

Statement by
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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to join others in thanking the Finish Chairmanship for the warm hospitality extended to us here in Helsinki. This year's Ministerial occurs at a critical and challenging time for the OSCE.

We congratulate Minister Stubb and his highly professional team on their tireless efforts in guiding our Organization.

We strongly hope that still ongoing consultations on the text of Ministerial Declaration will be productive breaking the six years absence of an agreed political document.

We need our Organisation to be more effective in order to respond efficiently to diverse and complex challenges that equally threaten the security of individuals, communities and states in steadily changing circumstances of today's globalized world.

In that context, Croatia closely follows the discussion for organizing the OSCE Summit. We would like to reiterate in this context the values and achievements of the OSCE, which certainly should be further strengthened.

The new initiatives at strengthening of political and security architecture in Europe, including the ideas of President Sarkozy and President Medvedev, deserve to be assessed carefully.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Yet we still need to solve the question of legal personality of the OSCE, as well as other issues that were added to our list of tasks on previous ministerials.

I sincerely hope we will be able to move forward on these matters, as well as on issues related to the human security dimension.

In the context of security cooperation, I would like to refer to the successful implementation of the Sub-Regional Arms Control Agreement (Article IV of Annex 1-B to the Dayton Peace Accord).

For the moment this treaty is the only effective conventional arms control verification mechanism in Europe, highly successful if we bear in mind that the impressive results were achieved among the countries which were at war.

I would also like to refer to a very recent and important event - signing ceremony of the Cluster Munitions Convention in Oslo. Not so long ago Croatian civilians also suffered from cluster bombs.

Therefore Croatia has been a strong supporter of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and we look forward to its successful verification in all our countries.

Ladies and gentleman, dear colleagues,

The year 2008 has witnessed developments which have irrevocably affected the political and security relations in the OSCE region. Among them the proclamation of independence of Kosovo and the conflict in Georgia stands high.

The numerous unresolved conflicts still exist in the OSCE area and search for negotiated solutions must become our urgent task.

The current situation underlines the need for dialogue and full engagement of all parties for which the OSCE should continue to provide a valuable platform. OSCE is recognized as the largest preventive and post-conflict mechanism.

But it should be more efficient in building pre-conflict prevention capabilities as well as post-conflict political capacities.

The field operations have been helpful in promoting transition and capacity building in many countries, but we should be more flexible in opening and closing them,

depending on its achievements, the progress made and limited resources of our Organization.

Dear colleagues,

Croatia strongly supports Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity and welcomes its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. We also call for the full implementation of 6 principles of the Peace Agreement, mediated by the French EU Presidency.

We hope that even with grater EU involvement, OSCE will continue to contribute to peace and stability in the region, committing both sides to the peaceful settlement of disputes. The security, stability and long lasting development trough regional cooperation are the main goals of the Croatian regional policy.

In that context, Kosovo still represents a big challenge to the regional stability and security. As process of international recognition of Kosovo continues, Croatia is developing comprehensive relations with the Republic of Kosovo, but we are also willing to contribute to the stability of the whole region.

With respect to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia endorses the endeavors of the international community, especially EU's new strategy for Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We also welcome the understanding among recent Bosnia-Herzegovina political leaders to speed up reforms, and to give momentum to euro-integration processes.

If the current blockade of the constitutional and political reforms continues Bosnia-Herzegovina could soon again become the challenge to the regional stability and security.

Subsequently, the utmost respect is being given to the strategic importance of improving cooperation between Croatia and Serbia –which is very important for the stability of the entire region.

The victory of pro-European forces in Serbia has contributed to regional stability and opened the way to the further development of successful bilateral cooperation of our two countries. This remains the highest interest of my government.

Furthermore, Croatia continues to support Serbia's aspiration for membership in the EU and stands ready to render its experience from this process.

Mr. Chairman, dear colleagues,

In a short period of time, Croatia has been transformed from a security consumer to a security provider. Croatia, currently a member of the UN Security Council, is today a stable democratic society very close to the full membership to EU and NATO.

We have proven our ability to assume responsibilities for international security and development.

The last year termination of the OSCE Mission to Croatia and establishment of the OSCE Office in Zagreb - tasked to monitor the war crimes trials and to report on residual aspects of the implementation of the housing care programmes in Croatia - represented a joint success of the OSCE and Croatia.

We welcome the latest Progress Report of the OSCE Office in Zagreb as objective and balanced.

We believe that fulfillment of the remaining mandate of the OSCE Office in Zagreb and successful end of Croatia-EU negotiations will be a happy coincidence – a success story for the OSCE, EU and my country.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I take this opportunity to wish the incoming Chairman-in-Office, my dear colleague Minister Dora Bakoyannis of Greece and her team, every success in tackling the challenging agenda of the OSCE in 2009 and assure them of our full support and cooperation for the year to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman