatives of the OSCE, CSCE, and other significant international organisations whose activities build upon the legacy of the Helsinki Conference.

Allow me therefore to extend our gratitude to all our guests, in particular to the speakers of the first panel, entitled *The Helsinki Impulse to European Dialogue*, who offered expert and authentic insights into the development of events and the situation in recent years. Their contributions have greatly enriched our conference. Our thanks go specifically to the OSCE representative, Mr Bakyt Dzhusup, Ms Jordan Warlick of the United States Mission to the OSCE, Ms Tea Jaliashvili of ODIHR, and Mr Walter Kemp from the Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

You may have noticed that I did not mention one of the panellists from the first session. This omission was intentional, as that person is Mr Ján Kubiš, former Secretary General of the OSCE and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic. He deserves our special appreciation—not only for his presentation, but also for having become, in effect, a co-organiser of our conference and for his active assistance in its preparation. Thanks to him, today's conference reached the high standard you have witnessed.

Although the principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms existed long before the Helsinki Conference, the Helsinki Final Act enshrined them in an international framework and, importantly, provided dissident movements in Eastern Europe with an official platform to which they could refer. With the aim of monitoring how governments fulfilled their human rights commitments, Helsinki Committees began to emerge.

We were greatly pleased that all the Chairs of the Helsinki Committees from Central Europe confirmed their participation in today's conference. In the second panel, entitled *The Helsinki Process as a Platform for Active Citizenship*, they presented the work and activities of their organisations. Our thanks go to the Chair of the Czech Helsinki Committee, Mr Miroslav Krutina; the Chair of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Poland, Mr Maciej Nowicki; the Chair of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Mr András Kádár; and

the Chair of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia, Ms Sylva Tiryaki, who is also the main organiser of this event.

The third and final panel, *Human Rights in the Helsinki Process*, provided a platform for civil society, academia, state and public administration, as well as the broader professional and general public in Slovakia. Representatives of Slovak organisations active in the field of human rights and freedoms informed us of the work and activities of their institutions and of how they uphold the important legacy of the Helsinki Final Act—namely, the strengthening of the principles of human rights and liberties. Our thanks for their participation go to the Public Defender of Rights, Mr Róbert Dobrovodský; the Director of the Roma Institute, Ms Klára Orgovánová; the Chairman of the Board of the Nation's Memory Institute, Mr Jerguš Sivoš; and likewise to Ambassador Dušan Rozbora, my former colleague in diplomacy, who, as a direct participant in the Helsinki negotiations, conveyed to us the atmosphere that prevailed in the Finlandia Hall at the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. We thank them sincerely.

My words of gratitude must also include the moderators of the individual panels, who are also board members of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia: the former President of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic, Mr Ján Šikuta, and the political scientists Ms Dagmar Kusá and Ms Dagmar Horná.

As with other international events organised by non-governmental organisations, today's conference could not have taken place without the involvement of numerous volunteers and those who worked behind the scenes. Our thanks therefore extend to the staff of Zichy Palace, to the technical team, to the catering personnel who provided our refreshments, to the interpreters Ms Rozholdová and Ms Šimová, and above all to the students who selflessly assisted us, dedicating and sacrificing countless hours to help organise this conference. Their names deserve to be mentioned: Paulínka, Natália, Richard, Salma, Hana, Klára, Karolínka, Miroslav, and Sofia. Our heartfelt thanks.

Our final and sincere gratitude goes to the principal organiser of this event, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia, to its Chair, Ms Tiryaki, and to the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic for its financial support.

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

We thank you all for your presence, for your reflections, and for your valuable contributions to the discussions.

In conclusion, allow me to express one final wish: that our conference may help direct society's attention more towards striving *for* something, rather than fighting *against* someone or something; and that this striving *for* may be a defence of the values we have spoken about today—freedom, democracy, and human rights. Should we succeed in this endeavour, the world will undoubtedly become a better and more beautiful place.

Thank you for your attention. I hope the conference has met your expectations, and I wish you a pleasant remainder of the evening.

Jana Kotová

Chair

Misia 89

ANNEX I

PROGRAMME OF THE CONFERENCE

09:00 – 09:10 Welcoming remarks

Sylvia TIRYAKI, Chair of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia

09:10 – 09:25 Address of the President of the Slovak Republic

H.E. Ján KUBIŠ on behalf of the **President of the Slovak Republic Peter PELLEGRINI**

09:25 – 11:15 Panel 1: The Helsinki impulse for European dialogue

Moderator: **Ján ŠIKUTA**, Former President of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic

Panellists:

- **H.E. Bakyt DZHUSUPOV**, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities
- **Tea JALIASHVILI**, First Deputy Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)
- **Walter KEMP**, Director of Communications at Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, The Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP)
- **H.E. Ján KUBIŠ**, Third OSCE Secretary General
- **Jordan WARLICK**, Policy Advisor at the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

11:15 – 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 13:00 Panel 2: The Helsinki Process & Active Citizenship Platform

Moderator: **Dagmar KUSÁ**, Political Scientist

Panellists:

- **Miroslav KRUTINA**, Chair of the Czech Helsinki Committee
- **Maciej NOWICKI**, Chair of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Poland
- **András K. KÁDÁR**, Co-Chair of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee
- **Sylvia TIRYAKI**, Chair of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Slovakia

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch break

14:00 – 15:45 Panel 3: Human rights in the Helsinki process

Moderator: **Dagmar HORNÁ**, Political Scientist

Panellists:

- **Róbert DOBROVODSKÝ**, Public Rights Defender in Slovakia
- **Klára ORGOVÁNOVÁ**, Director of the Roma Institute
- **Dušan ROZBORA**, Ambassador, Diplomatic Academy of Karol Rybárik, Comenius University in Bratislava
- **Jerguš SIVOŠ**, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Institute of National Memory

15:45 – 16:00 Conclusion

- **Jana KOTOVÁ**, Chair of Misia 89

Event Organizer



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