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[Sitemap](#)
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Search

[HOME](#)

[INITIATIVES](#)

[EVENTS](#)

[MEDIA CENTRE](#)



[MEMBERS' AREA](#)

Our History

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Over the course of three decades, the Forum has grown from humble beginnings as a European economic conference into a unique, member-based institution comprised of the 1,000 most powerful corporations in the world.

Beginning as a simple gathering in the Swiss Alps, the Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos has become the premiere gathering of world leaders in business, government and civil society to address the issues and challenges confronting humanity.

[2000 - 1990](#)

[1990 - 1980](#)

[1980 - 1970](#)

2000-1990

2000

The Forum holds its 30th [Annual Meeting](#) in Davos.

1998

The [Africa Competitiveness Report](#) is published for the first time. This new study undertaken on a region's competitiveness is based on the model of the successful Global Competitiveness Report. It is the first comprehensive competitiveness study on the African continent.

Creation of the Business Consultative Council, a group of over 30 heads of business associations from around the world and heads of several United Nations bodies meet for the first time in Davos at the Annual Meeting. This innovative initiative of the World Economic Forum offers the [UN](#) the support of business and aims to install a permanent relationship between the business community and the UN system.

The Forum moves into its new [headquarters](#) at 91-93 route de la Capite, 1223 Cologny/Geneva, Switzerland.

1996

The theme of the Annual Meeting in Davos is "Sustaining Globalization,"

and worldwide attention focuses on Davos as the centre of a growing debate, initiated by an editorial, written by the foundation's president and managing director, published in the International Herald Tribune and widely cited in other media.

The first Central and Eastern European Economic Summit is held in Salzburg, under the patronage of Austrian President Thomas Klestil. Attended by all the relevant heads of state and government, in addition to a significant group of business leaders, the meeting creates a new identity for this region inside the larger European framework.

The foundation publishes its ***Global Competitiveness Report***. The report is highly valued by governments worldwide as a benchmark for their own performance. The foundation recognizes its responsibility in this area and brings back the report under its sole control. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Harvard Institute for international Development, is co-chairman of the Report's Advisory Board.

The **Council** of the World Economic Forum meets for the first time at the Annual Meeting in Davos. The World Economic Forum integrates its **Foundation members** in the decision-making process via the Council, which is made up of some 40 eminent representatives from member companies. They meet twice a year.

1995

The foundation holds its 25th Annual Meeting in Davos.

The foundation takes members on a Special Trip to the Greater Mekong Subregion, creating a new identity and new forms of cooperation in this rapidly developing growth area.

The Forum has actively promoted the integration of Latin America into the world economy for many years, and in 1995 the first Mercosur Economic Summit is held in Sao Paulo. The Summit is instrumental in overcoming a crisis situation (an automotive trade dispute between Argentina and Brazil) which threatens the existence of this newly emerging economic region. On the occasion of the second Summit in Buenos Aires (1996), Chile formally joins the regional trade group (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay) as an associate member.

1994

The foundation welcomes its 1,000th member.

The first Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit in Casablanca is convened by the World Economic Forum in partnership with the Council on Foreign Relations, under the presidency of King Hassan II of Morocco. The Casablanca Declaration produced at the Summit proposes numerous concrete mechanisms to support the peace process in the Middle East and to launch the concept of a Middle East/North Africa economic community.

1993

The first Southern Africa Economic Summit takes place and is followed by a second in June 1994, coinciding with the emergence of the first democratic Government of National Unity in South Africa.

The foundation launches the Industry Summit outside the Annual Meeting in Davos, to serve particularly entrepreneurial "Global Growth Companies". The first Industry Summit is organized in Cambridge Massachusetts in cooperation with MIT and Harvard University; the 1994 Summit takes place in Palo Alto, hosted by Stanford University, and with the collaboration of Caltech and the University of California, Berkeley. The cooperation of the world's leading universities ensures the latest technology-research and knowledge-oriented input into the activities of the

foundation.

In order to reinforce the club character of its networks, the foundation limits its activities to members and to their special guests only.

The foundation starts the concept of Forum Fellows nominating some 300 top experts in the political, economic, social, cultural and technological fields as pertinent advisers and contributors to its activities.

The Informal Gathering of Editorialists and Commentators is created to provide the media with its own networks and with the opportunity to interact intensively with the other constituents of the Forum.

1992

The foundation initiates the annual Europe/East Asia Economic Summit with the objective to strengthen economic and business links between the two regions. The first meeting in Hong Kong gathers 400 participants; it is followed by a second in Hong Kong in 1993 and a third Summit in Singapore in 1994 attended by over 600 participants. Calls were made there for a meeting on the level of European/East Asian heads of government to be held in 1995, creating between Asia and Europe an APEC-type organization.

The foundation creates a new network, [Global Leaders for Tomorrow](#), composed of young leaders from business, politics, academia, the arts and the media, all of whom are under 43 when chosen and are already well established through their achievements and their positions of influence. The first 200 Global Leaders for Tomorrow are appointed, to be followed by another 100 each year. The network provides an additional source of forward-looking ideas and initiatives.

The foundation sponsors the creation of a sister foundation, the World Arts Forum, which convenes 200 artistic and cultural leaders from all over the world to a special meeting in Venice, Italy; based on this experience and contacts, the foundation integrates a stronger cultural and artistic dimension into all its activities. From 1995 onwards, it awards a prize (the Crystal Award) to personalities who, in addition to having made a real difference in the world of arts, have also made an outstanding contribution to cross-cultural understanding.

1990-1980

1990

The foundation launches in Davos an unprecedented All-European Summit of heads of state and government, followed by substantial activities to integrate Central and Eastern European countries and the former USSR into the world economy.

1988

[World Link magazine](#) is launched, covering global business and economic issues for 35,000 decision-makers worldwide, increasing the foundation's publishing activity.

The foundation has played a role in major reconciliation processes in the world, with the first of these initiatives in 1988. Examples are:

Greece and Turkey - after being at the brink of war, signing of the "Davos Declaration" between Prime Ministers Papandreou and Ozal, Davos 1988;

Korea - both Koreas meet for the first time for discussions at ministerial level at the Annual Meeting, Davos 1989;

Germany - German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and East German Prime Minister Hans Modrow meet, accelerating significantly the process of German reunification, Davos 1990;

East Asia - bilateral contacts lead to the normalization of relations with Vietnam, Davos 1990;

South Africa - the first private meeting of all political constituencies of South Africa is held in the Forum's headquarters in Geneva in 1990; the first joint appearance outside South Africa of F.W. de Klerk, Nelson Mandela and Chief Buthelezi brought new impetus to the political transition, Davos 1992;

Middle East - Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat reach a viable draft agreement on Gaza and Jericho, moving forward on the road to peace in the Middle East, Davos 1994.

1987

In order to reflect its increasingly global outlook, the name of the foundation is changed to World Economic Forum.

Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Germany's Foreign Minister delivers his famous "Let's give Gorbachev a chance" speech at the Annual Meeting in Davos. This is considered by many historians to mark the beginning of the end of the Cold War.

1985

Regular meetings begin in India, which have a substantial impact on the opening-up of the country. Concrete proposals made by business participants are taken into account by the government in shaping its policy.

1983

Governors Meetings, integrating the chief executive officers of the world's most important corporations, are created in specific industry sectors. These "CEO clubs" add an industry orientation to the foundation's well established country-related activities. Today, ten such industry groups exist with more than 400 Governors.

1982

The first Informal Gathering of World Economic Leaders takes place on the occasion of the Annual Meeting in Davos, bringing together cabinet members of major countries with heads of international organizations (such as the **World Bank**, **IMF**, **GATT**). This serves as a model for similar initiatives in the global public interest, including: the Club of Media Leaders (editors-in-chief) the annual informal gathering of heads of the world's foremost non-governmental economic research organizations the Informal Gathering of Regional Leaders the Informal Gathering of Global City Leaders the Roundtable of Industry and International Organization Leaders. All take place on the occasion of the Annual Meeting in Davos.

A special Informal Gathering of Trade Ministers from 17 countries is organized in Lausanne by the foundation, which spurs the launch of the Uruguay Round.

1980-1970

1979

The publication of the first annual World Competitiveness Report marks the debut of the foundation's research activities.

The foundation is the first non-governmental organization to initiate a partnership with China's economic commissions and starts activities in China. Since 1980, an annual China Business Summit is held in Beijing and a high-level Chinese delegation comes to Davos every year. No other organization has brought so many businesses to China; many joint ventures flourishing today originated within the activities of the Forum. The foundation has had a substantial impact on the economic reform policies of China.

1977

The foundation starts to organize Country Forums in developing countries. In such a way it highlights the potential of emerging markets and helps to integrate these countries into the world economy.

1976

With the creation of the first Arab-European Business Leaders Symposium in Montreux (2,000 participants) and the first Latin American-European Business Leaders Symposium in 1977, foundation activities take on an international dimension.

The foundation transforms itself into a membership organization, becoming the catalyst for the foremost global business network.

1973

Country Forums are created, to bring together the international business community with the political and economic leaders of specific countries. By 1995, more than 500 such meetings have taken place - in some 30 capitals or at the foundation's headquarters in Geneva, making the foundation the leading interface for global business/government interaction.

After concentrating at first on management issues, the foundation increasingly integrates into its activities (after the oil shock) political, economic and social issues. It starts to play a major role in confronting environmental challenges as expressed, for example, in its role as an official adviser to the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992.

1971

Klaus Schwab founds the European Management Forum, a not-for-profit foundation, as a framework for further initiatives and activities. The foundation's Annual Meeting in Davos is now considered the global summit which defines the political, economic and business agenda for the year.

In **1970**, Klaus Schwab, Professor of Business Administration, took the initiative and the personal risk to convene Europe's chief executives to an informal gathering in the Swiss mountain town of Davos in January 1971, to discuss a coherent strategy for European business to face challenges in the international marketplace. He secured the patronage of the Commission of the European Communities, as well as the encouragement of Europe's industry associations. This is the beginning of the World Economic Forum.

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