The official CSCE negotiations began in November 1972, and for two and a half years, thirty-five European and North American states debated what became known as the Helsinki Final Act. By the time the agreement was signed on August 1, 1975, the content bore little resemblance to early Soviet proposals. Instead, the text included a number of unique elements advocated by Western and neutral and nonaligned (NNA) states that led to the CSCE’s surprising influence on East–West relations. The agreement’s follow-up mechanism, commitment to respect human rights, and provisions for human contacts all fostered the development of a transnational network that played an important role in shaping political and social change in Europe in the late 1980s.

A number of earlier works, predominantly written by diplomats engaged in the CSCE negotiations, have addressed the years of talks that produced the Helsinki Final Act and examined the process by which thirty-five delegations finally reached a consensus. This chapter builds upon their accounts and other more recent scholarship. It begins by explaining why the Soviets lobbied for the conference beginning in 1954, and why Western states ultimately agreed to participate. My discussion, however, focuses more closely on how the NATO caucus succeeded in transforming the CSCE agenda and reshaping it to the West’s long-term advantage despite many internal disagreements and an overall lack of foresight as to the significance of the Helsinki Final Act. Most significant to the development and influence of a transnational Helsinki network was Eastern agreement to Principle Seven, committing them to respect human rights, and to the human contacts provisions in Basket Three. Soviet diplomats’ concessions on these points had surprising and unintended consequences,
heightening human rights activism in the USSR and elsewhere in the Soviet bloc. Western diplomatic efforts ensured that the CSCE concluded with a final document far different from that initially conceived by the Soviets. The negotiations in Finland and Switzerland in the early 1970s laid the foundation for the transnational Helsinki activism that followed.

Securing the participation of thirty-four other European and North American countries in the CSCE negotiations and their ultimate agreement to the Helsinki Final Act was initially seen as a great diplomatic coup by the Soviets. The conference had long been sought by the Soviets, who hoped for formal recognition of the post-World War II borders in Central and Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union first proposed a treaty on “collective security in Europe” at the 1954 Foreign Ministers Meeting. The Soviet proposal, designed to replace NATO and diminish United States influence in Europe, was rebuffed immediately.1 The Soviet Union and its allies were persistent on the issue, however, because they believed it would fulfill various objectives, most significant of which was the opportunity to secure international recognition for Eastern European borders, as there had been no formal treaty ending World War II. Offering protection to the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Poland, and Czechoslovakia from future Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) revanchism would increase communist legitimacy in Eastern Europe; in addition, it would protect the Soviet Union’s own territorial gains. Thus, from the Soviet perspective, the proposed conference was about securing the postwar order, territorial expansion, as well as European and international legitimacy. The concept gained little traction, however, for a number of years.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were marked by increasing efforts to diminish East–West tension in Europe, and, as such, proposals to hold a European security conference began to garner more serious attention than they had previously. Western European governments, responsive to citizens who had grown tired of living in a divided Europe dominated by the tension of the Cold War, felt compelled to engage in dialogue with the East. The Netherlands, for example, wanted to use a conference to challenge the status quo and alter East–West relations.2 Moreover, the


United Kingdom and others saw potentially positive implications for Eastern European autonomy and warned against dismissing such proposals.\textsuperscript{3} Canada viewed participation as offering a significant advantage to Canadian and Western interests.\textsuperscript{4} Italy, on the other hand, was one of a number of countries concerned it could weaken Western European unity and integration.\textsuperscript{5} The United States had opposed Soviet calls for a European Security Conference, as it was first known, for many reasons, but most basic was the Soviets’ exclusion of the United States from the potential proceedings.\textsuperscript{6} As there was general agreement among the NATO allies that the United States and Canada must be included, the Soviet Union eventually eased its opposition on the issue.\textsuperscript{7}

\textit{Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965–75} (New York: Routledge, 2008), 184–6. Angela Romano sees the Dutch as the most concerned about the possible consequences of a CSCE, leading to their divergence from the other members of the European Community. Romano, \textit{From Détente in Europe to European Détente}, 154–5.

\textsuperscript{3} REU 25, “Current West European Attitudes Toward a European Security Conference,” April 3, 1969, Folder 1, Box 709, Country Files: Europe, NSC Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NPMP); and Romano, \textit{From Détente in Europe to European Détente}, 151. Oliver Bange, however, argues that British diplomats were slow to see the CSCE as having a possible positive impact on Eastern Europe in the long term, and that it wasn’t until 1974 that they shifted their view of the CSCE. Oliver Bange, “\textit{Ostpolitik} as a Source of Intrabloc Tensions,” in Mary Ann Heiss and S. Victor Papcosma, ed., \textit{NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Intrabloc Conflicts} (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2008), 115. Additional recent scholarship has portrayed Britain as cautious about the proposed ESC (European Security Conference), seeing it possible as “a trap rather than an opportunity.” In the end, seeing the conference as inevitable, Britain turned toward maintaining Western unity and making sure concessions that favored Western interests were secured from the East. Luca Ratti, “Britain, the German Question and the Transformation of Europe: From \textit{Ostpolitik} to the Helsinki Conference, 1963–1975,” in Oliver Bange and Gottfried Niedhart, ed., \textit{Helsinki 1975 and the Transformation of Europe} (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 91.


\textsuperscript{5} Romano, \textit{From Détente in Europe to European Détente}, 152.

\textsuperscript{6} East German analysis of support for an ESC identified the United States as its “main opponent.” Factor Analysis, September 25, 1971, CSCE Negotiation Process, Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive.

\textsuperscript{7} For greater discussion of the challenges the United States faced as it tried to balance its bilateral relationship with the Soviets and its relations with its NATO allies over these issues, see Sarah B. Snyder, “The United States, Western Europe, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1972–1975,” in Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz, ed., \textit{The Strained Alliance: U.S.–European Relations from Nixon to Carter} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 257–75. Copyright © 2010 The German Historical Institute. Parts of that chapter are reprinted here in revised form with permission from Cambridge University Press. Csaba Békés argues that the Warsaw Pact states had
Among the Western states, representatives of the six countries that made up the European Community (EC) worked to develop a common position for the proposed conference while the fifteen NATO countries simultaneously attempted to develop a joint stance. In some ways, the EC was preferable over NATO as the principal forum in which Western CSCE policy would be formulated given France’s lack of interest in working within NATO and the poor human rights records of Greece, Turkey, and Portugal at the time. Indeed, several scholars have recently focused on successful EC diplomacy within the CSCE, arguing it was able to gain Soviet agreement to an expansive notion of security, one that addressed people as well as states. The NATO allies, however, also played a key role given the size of the alliance and the outsize influence of the United States with the Soviets.

By 1971 NATO members had also entered into discussions about how best to achieve allied objectives in a European Security Conference and moved beyond initial Soviet hopes for a short, narrowly defined conference to envision one that would be as advantageous as possible to Western European goals. The Warsaw Pact countries had originally proposed an agenda addressing only the renunciation of force and economic and technological exchange. To strengthen the substance of the agenda, NATO focused on including governing principles for relations between CSCE states; free movement of people, ideas, and information; environmental cooperation; and human rights. The NATO countries wanted the conference to consider measures that would materially reduce the tension in Europe and genuinely increase security. NATO leaders also recognized
the opportunity to exhibit the “superiority” of life in the West to that under the Soviets, and their desired agenda reflected that goal. The State Department identified a conference as important to achieving long-term American objectives of expanding the “influence of the Western community ... eastward.”

Although allied and American thinking was largely in agreement on overall NATO objectives, a coherent strategy and agreement were not reached for some time. Many American administration officials wanted to put the Soviets “on the tactical defensive” by including force reductions and supporting a permanent institution to which East European states could appeal if threatened militarily. The United States supported a more aggressive agenda than some of its allies, in part to demonstrate that significant differences remained between the East and the West, which would imply that the continuation of the Atlantic alliance and the presence of American troops in Europe were necessary.

Despite repeated efforts to maintain allied unity, a State Department report characterized NATO allies as “more divided, perhaps, than ever” over progress on CSCE as they began their NATO ministerial meeting in December 1971. Some of these divisions centered on what subjects should be addressed at the conference and the degree to which the West should take adversarial positions. For example, some American policymakers identified the potential for propaganda victories and even some Soviet concessions during the negotiations on freer movement, although there were hesitations about pursuing such an assertive approach on a
controversial subject; State Department official George Vest warned that the issue of freer movement was a “card” that “should be used for what it was worth and not over-played.” France and the FRG worried that such discussions might be too confrontational for the Soviets, whereas others, such as the Dutch and the British, focused on the potential positive effects from such negotiations.

Extensive advanced consultations eventually led the NATO position to be more far-reaching than initially considered, with lasting importance to the significance of the Helsinki Final Act. James Goodby, who was posted to the United States mission to NATO for much of this period, sees the State Department as having had an “aim of changing the status quo in Eastern Europe, using the issue of human rights as a means of challenging Soviet dominion over that area” in its thinking about the CSCE in the early 1970s. Goodby argues that before the fall of 1970, the NATO allies were focused only on securing agreement that would prevent further Soviet action under the guise of the Brezhnev Doctrine. In his view, State Department prodding fundamentally changed Western European thinking about a security conference and convinced the NATO allies that the proposed conference also could be used to influence how a state treated its citizens, which marked an important reconception of the potential for the concluding agreement. Some on the United States CSCE Inter-Agency Task Force thought that if the NATO allies could maintain a uniform position, they could exact concessions on human rights provisions due to Soviet emphasis on a “successful” conference.

Despite such discussions, the United States was less focused on developing the form and substance of the conference, and the European allies ultimately led the efforts to protect Western interests in the conference

17 Reply to NSSM 138, October 2, 1971, Folder 1, Box H-063, Institutional “H” Files, NSC Files, NPMP; and Telegram, U.S. Mission NATO to SecState, March 1, 1972, DEF 1 EUR, 3/1/72, Box 1708, Subject Numeric Files, 1970–73, Political and Defense, RG 59.
19 Goodby argues that despite a more reticent role by the State Department during the CSCE negotiations, it had a significant impact due to these early efforts. His account may overemphasize the influence of American diplomats on Western European CSCE policy. Goodby, “The Origins of the Human Rights Provisions in the Helsinki Final Act,” 13; and Goodby, *Europe Undivided*, 54.
20 Secretary of State William Rogers sent the report to David Kennedy, U.S. Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Council for use in NATO negotiations. Rogers to Kennedy, March 20, 1972, DEF 1 EUR, 3/20/72, Box 1708, Subject Numeric Files, 1970–73, Political and Defense, RG 59; and Attachment to Memorandum, March 20, 1972, Folder NSDM 162, Box H – 233, Institutional “H” Files, NSC Files, NPMP.
preparations. Although the United States was less involved in the planning than its allies, its position was of particular importance given attempts to maintain harmony within the Atlantic alliance. British head of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Western Organizations Department, Crispin Tickell, wrote, “We do indeed want to avoid any European/American row about CSCE, and we agree that the avoidance of such a row is more important than abstract arguments about how a hypothetical conference might be prepared.”

The Consultations stage to establish the agenda for the CSCE, also known as the Multilateral Preparatory Talks (MPT), began on November 22, 1972, in Dipoli, Finland, not far from Helsinki. As the agenda would determine the substance of the negotiations and the outline of the final agreement, the MPT was a critical component of the CSCE and presented an opportunity for the Western powers to seize control. The meetings lasted seven months and were shaped by a number of factors: Western emphasis on enhancing the substance of the agreement, lack of interest by American foreign policymakers, Western European concern about public reaction, and increased pressure by the Soviets on the United States and others to accommodate their objectives.

The Helsinki Consultations were used to develop an outline of the final CSCE agreement; the detailed language would be worked out in the subsequent negotiations in Geneva that would begin in August 1973. Allied objectives for the CSCE, all of which the NATO states pursued in the MPT in Dipoli, included diminishing East–West divisions in Europe, in part by lessening the isolation of Eastern European states. The allies worked to strengthen their CSCE proposals by supporting provisions related to human rights and formulating confidence-building measures (CBMs) in order to balance Eastern European proposals at the talks.

Many of the wide-ranging objectives to which NATO was committed necessitated securing consensus of the Warsaw Pact and NNA states as well as managing any intra-alliance differences over priorities and

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22     Telegram, U.S. Mission NATO to SecState, April 8, 1972, MBFR-CSCE Backup Book, Part 3, Box 482, President’s Trip Files, NSC Files, NPMP. A British document suggested that NATO had decided to withhold judgment until after the MPT, implying if the results were not satisfactory they would not yet be committed to the conference. Draft Brief, November 13, 1972, DBPO III:II.
strategy. Overall, the Western states were organizing to achieve maximum gains at the talks without succumbing to any of their long-held fears about Soviet maneuvering and manipulations. Although NATO members were in general agreement about their defensive goals, countries disagreed as to the balance between extracting concessions and threatening European détente with confrontational negotiations, which was a question that would plague allied relations throughout the years under consideration here.

The relative lack of United States interest in the CSCE continued during the MPT in Dipoli. In Ferraris’s view, the American “attitude of detachment” was “ostentatiously” displayed there. He rightly notes that Kissinger regarded the CSCE “as an exercise, at best significant for public opinion, but certainly not as an essential component of the substantial make-up of the process of détente.”

To United States CSCE delegate John J. Maresca, the speaking order at the foreign ministers meeting in Helsinki following the Dipoli Consultations most clearly illustrated American lack of interest in the conference preparations; according to him, all the other thirty-four states asked for special placement on the speakers list, whereas the United States made no such request. This led Secretary of State William Rogers to be listed last, an embarrassment only partially lessened after his arrival in Helsinki, when the Finnish hosts switched places with the United States, moving Rogers up to the twenty-first position. The Soviets, who had designated a diplomat to wait outside the Finnish foreign ministry overnight to secure their spot on the list, spoke first. American apathy, it seems, was principally a result of skepticism about the conference’s impact.

The Helsinki Consultations ended on June 8, 1973, with an agreement on Final Recommendations that delineated the timing of the formal conference and the four baskets of issues to be discussed in the Geneva phase. By the end of Dipoli, the negotiators had already defined the elements of each of the baskets, indicating that delegates at Geneva would consider proposals on freedom of movement, dissemination of information, and different types of exchanges. In addition, the negotiations had outlined what would be the ten principles of Basket One, including the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Success in broadening the

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agenda to include issues such as family reunification and working conditions for journalists, not part of early Soviet proposals, led to positive appraisals in the West. Nevertheless, fundamental disagreements within the NATO alliance and between East and West on the agreements guiding principles and human contacts provisions remained and would characterize much of the negotiations in Geneva.

The Soviets initially had hoped for a short conference with a brief, superficial, political declaration on postwar borders, territorial integrity, and nonuse of force; they wanted to stymie Western efforts to infuse more content into the agreement. In order to gain Western participation, however, the Soviets had agreed in Diplomacy to broaden the agenda to humanitarian issues and others of interest to the Western Europeans. The Soviet strategy during the Geneva stage was to push the negotiations toward a summit finale as quickly as possible while reserving the flexibility to make certain strategic concessions in order to reach a successful conclusion to the conference, which for them meant a document addressing principles of détente and economic cooperation. To this end, the Soviets pursued a range of tactics, including public statements and bilateral pressure. In American characterizations, Soviet pressure tactics included blackmail and “abusive comments.” Furthermore, the Soviets attempted to breed dissention among the NATO allies by informing some countries of their

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own bilateral negotiations with the United States in Washington before the United States had communicated this to its allies.  

There was a growing belief among the allied delegations, however, that Soviet conduct demonstrated their strong commitment to the conference and meant they must be near to yielding on some issues in order to achieve a summit before August 1975; according to the United States delegation in Geneva, the Soviets “pretend nonchalance, but their behavior showed that they were quite evidently under growing time pressure.” Indeed, a Soviet diplomat later reported that Brezhnev said, “If Helsinki is held, then I can die.” In the United States delegation’s view, some Western countries preferred waiting to seize the advantage while others were more concerned with simply ensuring the conference would be over. However, the perception that the Soviets were becoming increasingly vulnerable with the passage of time was supported as they finally displayed greater flexibility in negotiations at Geneva at the end of May 1975. The Soviets were more willing to bargain on Basket Three than on the CBMs at the time, but in Kissinger’s words, the concessions began “dribbling out.” This was in contrast to the first years of negotiations, in which the Soviets conceded only minor points at highly opportunistic moments. Siegfried Bock, who headed the GDR’s delegation at Dipoli, has argued the Warsaw Pact delegations made a tactical mistake by putting such great emphasis on ending the CSCE negotiations swiftly as that left them open to pressure from the West: “The more discernibly the Soviet Union showed that it wanted the conference to become an early success, the more vigorously did the West present demands of their own in regard to the humanitarian issues.”

30 Briefing Item, April or May 1975, Folder CSCE, 1975 (2) White House, Box 44, National Security Council Europe, Canada and Ocean Affairs Staff Files, NSA, GRFL.
32 A. Kovalev, Azbuka Diplomatim (Moscow: Interpraks, 1993), 188. Even if such a quote is apocryphal, it indicates the extent to which Brezhnev was perceived to be attached to a CSCE summit.
33 Telegram, US Mission Geneva to SecState, April 29, 1975, Folder Switzerland – State Department Telegrams – To SECSTATE – NODIS (4), Box 13, President’s Country Files for Europe and Canada, NSA, GRFL.
34 Briefing Memorandum, May 29, 1975, Folder CSCE 1975 (3) White House, Box 44, National Security Council Europe, Canada, and Ocean Affairs Staff Files, NSA, GRFL.
35 Memorandum of Conversation, May 30, 1975, Folder Britain 1975, Box 4, Sonnenfeldt Collection.
An important element in the Soviet CSCE strategy was utilizing ongoing bilateral talks with the United States to influence American negotiating positions and convince the United States to pressure its allies to relent on proposals opposed by the USSR. At times this succeeded, as the United States was motivated by broader concerns about Soviet–American détente and thus engaged in CSCE-related negotiations outside the CSCE framework; for example, during Nixon’s July 1974 trip to Moscow, the United States enhanced its support for the Soviet Union’s plan for a final stage summit, articulating an “assumption” that the negotiations would warrant such a meeting.37 Similarly, Kissinger worked closely and clandestinely with the Soviets to forge compromises at Geneva. For instance, the United States and the Soviet Union reached an agreement on Basket Three language, but in order to avoid raising Western European suspicions, they developed a plan whereby “Country X,” later decided to be Finland, would introduce the language. The United States would comment favorably on the “new” language once other countries, including the USSR, had reacted.38 This instance was part of a larger ongoing Soviet–American dialogue about how to reach agreements without appearing to circumvent the multilateral proceedings.39 For the most part, although, the bilateral discussions involved Soviet diplomats pushing for commitments from the United States that it would not make.40

At the root of the Soviet frustration with the proceedings were delays they attributed to overly aggressive proposals from Western Europe, a complaint with which some United States policymakers agreed. Kissinger, when confronted by Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, blamed the slow speed on the Europeans, whom he described as “crazy on the subject of human contacts.”41 Indeed, some Western European countries, taking advantage of strong Soviet desires for a successful conclusion of the

38 Memorandum of Conversation, May 7, 1974, Folder 4, Box 71, HAK Office Files, NPMP; and Memorandum, Stabler to Kissinger, June 6, 1974, Folder 8, Box 8, Sonnenfeldt Collection.
39 Telegram, SecState to AmEmbassy Moscow, April 4, 1974, Folder 1, Box 723, Country Files: Europe, NSC Files, NPMP; Telegram, AmEmbassy Moscow to SecState, April 19, 1974, ibid.; and Kovalev, Azbuka Diplomatim, 189.
40 Telegram, AmEmbassy Rome to SecState, October 25, 1973, Folder 1, Box 696, Country Files: Europe, NSC Files, NPMP. See also February 7, 1974, Folder CSCE LOG Washington-Geneva, Box 4, Sherer Papers.
41 Memorandum of Conversation, December 22, 1973, Folder 2, Box 69, The Road to Helsinki, Cold War International History Project Conference Volume. At times, however, this was a strategy to camouflage American intransigence. For example, when Gromyko
conference, had pushed confrontational issues such as freer movement of people.\textsuperscript{42} CSCE negotiations dragged in the fall of 1974 due to Western European unwillingness to compromise, as some states were quite zealous, including the Netherlands, which pursued an aggressive campaign for the sanctity of private correspondence.\textsuperscript{43} The Dutch approach to the negotiations frustrated the Soviets and at times even their allies.\textsuperscript{44} Prince Henri of Lichtenstein depicted the Dutch as the most ardent of the Western negotiators, saying, “We all throw stones at the Soviets, but the Dutch throw entire blocks of concrete.”\textsuperscript{45} The Soviets certainly had the Dutch in mind when they referred to some Western Basket Three proposals as “excessive and obnoxious.”\textsuperscript{46}

The Warsaw Pact states, at times, also disagreed among themselves about how to approach the conference. The Soviet Union attempted to speak for the entire Eastern bloc, but its interests frequently were not aligned with its satellites. Eastern European states hoped to use the CSCE to address their specific interests in East–West relations while enhancing advocated ending the Conference before the upcoming American summit in Moscow, Kissinger deflected blame onto the Western European allies although he was privately working against such a timetable. Memorandum of Conversation, April 28, 1974, Folder 4, Box 71, HAK Office Files, NSC Files, NPMP. The dismissive attitude with which Kissinger regarded these proposals likely emboldened the Soviets in their unwillingness to compromise.

\textsuperscript{42} Historian Daniel Möckli describes the EC states as “the fortress of Western interests” that worked to rebuff “Eastern attempts to water down” Basket Three provisions. Möckli, \textit{European Foreign Policy During the Cold War}, 116.


\textsuperscript{44} Baudet, “‘It Was Cold War and We Wanted to Win’” in Wenger et al., ed., \textit{Origins of the European Security System}, 187.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 192.


\url{https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms}. 
\url{https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511851964.002}
their position with respect to the Soviet Union, which at times created a divergence from Soviet positions. Romania, the most prominent example, saw CSCE provisions on noninterference in internal affairs and the renunciation of the use of force as providing some security protection from a potential Soviet invasion. Nonetheless, Eastern European diplomats largely followed the Soviet lead and did not exercise independent authority in these negotiations that would later prove so significant to the future of the region.

The Western European strategy for the Geneva stage, like its approach to Dipoli, was focused on gaining Soviet concessions on human contacts, which the NATO allies achieved by capitalizing on the Soviet desire for a short conference that ended at the summit level. According to Goodby, there was hope among diplomats negotiating the NATO position on Basket Three that the CSCE could “unfreeze the situation” in Eastern Europe by exposing people there to new influences, although there was less optimism about the Soviet Union. France and Britain both hoped provisions on human contacts could slowly improve the situation in Eastern Europe. Throughout the negotiations in Geneva, the delegates debated if the final stage would be a summit with heads of state or if the meeting would conclude at a lower level. As the Soviets showed their desperation for a summit conclusion, Western and neutral states maintained that their level of participation was dependent on the substance agreed to at Geneva and thus pressed for more Eastern concessions. Soviet attempts to preserve some of their original vision of the CSCE as a large European conference, presided over by Brezhnev, at which heads of state would meet and discuss security issues, were frustrated by Western insistence on human rights and democratization.


49 James Goodby Interview, April 1, 2005; and Romano, From Détente in Europe to European Détente, 115.

state all signed an agreement recognizing the postwar borders ultimately enabled the Western Europeans to gain acquiescence on Basket Three elements opposed by the East.

Western European diplomats had taken the lead in Geneva because Kissinger remained uninterested in the CSCE. Guy Coriden, who was a member of the United States delegation, remembers, “Nobody really cared about [the CSCE]. We really felt that we were out there alone. We didn’t have much instruction from Washington.” George Vest, who was one of the heads of the United States delegation, suggests the lack of instructions might be due to the contradictory positions of the secretary of state and national security adviser. According to Vest, Rogers supported “strong human rights activity,” whereas Kissinger felt, “You should forget all this business about human rights.” Kissinger and advisers such as Sonnenfeldt, however, were cautious about the CSCE before the talks began and believed confrontational debate had limited positive potential. He did not ascribe much significance to the human contacts provisions being negotiated, such as an Italian proposal on free access to foreign printed information. At one point, Kissinger remarked: “What is it that suddenly possesses the West to believe that it can affect the domestic structure of the Soviet Union through a treaty signed in Geneva of peripheral significance?” In addition, he did not want to risk unnecessary disagreements with the Soviet Union. Prophesying about negotiations with the Soviets, Sonnenfeldt wrote, “The West will press for freer


CSCE/II/f/3, October 4, 1973, CSCE II/vol. 18, OSCE Archives.


Thomas Delworth, a Canadian diplomat involved in many of the early CSCE negotiations, told me that Kissinger dismissed the value of Basket Three provisions such as the free flow of information by noting the wide variety of international newspapers available in Berlin in the 1930s had not prevented Hitler’s rise to power. Thomas Delworth Interview, December 7, 2005; and Thomas, The Helsinki Effect, 78.
movement of people and information. The East will parry with a general promise not to interfere with movement of people and information. This will be hailed as an important beginning. Nothing much will change.” In his view, “some debating points may be scored” but an agreement on freer movement would not significantly affect Europe. Sonnenfeldt’s assessment was quite accurate as the agreement’s language itself would not change the communist system in Eastern Europe; not until Eastern European states began to implement their CSCE commitments on freedom of movement was European stability affected. With the benefit of hindsight, Kissinger later suggested that he had identified a “long-term opportunity” in the CSCE, but he only wanted to use American participation in the conference as a tool to restrain Soviet behavior and did not have a prophetic understanding of the negotiations’ long-term significance.

As the Geneva stage wore on, Italian diplomat Luigi Ferraris wrote there was “the risk of transforming the CSCE into a permanent inter-European debating forum.” In order to avoid such a fate, some states began to moderate their positions. By early May 1975, State Department Counselor Helmut Sonnenfeldt reported to Kissinger that there was a “virtually unanimous desire” among those in Geneva to end the conference by swiftly moving to the final stage. Yet, tension within the NATO caucus had increased due to frustration with the lack of Soviet movement and allegations that the United States might settle for a weaker Basket Three. United States Ambassador to the Geneva negotiations Albert J. Sherer, Jr., reported that his delegation was working hard to soothe disagreements among the allies, but trust between many of the countries had waned. After a final flurry of negotiations,

56 Memorandum, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, August 19, 1972, NATO, the Warsaw Pact and Détente, 1965–1973, Cold War International History Project Conference Volume.
58 Ferraris, Report on a Negotiation, 402.
59 Telegram, U.S. Mission Geneva to SecState, September 25, 1974, Switzerland – SDT-To SecState – EXDIS (11), Box 13, President’s Country Files for Europe and Canada, NSA, GRFL.
60 Memorandum, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, Folder 11, Box 7, Sonnenfeldt Collection.
61 Briefing Item, May 27, 1975, Folder CSCE 1975 (3) White House, Box 44, National Security Council Europe, Canada, and Ocean Affairs Staff Files, NSA, GRFL; April 22, 1975, Folder CSCE LOG Washington-Geneva, Box 4, Sherer Papers; and April 23, 1975, ibid.
the negotiation of the four baskets of the Helsinki Final Act finally ended on July 21, 1975.\textsuperscript{62}

The representatives of thirty-five European and North American states signed the Helsinki Final Act on August 1, 1975, in Helsinki. The agreement has often been described as the “high point of détente” and contained far-reaching agreements on East–West interactions, political borders, military confidence-building measures, trade, and human contacts. It was a key diplomatic turning point in the Cold War, as over time the agreement spurred the development of a transnational network committed to Helsinki implementation and inspired popular movements against the communist regimes.\textsuperscript{63}

The Helsinki Final Act was a consensus document signed by thirty-five nations, whose delegates had starkly different understandings of the meaning and obligations of the agreement. Much as the United States and the Soviet Union had differing conceptions of détente, the two superpowers had divergent interpretations of the act, in particular related to the binding nature of the signatories’ commitments and the degree to which each side intended to fulfill its obligations.\textsuperscript{64} It also was quickly apparent that Eastern and Western states were determined to emphasize different

\textsuperscript{62} As discussed at greater length in the introduction, the first basket outlined ten principles guiding relations in Europe, including inviolability of frontiers, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, territorial integrity of states, and peaceful settlement of disputes. It also incorporated confidence-building measures such as advanced notification of troop maneuvers.


elements of the Helsinki agreement. The Soviet Union and its allies, for example, trumpeted principles such as the inviolability of frontiers and noninterference in internal affairs, whereas Western states focused on provisions for freedom of movement and other human contacts provisions.\(^{65}\)

Although the United States would later fight with the Soviets over lack of compliance in the East for many years, Kissinger can be considered complicit in establishing nonimplementation as acceptable. Throughout their bilateral talks on the CSCE, the Soviets gave early signals that, not unsurprisingly, they did not intend to implement all provisions of the agreement fully. Kissinger seems to have implicitly accepted Soviet plans for partial compliance given the issue’s low priority for him. For example, in September 1974 talks in Washington, Kissinger and Gromyko discussed the nature of obligation to the CBM provisions of the agreement, with the Soviet foreign minister noting it was a “moral commitment.” Kissinger asked if a “moral obligation” was more or less binding than a legal commitment, to which Gromyko responded that “as a rule it will be carried out.” Gromyko’s answer and Kissinger’s failure to address Gromyko’s

\(^{65}\) Memorandum, Ingersoll to Ford, January 15, 1976, Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1976 (1) NSC, Box 45, National Security Council Europe, Canada and Ocean Affairs Staff, NSA, GRFL.
qualification “as a rule” implied there was some sense between the two that the Helsinki agreement would be less than completely obligatory.\textsuperscript{66} This interpretation is further supported by Kissinger’s repeated references to the Helsinki Final Act as “unenforceable” or even “meaningless.”\textsuperscript{67} Kissinger and Gromyko also jointly mocked the third basket and its provisions for cultural contacts, deriving the most amusement from the idea that they might allow a country to open a “cabaret” in Moscow.\textsuperscript{68} At one point, Kissinger said to Gromyko, “I don’t think you’ll change your system as a result of Basket III” and implied that he did not expect the Soviets to adhere completely to Basket Three provisions.\textsuperscript{69} Similarly, Nixon had earlier pressured Brezhnev to make concessions on the third basket because the language was theoretical and not a “fact.”\textsuperscript{70} The available record is echoed in the memories of Soviet translator Viktor Sukhodrev, who has said the Soviets “had been conditioned by Henry Kissinger to treat the whole thing as something of no practical importance.” He recalls Kissinger telling Gromyko, “Mr. Minister, why are we quibbling over these forms of words? No matter what goes into the final act, I don’t believe that the Soviet Union will ever do anything it doesn’t want to.”\textsuperscript{71}

Not surprisingly, there also were divergent views on which side benefited most from the agreement. Former American diplomat to the Soviet Union Marshall Brement notes that the Soviets thought they had secured a great diplomatic achievement in the Helsinki Final Act, one for which Gromyko had worked for twenty years.\textsuperscript{72} And, indeed, that was

\textsuperscript{66} Memorandum of Conversation, September 20, 1974, Soviet Union August–September 1974, Box 8, Sonnenfeldt Collection.

\textsuperscript{67} Memorandum of Conversation, May 30, 1975, Britain 1975, Box 4, Sonnenfeldt Collection; and Memorandum of Conversation, August 15, 1974, August 15, 1974–Ford, Kissinger, Box 5, Memcons, NSA, GRFL.

\textsuperscript{68} Memorandum of Conversation, April 28, 1974, Folder 4, Box 71, NSC, HAK Office Files, NPMP; and Memorandum of Conversation, June 29, 1974, Folder 3, Box 77, Country Files: Europe, NSC, ibid.

\textsuperscript{69} Memorandum of Conversation, May 19, 1975, Folder 7, Box 11, Sonnenfeldt Collection.

\textsuperscript{70} Memorandum of Conversation, June 29, 1974, Folder 3, Box 77, Country Files: Europe, NSC, HAK Office Files, NPMP.

\textsuperscript{71} Viktor Sukhodrev in “SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust: Conference #2 of the Carter-Brezhnev Project (A Conference of U.S. and Russian Policymakers and Scholars Held at Musgrove Plantation, St. Simon’s Island, Georgia, May 6–9, 1994), on file at the National Security Archive.

also the dominant interpretation among those in the American press and politics. Critics of the Helsinki Final Act saw the principle on the inviolability of frontiers and others as signaling official Western acceptance of Soviet territorial acquisitions during World War II. These criticisms dovetailed with those who had always asserted that the Soviet Union’s goal with the CSCE was the expansion of its influence in Europe. Principle Six, which disavowed intervention into internal affairs, was the most controversial part of the first basket as the two sides interpreted it in starkly different lights. For the West, Principle Six was a rebuke to the Brezhnev Doctrine, ensuring that the Soviets could not again intervene militarily in Eastern European countries as they had in the past. In contrast, the Soviets were minimally concerned about Principle Six’s impact on their influence in Eastern Europe, and instead interpreted Principle Six as a way to prevent the West from interfering with internal policies, including human rights. This viewpoint, however, neglected to focus on many of the onerous commitments to which the Soviets agreed.

Explaining how the Soviets could have signed a document so potentially disadvantageous to them and ultimately threatening to their system, one observer has suggested Gromyko made numerous concessions he regarded as meaningless in the final negotiations because he could not allow the conference to fall apart due to the national and personal prestige associated with it.

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76 The second and least controversial basket addressed economic, scientific, and technological cooperation between CSCE states. The third basket concentrated on humanitarian issues such as the reunification of families, the improvement of working conditions for journalists, and increased cultural exchanges. The fourth basket set up a follow-up meeting to review implementation of the Helsinki Final Act in October 1977 in Belgrade.

In addition, Soviet diplomat Yuri Kashlev suggests that Brezhnev signed the Helsinki Final Act without carefully reviewing it.\textsuperscript{78} Brezhnev’s unfamiliarity with the terms of Basket Three likely was less to blame, however, than Soviet assumptions that they would never have to implement the accord’s provisions. To this point, Gromyko is reported to have told Brezhnev in response to concerns about the Helsinki commitments: “We are masters in our own house,” assuring him that the Soviet leaders could decide how to define human rights.\textsuperscript{79} Dobrynin later acknowledged that the Soviets were interested only in the first two baskets and tried to downgrade the importance of the third basket however possible.\textsuperscript{80} Soviet ideologist Mikhail Suslov, however, understood the significance of what the Soviets had agreed to and blamed Anatoly Kovalev, who had headed the Soviet delegation.\textsuperscript{81} Other Soviet leaders also were concerned, particularly President Nikolai Podgorny, Premier Alexei Kosygin, and KGB head Yuri Andropov, but Gromyko sold it as a victory.\textsuperscript{82}


\textsuperscript{79} Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 322; and John Lewis Gaddis, The Cold War: A New History (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 188. Indeed, as discussed in an earlier chapter, Nixon and Kissinger may have led the Soviets to believe the United States would not insist on compliance.


\textsuperscript{81} Kashlev, “The CSCE in the Soviet Union’s Politics,” 68; Korey, The Promises We Keep, xxii; and Savranskaya, “Unintended Consequences,” in Bange and Niedhart, ed., Helsinki 1975 and the Transformation of Europe, 179.

\textsuperscript{82} Loth, Overcoming the Cold War, 131. One scholar has suggested the Soviets involved in negotiating the Helsinki Final Act might not have been concerned about the content of the agreement because they had been so successful in suppressing human rights activism up to that point. Svetlana Savranskaya, “The Battles for the Final Act: the Soviet Government and Dissidents’ Efforts to Define the Substance and the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act,” paper presented at the conference “European and Transatlantic Strategies in the Late Cold War Period to Overcome the East–West Division of Europe,” Copenhagen, Denmark, November 30–December 1, 2007.
Soviet claims of triumph at Helsinki complicated American public interpretation of the agreement, which was decidedly negative. A range of groups and individuals, including a number of prominent politicians, opposed the Helsinki Final Act, arguing that it served Soviet, not American objectives; many believed it formally recognized the Soviet annexation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and acquiesced in Soviet domination of Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{83} A Wall Street Journal editorial urged Ford not to sign the agreement, pleading, “Jerry, don’t go.”\textsuperscript{84} The principal line of American criticism was that the United States had given away too much in the negotiations and had required little of the Soviets in return; many believed Kissinger had focused on minimizing human rights in order to defuse confrontation with the Soviet Union and preserve détente.\textsuperscript{85} In the United States, there were concerns that the agreement represented a diplomatic defeat for the West, or in the words of one commentator, “a new edition of Munich.”\textsuperscript{86}

Western European views generally were more optimistic than those in the United States, which was consistent with their divergent ideas about détente as well as the value of the conference, and their different roles in negotiations. A European Council declaration on the content of the Helsinki Final Act, approved at a July 17, 1975, meeting, stated, “The Final Act represents a step toward détente whose real importance can be measured only by effective application by all participating states of all the principles reaffirmed and measures approved.”\textsuperscript{87} The FRG and France may have expressed the most enthusiasm about the CSCE, as the FRG was pursuing improved relations with the East, and France wanted to introduce more multipolarity to the Cold War.\textsuperscript{88}

Remarks by the leaders assembled in Helsinki reflected the different interpretations of the Helsinki Final Act that would plague the CSCE for many subsequent years. Speaking first, Finnish President Urho Kekkonen, who had marshaled the ESC initiative to fruition, told the assembled leaders, “This is a day of joy and hope for Europe. We have every reason

\textsuperscript{83} For further discussion, see Sarah B. Snyder, “‘Jerry, Don’t Go’: Domestic Opposition to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act,” Journal of American Studies 44:1 (February 2010): 67–81.


\textsuperscript{85} Flynn, “The Content of European Détente,” 411; and Korey, The Promises We Keep, xxii.

\textsuperscript{86} Dubinin, “Khel’sinki 1975,” 101.

\textsuperscript{87} Telegram, USMission EC Brussels to SecState, July 18, 1975, Belgium-State Dept. Telegrams to SECSTATE-EXDIS, Box 1, Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada, NSA, GRFL.

\textsuperscript{88} Loth, Overcoming the Cold War, 148.
to believe that a new era in our mutual relations is dawning and that we have set out on a journey through détente to stability and enduring peace.”

Brezhnev was similarly positive about the conference, sounding familiar Soviet themes that the Helsinki Final Act represented an end to the Second World War: “The Soviet Union regards the results of the Conference not merely as a necessary summing up of the political outcome of the Second World War … Possibilities for co-operation extend now also to areas where it was unthinkable in the years of the cold war.” At the same time he indicated Soviet resistance to discussing internal policies, cautioning, “no one should try to dictate to other peoples on the basis of foreign policy considerations of one kind or another the manner in which they ought to manage their internal affairs.”

British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, in contrast, highlighted the issues of human rights and human contacts by criticizing restrictions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, saying, “There is no reason why in 1975 Europeans should not be allowed to marry whom they want; hear and read what they want, travel abroad where and when they want, and meet whom they want.”

In his speech to the collected heads of state, Ford suggested that the CSCE offered an opportunity for Europe to overcome its divisive past and reestablish positive intra-European relations. Ford had asked his speechwriters to emphasize “hope” in his speech, and against Kissinger’s advice, strengthen the rhetoric. He also referenced the long-standing connections between the American and European people, including the ancestral links to Europe that many Americans felt. In his most famous remarks in Helsinki, Ford emphasized implementation of the agreement: “History will judge this Conference not by what we say here today, but by what we do tomorrow – not by the promises we make, but by the promises we make.

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89 Urho Kekkonen (Finland), July 30, 1975, CSCE/III/vol. 24, OSCE Archives.
90 Leonid Brezhnev (USSR), July 31, 1975, CSCE/III/vol. 24, OSCE Archives. A CIA report prepared shortly before the signing of the Helsinki Final Act predicted “the long-term effects of the conference are not likely to be discernible for many years.” The CIA analysis notes that as the conference progressed, the Soviets became increasingly concerned about the potential impact of monitoring the agreement’s implementation. Memorandum, “The CSCE and Western Europe – Pluses and Minuses,” July 18, 1975, CSCE, 1975 (1) National Security Council, Box 44, National Security Council Europe, Canada and Ocean Affairs Staff, NSA, GRFL.
91 Elliott to Callaghan, August 12, 1975, DBPO III: II.
92 AP, “Ford Overruled Kissinger, Toughened Helsinki Speech,” Richmond Times-Dispatch, August 9, 1975, A–3, Press Clipping Helsinki, 1975, OSCE Archives; and Note, July 3, 1975, Speeches (3), Box 43, Presidential Handwriting File, GRFL.
Ford’s strong stand at Helsinki was intended to impress Eastern leaders and to quiet domestic critics of his trip but had little resonance at home. Upon his return on August 4, 1975, Ford announced he was glad he had traveled to Helsinki because it reinforced American support for liberty and peace in Eastern Europe. However prescient Ford’s remarks may have been, at the time few recognized the future consequences of the Helsinki Final Act. The summit in Helsinki marked the beginning of an ongoing process in which the CSCE states gathered periodically in follow-up meetings, as stipulated by Basket Four, to review the implementation of the Act and pursue further efforts to decrease East–West tension. These meetings established a framework within which Helsinki compliance was monitored carefully and also offered the opportunity for those active on Helsinki issues to press for greater adherence to the terms of the act.

The content of the final agreement was essential to the CSCE’s long-term prospects. Over time Soviet assent to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, to adhere to provisions governing East–West contacts, and to review progress toward Helsinki implementation in two years’ time, all had far-reaching influence on politics and society in Eastern Europe. Kissinger’s lack of interest may have diminished the agreement’s impact in the early years of the Helsinki process by implying the Soviets would not need to adhere to the terms of the agreement. Numerous challenges, however, in the form of Eastern dissidence and activist politicians challenged Soviet assumptions, transforming the Helsinki process into a force for change in Europe.

93 Address, August 1, 1975, United States Department of State, The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

94 The Los Angeles Times regarded it as “probably Mr. Ford’s most impressive speech.” Amy Schapiro, Millicent Fenwick: Her Way (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 167.

95 Statement, August 4, 1975, 8/1/75 CSCE (4), Box 176, Robert T. Hartmann Papers, GRFL.