

Speech

by Chairman-in-Office, Minister Ilkka Kanerva at the OSCE
Permanent Council

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Vienna

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address the Permanent Council for the first time as Chairman-in-Office.

The CSCE has always had a special place in Finnish foreign policy. As you know well, it was the Helsinki Summit of 1975 that produced the breakthrough agreement on a set of principles that still guide us today. The spirit of Helsinki opened new possibilities for dialogue between Cold War rivals and helped to bridge the East-West divide. This was a significant achievement for Finland and it also strengthened our own position in Europe.

At the second Helsinki Summit in 1992, the CSCE was reorganized from top to bottom to address new challenges facing Europe. With this, the CSCE became a major forum for conflict prevention and crisis management.

Helsinki has always had a special role tied to turning points in the history of this Organization. I trust that this year will be no different.

If I may add a personal note: it so happens that in 1975 I was elected to the Finnish Parliament for the first time. I remember vividly the sense of excitement that the Helsinki Conference brought to political life in Finland.

Finland is proud of its role in the history of the organization. I believe that all participating States can take pride from the achievements of the Organization -- the historic role it played in ending the division of Europe and its undertakings today to build a safer future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What does the future hold?

A pessimist would say that old ghosts are returning to haunt Europe. New divisions in Europe are opening. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find common ground across the region on security issues. In this picture, a pessimist would argue that the OSCE has little role to play.

An optimist would point to the growing interaction between our States and deepening ties between our societies. In this view, renewed confrontation would serve no State's interests. Interdependence, not isolation, is the catchword of the day.

I myself remain an optimist. But this will not be enough. We all need an injection of optimism and positive spirit in order to utilize the OSCE in the best possible way.

I believe that this Organization can and will continue to shape the development of security across wider Europe. As the old saying goes, the OSCE connects people from Vancouver to Vladivostok. It is both a forum for political discussion as well as an instrument we can use to achieve our common goals. The OSCE provides us with a special kind of power - namely co-operative power.

We need to place the OSCE also in a more global scale of things. We are not living in an "OSCE vacuum", but in a world where a new era of risks and opportunities is emerging. We have not only common values and principles, but also interests. Close to the OSCE area we have some of the most difficult zones of conflict and tension, with possible spill-over effects. In this context, the OSCE should act as a co-operative extra shield against instability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE area faces many challenges. These will shape the work of the Organization this year and beyond.

For one, the continuing deadlock in the negotiations concerning the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe poses serious risks to our common security. The CFE treaty remains a cornerstone of European military security. I urge the parties to continue a dialogue in order to seek resolution of outstanding differences. We should seek at all costs to avoid an erosion of the treaty regime.

Kosovo is an issue that will figure highly on the agenda of this organization. The international community has invested much

resources and energy in the search of an agreed solution. I call upon the leadership of both Serbia and Kosovo to consider their responsibilities with due care. Let us all look to building a stable and peaceful future.

I have no doubt that the OSCE should remain active in Kosovo. It is the people of Kosovo - be they Albanians or Serbs - and their developing institutions that still need our help. Therefore, the Organization should continue its essential work on the ground for their benefit.

Election observation by the OSCE has become a divisive issue amongst participating States – it need not remain so.

National elections are vital moments in the history of any country. We all agree that elections must be based on the free will as expressed by the people. The OSCE must continue its valuable work in election-related activities.

The experience of last weekend confirms this. Working together, the ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly formed a formidable observation team in Georgia. I am pleased to note that Georgia did hold competitive presidential elections that were in essence consistent with most of the relevant standards. At the same time I urge the Georgian authorities to take fully into account the recommendations of the OSCE observation mission when preparing for the parliamentary elections.

As you know, year 2008 will be busy with elections in the OSCE area. In terms of election monitoring, I appeal to all Governments concerned to co-operate closely with ODIHR. In my view, election monitoring should be seen as a helpful tool to a host-country, not as a confrontational labelling-machine.

Democracy is not built overnight. In all participating States, democracy is a process that requires constant work. Every participating State can and should continue to work towards improving their democratic institutions, including those of elections, in accordance with agreed commitments and established practices.

As Chairman-in-Office, I will uphold the value of democracy in all activities of the Organization. I am ready to continue a discussion on election-related activities of the OSCE. Certainly, new developments in this area require new commitments from participating States. For instance, such challenges as those posed by digital democracy should be addressed by all participating States working together.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am aware that there are tensions within the OSCE. The past years have not been clear sailing for our Organization.

Every international organization should review its work in order to remain relevant and useful to its membership. I believe that we should seek continually to increase the OSCE capacity to act and its efficiency. I welcome a discussion on this challenge and look forward to the views of all OSCE States.

The Finnish Chairmanship needs your support to take the Organization forward. We must work together to continue to adapt the OSCE to new times and new needs, as we have done throughout the history of the Organization. Reform should be pursued on the basis of evolution and not revolution.

Please allow me to remind all participating States that the OSCE needs a budget for this year. I hope that an agreed solution to the budget and the scales of contribution is around the corner. This is vital for the good governance of the OSCE.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE is an important political forum dedicated to building pan-European security. It brings together every State in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian area around an ambitious set of shared values and agreed commitments.

The hallmark of the OSCE is dialogue. Given the security challenges that we face, political dialogue linking States and governments, along with voices of civil society, is vital. The exchanges that occur in the framework of the OSCE must continue to be inclusive and frank. It is only natural for political dialogue to be heated, but it should always remain respectful.

Acting together, the participating States have built the OSCE as a value-based Organization. The activities of the Organization must remain anchored in our common values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The political commitments given by the participating States are based on these same values. They should be implemented in good faith.

We should accept that the participating States contribute to the activities of the Organization on the basis of their particular experience, and their interests and needs. The principle of equality remains at heart of the OSCE and should be transformed into a real sense of shared ownership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is important that we maintain continuity in the activities of our Organization. We need to build on the strengths of the OSCE and to ensure that its work in different fields is well-planned.

The decision on the next three Chairmanships reached during the Madrid Ministerial Council will allow us to plan further ahead than ever before. I intend to use this opportunity to encourage the future chairmanships of Kazakhstan and Lithuania to join the current Troika countries Spain, Finland and Greece in developing ideas for longer-term activities.

I wish to invite the Foreign Ministers of this "quintet" to identify possible common priorities for the purpose of better planning. I am ready to host a meeting of the five countries in Finland for these purposes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish now to highlight some of the priorities of the Finnish Chairmanship. The full version of our programme will have already been circulated to you. My thanks go to all who participated in the useful consultations on the programme.

Conflict prevention and crisis management lie at the core of the Finnish Chairmanship. I will use every opportunity to make progress on regional issues, in close consultation with all parties. I intend to visit all of the countries in question, and my first visit will be to Moldova in one week's time.

I have nominated a special envoy, Ambassador Heikki Talvitie, to assist and advise me during the Finnish Chairmanship. Ambassador Talvitie is with me today, and I hope that he will have your full support.

The OSCE has been at the forefront of international efforts in the field of Small Arms and Light Weapons. The Finnish Chairmanship will focus on improving the field work of the OSCE. The OSCE has an important contribution to make in the forthcoming United Nations meeting on Small Arms. Through sustained action in this area, the OSCE and participating States must take every opportunity to reduce human suffering and to improve human security.

The OSCE is developing plans to improve the security and better management of borders. I look with optimism on this new area of co-operation for the OSCE with interested participating States.

I am pleased to note that Finland has already contributed more than half a million euros for projects to enhance the security and management of the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. I am convinced that such projects will increase the security of the whole OSCE area.

Today economic and environmental co-operation is gaining new relevance for participating States. The Finnish Chairmanship will focus on maritime and inland waterways co-operation. The challenges of land-locked countries will also be addressed, including in a Conference to be held in Turkmenistan in March. I have been pleased also to note the wide interest across the OSCE in co-operation to improve the security and safety of the growing traffic at sea, on lakes, and in rivers and canals.

In 2008, the United Nations will celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As in the past, the OSCE should join with UN efforts and devote special attention to the promotion of human rights in its area.

In this respect, I wish to emphasize three Human Dimension questions. First, the combat against trafficking in human beings must be pursued with increasing vigour. A particular issue to be tackled in this respect is the identification and protection of child victims. Here I trust my fellow Finn, Ms. Eva Biaudet, to continue an active role as the OSCE Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

The OSCE has made great efforts to raise awareness of the dangers of intolerance -- including anti-Semitism, discrimination against Muslims, and many other forms of intolerance. More can be done also to fight discrimination against Roma and Sinti. I count on all participating States to renew their commitment to implementing the recommendations in the OSCE Action Plan of 2003.

Third, the OSCE must recognize gender mainstreaming as a goal to be pursued across all of its activities. I have asked the Senior Gender Advisor to address the meeting of the Heads of Missions and Institutions in order to present her ideas. Also, it is my hope that I can nominate more women to leading positions in the OSCE in 2008.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank my colleague, Minister Moratinos, and the entire Spanish chairmanship team for their leadership of the OSCE in 2007. I look forward to further co-operation with Spain and Greece in the Troika format throughout 2008.

I also look forward to working with the Secretary General and the Heads of the OSCE Institutions and Field Operations.

Of course, I should not forget the Ambassadors present here today. You are key players in representing the views of the 56 participating States and the eleven Partner States. The Finnish Delegation in Vienna counts on your co-operation and looks forward to the year ahead.

Thank you.