UNIVERSITÉ DE FRIBOURG
UNIVERSITÄT FREIBURG

Diplomacy and Society Post-Helsinki
Citizen Diplomacy Revisited

University of Fribourg Workshop

Wednesday 11 November 2026

Miséricorde MIS08 0101

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FACULTÉ DES LETTRES ET DES SCIENCES HUMAINES
DÉPARTEMENT HISTOIRE CONTEMPORAINE
AV. DE L'EUROPE 20, 1700-FRIOURG

PHILOSOPHISCHE FAKULTÄT
DEPARTEMENT FÜR ZEITGESCHICHTE
AV. DE L'EUROPE 20, 1700-FREIBURG

The 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025 led to various reminiscences among former activist communities and participants of the Helsinki Process. Many asked where the conscience of Helsinki has gone today. Inspired by this question, this workshop endeavors to take stock of the field of citizen, non-state, and social movement diplomacy that the Helsinki Process facilitated or inspired. As E.P. Tompson (1990) remarked, the Helsinki Process offered citizens more opportunities to participate in security politics, giving "History a new hinge." Similarly, Michael Cotey Morgan (2018) argued that Western decision-makers felt obliged to participate in the European security conference in the early 1970s because of what "non-participation would mean at home," acknowledging that citizen action and public opinion (or the fear thereof) influenced foreign policy thinking.

In this workshop, we aim to expand these perspectives and ask how different non-state actors reconceptualized security through the Helsinki Process and if this influenced state perceptions. If one looks at the Helsinki Process and not only the formal CSCE, the breadth of actors is also expanded to include anti–nuclear groups, feminist movements, religious communities, trade unions, European Security Committees, Eastern bloc dissidents, Reaganite cold warriors, business leaders, concerned scientists, peace activists, and more. Therefore, we apply a broad conceptualization of the Helsinki Process to mean the numerous movements, meetings, conferences, and other connections across the European continent during the Cold War, inspired directly or indirectly by the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

Some of these non-state actors attempted to participate more directly in the formal CSCE by organizing conferences and mobilizing public opinion in parallel to CSCE follow-up meetings. Others made Helsinki their own, redefining security in the process. This expanse of what Helsinki meant was sometimes dizzying for diplomats. As Pertti Paasio, Finnish Foreign Minister, stated in 1991 during negotiations with civil society actors on what role they could play in the 1992 Helsinki Summit, "we support the participation of civil society organizations… but so far your plans do not contain much substance of the CSCE."

Through this workshop, we hope to expand upon these thoughts and investigate when and how citizen action, civil society diplomacy, and other non-state initiatives, such as business contacts, shaped the Helsinki Process. Additionally, we hope to shed light on the broad structural, social, cultural, and economic conditions (e.g., financing opportunities) that facilitated citizen diplomacy and activism in the Helsinki Process, and what impact this had on formal diplomacy, as well as state-level conceptions of foreign policy throughout the era.

Program

8:45 **Introduction (Matthieu Gillabert and Bradley Reynolds)**

9.00 **Keynote: Giles Scott-Smith, Professor (University of Leiden)**

Pandora's Box? Citizen Diplomacy, the Cold War, and New Diplomatic History

9.30-10.45 **The Helsinki Process Reconceptualized – Helsinki Beyond Helsinki**

- Bent Boel (Aalborg University): *Western dissident encounters, prisoner-support activism and East-West relations in the 1970s and 1980s*.
- Katharina Kunter (University of Helsinki): *Churches as Ambivalent Civic Diplomats in the Helsinki Process*.

Discussant: Bradley Reynolds (Geneva Graduate Institute)

10.45-11.15 Coffee

11.15-12.30 **The Many Faces of Freedom – Arms Control, Environmental Issues, and Fundamental Freedoms**

- Timeo Antognini (University of Fribourg): *Coexistence or Human Rights? How the Helsinki Process Shaped the Peace movement in Switzerland*;
- Nicolas Badalassi (Science Po Aix), online: *From Helsinki to the Mediterranean: Scientists, Organisations and the Expansion of the Second Basket*.

Discussant: Matthieu Gillabert (University of Fribourg)

Lunch 12.30-14.00

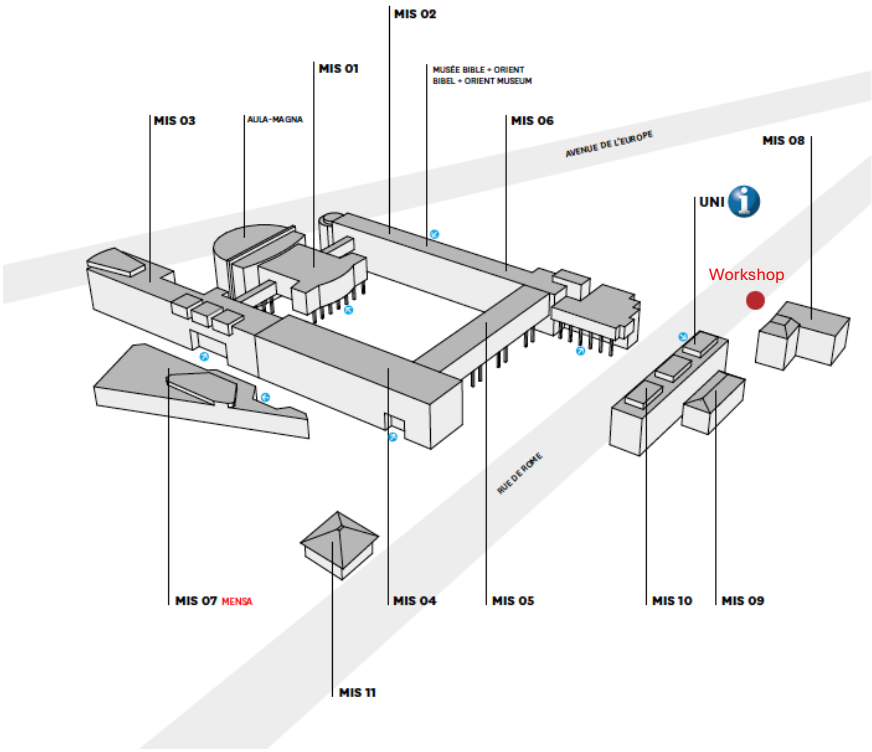
14.00-16.00 **The Multiple Meanings of Helsinki – Human Rights and New Research Directions in CSCE State and Society Co-operation**

- Krzysztof Kliszczyński (Queer Museum of Warsaw) and Paweł Matusz (University of Regensburg): *Awakening. The Birth of Queer Movements in the Eastern Bloc Against the Backdrop of Political Changes in the 1970s and 1980s*;
- Heikki Haara (University of Helsinki): *Finnish Churches and Human Rights in the CSCE Process*;
- Nina Hechenblaikner (Independent Researcher), online: *Whose voice counts? Human rights groups in media coverage on the third CSCE Follow-Up Meeting (1986–1989)*.

Discussant: Stéphanie Roulin (University of Fribourg)

17.15-19.00 **Public Panel: What Was the Conscience of Helsinki and Where Has it Gone Today?**

Thomas Fischer (Associated Researcher DODIS), Annemarie Sancar (Swiss Helsinki Committee) and Berenika Zeller (Swiss Helsinki Committee) in conversation with Bradley Reynolds (Moderation).



Organization:

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Organized in co-operation with the Geneva Graduate Institute

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Photo: The 'Helsinki 1986' group on the way to the Freedom Monument in Riga, 14 June 1987. © Wikipedia.