



**STATEMENT BY THE OSCE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE,
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF FINLAND,
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**United States Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Helsinki Commission
Washington, DC
February 13, 2008**

Mr Chairman, Honorable Congressman Hastings,
Distinguished Members of the Helsinki Commission,

I thank you for this opportunity to speak before the United States Helsinki Commission as the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE. I would like to use this occasion to express my deepest sympathy for the passing away of the Honorable Tom Lantos, Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs and one of the most distinguished members of the United States Congress in recent times.

It is a great pleasure to travel from Helsinki to Washington and be received here by the Helsinki Commission. The symbolic name of your Commission reminds us of a breakthrough in East-West relations. It also reminds us Finns of the role that our country had in making it happen.

As a longstanding member of parliament myself, I fully understand the importance of the parliamentary dimension of the OSCE. The role of elected legislators is to embody the aspirations of our peoples and to voice their concerns

in all OSCE countries. Therefore, I warmly welcomed the invitation to this hearing.

Mr Chairman,

Since the time when the CSCE was born in Helsinki in 1975, Europe has been transformed for the better. Divisions that once seemed permanent have been swept away, and liberty has been restored to entire regions and societies.

Nonetheless, we still have much work to do. While the front lines of the Cold War have been transformed into tourist attractions, there is the risk of new divisions taking hold in the OSCE area. Old threats have taken a new shape, longstanding conflicts remain unresolved and new challenges require firm and unified responses.

But as the Chairman-in-Office I see that these challenges could also provide an opportunity to demonstrate the strength and vitality of the basic OSCE values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In this spirit, I wish to reflect with you today some of the key issues facing the Finnish Chairmanship and the OSCE in general.

Mr Chairman,

Issues related to election observation have dominated the beginning of the Finnish Chairmanship. After the ODIHR did not observe the Russian Duma elections last December, much work went into an effort to secure credible OSCE election observation in the forthcoming Russian presidential elections.

I am satisfied that we could help Russia and the ODIHR to engage in an active dialogue to resolve their differences on the parameters of the observation. The

deal was close. But unfortunately we will not have an ODIHR election observation mission to the Russian Presidential Elections. We also will not have an OSCE Parliamentary Assembly mission in Russia this time.

Let me be clear about the Chairman's view on election observation. The OSCE commitments oblige the participating States to invite and host an OSCE election observation mission. These missions should cover all the key phases of the electoral process – candidate and voter registration, electoral campaign, media coverage, complaints and appeals. The ODIHR must continue to be in a position to determine the length and size of observation missions on professional grounds, in order to produce a meaningful assessment and recommendations benefiting the observed country.

The ultimate aim of election observation is to support the hosting country in enhancing its democratic process. The recent observation missions in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Georgia have all produced tangible recommendations to bolster the democratic institutions of their host countries. I also expect the election observation mission in the forthcoming Armenian presidential elections to do the same.

I am convinced that continued dialogue on election-related issues among the participating States - with the involvement of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly - is essential in the OSCE. We should all be willing to engage with a constructive attitude.

Mr Chairman,

Last week I visited both Belgrade and Priština. Kosovo is very much on your mind these days - as it is certainly on my mind.

The OSCE has played an important role in Kosovo -- in establishing and consolidating local institutions, in promoting democratization, the rule of law, as well as human and minority rights. Because the OSCE has remained “status-neutral,” it has retained a unique ability to work with all ethnic communities in promoting stability and democratic development. It is my firm belief that the OSCE work in Kosovo is and will be beneficial to all Kosovars.

The outcome of the status process could have a negative impact on the OSCE's engagement in Kosovo. You are well aware that the OSCE participating States remain deeply divided over the issue. This disagreement could lead to the current Mission's termination. It would be a grave mistake for the OSCE and the entire international community if we were to leave it at that.

I am determined to ensure continued OSCE engagement in Kosovo regardless of the status process. I am aware of the fact that any participating State has the possibility to use a veto and to end the mandate of the present mission - the mission which at the moment comprises 800 people and which has an immense effect on the viability of the civil society. Should this happen, I am prepared to immediately start the negotiations on a revised mandate for the OSCE mission. I am convinced that all participating States agree on the need for continued OSCE engagement in Kosovo.

Mr Chairman,

The Finnish Chairmanship has put the so called frozen or protracted conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh at the top of our agenda. I will personally visit all the conflict regions. I have already nominated a special envoy to promote any useful negotiations on conflict resolution.

One of the first things I have done was to visit Ukraine and Moldova to examine possibilities to kick-start the stalled negotiations on the Moldova - Transnistria

conflict. The government of Moldova and the leadership of Transnistria indicated their willingness to re-engage and I have tasked my special envoy to see what can be done to take the process forward. I acknowledge the difficulties in front of us but we cannot give up. The parties should be encouraged to engage in serious negotiations, and any momentum created should be fully used.

In two weeks time I plan to visit Southern Caucasus, where we have witnessed worrying tensions lately. The Finnish Chairmanship will use all possibilities to build trust between the parties and promote conflict resolution in South Ossetia, Georgia and in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. I will work closely with the three Co-chairs of the Minsk Group, the United States, France and Russia.

Mr Chairman,

Ministers pledged in the Madrid meeting last November to intensify OSCE activities to secure the borders between the Central Asian States and Afghanistan. The ministers also decided to enhance the involvement of the OSCE with Afghanistan -- especially in areas related to border security and management, policing and the fight against drug trafficking.

This work is now underway on two tracks.

In Madrid, I listened to my Tajik colleague's worries about their over 750 mile border with Afghanistan and their wish to increase co-operation with the OSCE to ensure better and more secure border management. He said that if this border is not holding, it means a great danger for the whole Central Asian region. This is why we have to do all we can for the security of Afghanistan, Central Asia and the OSCE area in general. These projects must lead to a long-term OSCE commitment to Central Asian border security and management. I regard this as a

priority. Finland will contribute financial and personnel resources to get this work speedily underway.

At the same time we are discussing whether the OSCE might eventually become active on Afghan territory. The OSCE Secretary General is currently collecting ideas from participating States and relevant international organizations.

Mr Chairman,

Your Commission has shown great interest in developing the OSCE human dimension. I would like to briefly lay out some of our plans, and I am looking forward to hearing your thoughts in this respect.

The starting point of the Finnish Chairmanship is that the OSCE is a value-based organization that actively promotes our common values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We stress the full implementation of the human rights commitments by the participating States.

Our main operational priorities in the human dimension are combating trafficking in human beings, promoting tolerance and non-discrimination as well as gender mainstreaming in all OSCE activities.

In the past 10 years or so, the OSCE has engaged in combating all forms of human trafficking. Many OSCE countries have developed much needed cross-dimensional and victim-centred approaches to human trafficking, established coordinating structures and elaborated national programmes of action. However, much needs to be done to tackle this form of modern-day slavery.

Europe continues to be plagued by the rise of intolerance, including a resurgence of anti-Semitism. The Finnish Chairmanship will seek ways to promote tolerance and fight all forms of discrimination within the OSCE. Our aim is that the

emphasis would be on the implementation of the tolerance and non-discrimination commitments. Parliamentarians have a vital role to play in debating tolerance issues and in passing laws against discrimination.

This year we will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This anniversary will also underline the role of the brave people who defend human rights often in difficult situations. The Finnish Chairmanship will seek to increase support for their invaluable work.

Mr Chairman,

Every international organization should review its work in order to remain relevant to its membership. The OSCE is not exception and in recent years we have had a lively discussion on the reform of the OSCE. In my view we should focus on improving the OSCE's effectiveness and its capacity to better serve the participating States and their citizens.

The Madrid ministerial decision to grant the OSCE Chairmanship to Greece in 2009, Kazakhstan in 2010 and Lithuania in 2011 offers us an unprecedented opportunity for long-term planning of the Organization's activities. I have invited my colleagues from the future Chairmanships of Kazakhstan and Lithuania to meet with the current Troika countries Spain, Finland and Greece to develop ideas for longer-term priorities. I am convinced there are many issues where the "Quintet" can add value and lead to more coherent OSCE action in the next few years.

We are facing challenging times in international politics. These tensions are reflected also in the OSCE. This is why the Organization needs clearly defined priorities, on which its activities can be planned. The Finnish Chairmanship will do its utmost to maintain a forward movement in the OSCE in spite of the present difficulties.

Mr. Chairman,

The Helsinki Commission embodies the longstanding engagement of the United States with the OSCE and the values that underpin it. The OSCE can only work with the full engagement of its participating States. The United States has always played a key role, and must continue to do so, if we are to achieve the ambitious goals we have set for our Organization.

I want to thank the United States Helsinki Commission for its much-appreciated support for the OSCE over the years. I would like to pay tribute to you, Congressman Hastings, for your extraordinary leadership of the Parliamentary Assembly, and I am pleased to have established an excellent relationship with the present President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. Göran Lenmarker of Sweden.

I recognize the central role that the Commission has had in defining United States policy in the OSCE. Perhaps the most rewarding recognition, however, comes from Henry Kissinger, who in a hearing held before the Helsinki Commission in 2005 confessed that he did not expect that the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act would reach the scope and the impact that they now have. I fully endorse his words. The long-standing commitment of the Commission has paid off.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the distinguished Members of the Commission for your dedication and your support for the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship in 2008.