



Open Skies Consultative Commission

20 years of Open Skies

“By this step to convince the world that we are providing as between ourselves against the possibility of a great surprise attack, thus lessening danger and relaxing tension...”

In 1955 then-US President Eisenhower proposed mutual aerial inspections by the major Cold War powers. The proposal was rejected, only to be put into practice 20 years later under the auspices of the OSCE, the then-Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE).



In 1992, following the end of the Cold War, 26 member States of the Atlantic Alliance and the former Warsaw Pact came together within the framework of the CSCE to sign the Treaty on Open Skies. Ten years later, following a drawn-out period of negotiations, the treaty, with a membership of 34 States Parties, entered into force.

The treaty allows States Parties to carry out unarmed observation flights over each other's territories by giving them the possibility to obtain information on military or other activities of their concern.

With its aim of promoting openness and transparency, the Open Skies Treaty has served as an effective tool to increase confidence and stability among all States Parties. It helps to build trust and familiarity not only between States, but also between people; at least 20 people are engaged in any observation flight, including the aircraft crew and the teams from the observing and the observed countries.

Damian Leader, Chief Arms Control Delegate of the US Mission to the OSCE, believes that the success of the Open Skies Treaty is not fully appreciated.

“It has really increased confidence among the countries; it allowed interaction between thousands of inspectors from all the different countries. Sometimes we overlook the value of just an individual face-to-face contact between people from countries, which sometimes in the past have been adversaries, but are now joining this common effort at increasing confidence within the OSCE space,” he says.

Anton Mazur, the head of Military Security and Arms Control in the Russian Federation's delegation, said the treaty had contributed to an atmosphere of transparency in the OSCE region: “We think that the Treaty on Open Skies is a well-functioning tool in the system of confidence- and security-building measures from Vancouver to Vladivostok. As a matter of fact, the last decade of the treaty's implementation has ensured

unprecedented openness and transparency of the States Parties. Thanks to the treaty we have an efficient tool to monitor the implementation of the arrangements in the sphere of arms control. ”

Since the end of the Cold War, the security situation in Europe and the priorities of individual States have changed. Today, 20 years after its signing and 10 years after coming into force, the future of the Open Skies treaty has become uncertain. How should it be developed in the twenty-first century, how can it be made more cost effective so it continues to serve as a useful and efficient confidence-building tool in the years to come? Can the treaty be an effective tool in addressing new challenges, such as cross-border environmental issues, or should its membership be extended to include new States Parties?

The Vienna-based Open Skies Consultative Commission is the implementing body for the treaty and is seeking to agree a way forward.

“The Commission has accomplished remarkable work in order not only to implement but also to modernize the rules of the implementation of the treaty,” said Ambassador François Alabrune of France, which currently chairs the commission. “So the commission pursues this work of adaptation to new technologies - of course technologies have changed a lot since the negotiation of the treaty.”

Although the forecast for Open Skies may be cloudy, one thing is clear – this remarkable treaty has helped to build trust in the OSCE area, providing a solid foundation for participating States as they work together to address common security challenges in the twenty-first century.

“Over 835 flights have been carried out under the Open Skies treaty, it’s something which we believe significantly increased confidence and stability among all the States Parties,” says Leader. “And it is one of the ways that we can help to break down any divisions in the OSCE space.”

Membership

The 34 States Parties to the Open Skies Treaty are: Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, Ukraine and United States. Kyrgyzstan has signed but not yet ratified.

The Treaty depositories are Canada and Hungary.

As of March 2012, 836 flights have been carried out.