

Chairpersonship Youth Forum

– from Helsinki to the next 50 years

29–30 July | Helsinki



SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES AND PHOTOS



Elina Valtonen

Minister for Foreign Affairs, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office

Born on 23 October 1981 in Helsinki, Elina Valtonen is a fourth-term Member of Parliament, deputy chair of the National Coalition Party and mother of two children. In Parliament, she has served as vice chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee and in the Defence Committee, Finance Committee and Grand Committee. Valtonen has chaired the Finnish delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and served as deputy member of the Finnish Delegation to the Council of Europe. Before entering politics, Valtonen worked abroad in the private sector in various countries, including for ten years in the financial sector in Copenhagen and London. A former computer programmer, she has been involved in setting up several growth companies. Valtonen's first book *Vapauden voitto* ('Freedom's Victory', Otava 2018) was the most sold non-fiction book in Finland for several weeks. In addition to Finnish, Valtonen speaks Swedish, English, German and French.



Mika Poutala

Minister of Youth, Sport and Physical Activity

Minister of Youth, Sport and Physical Activity Poutala is responsible for matters covered by the Department of Youth and Sport Policy, including matters related to student financial aid. Mika Poutala was elected to Parliament from the Uusimaa electoral district in 2023. He serves as the First Vice-Chair of the Christian Democrats in Finland. Before his political career, Poutala was known as a successful speed skater. He competed in four Olympic Games, achieving his best result with a fourth-place finish at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in 2018. That same year, he also won silver at the European Championships in the 500-metre race and in the team sprint. After retiring from competitive sports, Poutala worked as an entrepreneur and professional speaker. He has focused on developing his expertise in social media, wellbeing and influencer communications. He has also served on the board of the Finnish Olympic Committee. In his free time, Poutala enjoys running, cycling to work, and working with wood and leather. He lives with his wife and their three children.



Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu

OSCE Secretary General

Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu (Türkiye) is the eighth OSCE Secretary General, appointed in December 2024. Prior to his appointment, Sinirlioğlu served as the Permanent Representative of Türkiye to the United Nations (UN) from 2016 to 2023. In 2023, he was also appointed by UN Secretary-General António Guterres as the UN Special Co-ordinator for the Independent Assessment mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 2679 (2023). He has also held the positions of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye in the interim government of 2015, and of Permanent Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye from 2015 to 2016 and 2009 to 2015. Sinirlioğlu has a PhD from the School of Political Science and International Relations at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul and a Bachelor's degree from the Political Science Faculty of Ankara University.



Volker Türk

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Mr. Türk is the current United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. He took up his official functions as High Commissioner on 17 October 2022. He has devoted his long and distinguished career to advancing universal human rights, notably the international protection of some of the world's most vulnerable people - refugees and stateless persons. Prior to this, Mr. Türk was the Under-Secretary-General for Policy in the Executive Office of the United Nations Secretary-General where he coordinated global policy work. He also ensured UN system-wide coordination in the follow-up to the Secretary-General's "Call to Action for Human Rights" and his report, Our Common Agenda, which sets out a vision to tackle the world's interconnected challenges on foundations of trust, solidarity and human rights. He previously served as Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (2019-2021). As Assistant High Commissioner for Protection in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva (2015-2019), Mr. Türk played a key role in the development of the landmark Global Compact on Refugees. Over the course of his career, he held a number of key positions including at UNHCR headquarters where he served as Director of the Division of International Protection (2009-2015); Director of Organizational Development and Management (2008-2009); and Chief of Section, Protection Policy and Legal Advice (2000-2004). Mr. Türk also served UNHCR around the world, including as Representative in Malaysia; Assistant Chief of

Mission in Kosovo and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, respectively; Regional Protection Coordinator in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and in Kuwait. Mr. Türk holds a doctorate in international law from the University of Vienna and a Master of Laws degree from the University of Linz, Austria. He has published widely on international refugee law and international human rights law. He is fluent in English and French and has a working knowledge of Spanish.



Jouni Laaksonen

Ambassador, Head of Task Force for the Finnish OSCE Chairpersonship, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Ambassador Jouni Laaksonen has served as Head of the Task Force for the Finnish OSCE Chairpersonship since June 2023. He joined the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1997. Prior to his present position he has previously served as Deputy Permanent Representative (Ambassador) of Finland to the UN (New York), Deputy Permanent Representative of Finland to the OSCE and Minister at the Embassy of Finland in Stockholm, and at the Embassy of Finland in Ankara, Türkiye, and at the Permanent Mission of Finland to the OSCE, Vienna. During the Finnish Chairpersonship of the OSCE in 2008, he worked as Adviser to the Secretary General of the OSCE in Vienna. Ambassador Laaksonen has MSc from Helsinki University 1993.



Yuliia Martyniuk

Yuliia Martyniuk, Head of PR and Communications Department at TVORY! Youth Center Network and Lviv – European Youth Capital 2025 initiative (online)

Hello! I'm Yuliia Martyniuk, a Communications and PR Specialist from Lviv, Ukraine, with a deep-rooted passion for youth empowerment and community development. With six years of experience in strategic communications in the youth sphere, I currently have the privilege of serving as the Head of PR and Communications Department for both the TVORY! Youth Center Network and the Lviv – European Youth Capital 2025 initiative. My journey with TVORY! began in 2019, and since September 2020, I've been leading the PR department, playing a key role in shaping our communication strategies and building a strong media presence for vital youth projects. I had the honor of leading PR for the "Molodvzh" National Youth Event for three years and designed the comprehensive communication strategy for the Lviv - European Youth Capital 2025 grand opening, which successfully engaged over 10,000 visitors and garnered broad media coverage. I've actively promoted significant youth initiatives like the OL Science & Tech Fest and contributed to developing what became the first youth strategy for our city. As a dedicated civic activist and volunteer, my work is truly fueled by my passion for "people who move and make change" and advocating for "strong and heard Ukrainian youth all over the world". My international engagement includes presenting at the OSCE "Youth in Times of War" session in Vienna in April 2025, where I shared insights from the EYC 2025 initiative. I'm also coordinating a youth-focused side event at the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2024 in Berlin and participated in the European Youth Event 2023 in Brussels, actively representing Ukraine's voice in European youth policy platforms.

**Santeri Leinonen**

Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Youth, Peace and Security

Santeri Leinonen holds a Bachelor of Arts in Russian language and Literature and is currently completing his master's studies in International Relations and Russian studies at the Universities of Helsinki and Tampere. His areas of specialization include Eurasian security, Russian and Soviet history, and national foreign policy issues. Leinonen has working proficiency in English, Russian, Swedish, and German. He has previous work experience from a wide variety of foreign policy actors, including from his previous internships at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the National Defence University of Finland. Leinonen is also actively involved in many organizations and other activities in his local community. He is a long-time active member of the Scouts of Finland. Additionally, he serves as a local city councilor in his hometown, focusing on issues such as nature conservation, education, and children's rights.

**Saji Prelis**

Director of Children & Youth Programs, Search for Common Ground / Co-Chair, Global Coalition, Youth, Peace, and Security

Saji has over 25 years of experience working with youth movements, governments, and partners to build intergenerational trust and collaboration in over 35 countries. As the Co-Chair of the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, he co-led successful advocacy for the UN Security Council Resolutions 2250, 2419, and 2535. He also leads the Global Community of Practice on YPS National Action Plans. Saji is the Director of Children & Youth Programs at Search for Common Ground. Before that, he was the founding director of the Peacebuilding & Development Institute at American University in Washington, DC. Over 11 years at the university resulted in him co-developing over 150 training curricula exploring the nexus of peacebuilding with development from a human-centered perspective. Saji received the distinguished Luxembourg Peace Prize for his Outstanding Achievements in Peace Support. He obtained his Master's Degree in International Peace & Conflict Resolution from American University.



Nina Brandt

Chief of Section, Partnerships, Advocacy and Communications, United Nations Youth Office

Nina Brandt brings over 19 years of experience within the United Nations system and currently serves as Chief of Advocacy, Partnerships, and Communications at the UN Youth Office. In this role, she advances the Office's political and public advocacy across sustainable development, human rights, and peace and security. Between 2015-2025, Nina held several positions at UN DESA, including as Chief of the Strategic Programme Development and Partnerships Section overseeing country-level capacity Development support to governments. From 2008-2015, as Chief of UN Development Business, she managed two offices in New York and Washington DC to promote development projects for private sector participation. At UNDP from 2006-2008, she worked on pandemic preparedness and private sector engagement. Nina began her career as a journalist and moderator, working with one of Germany's largest private radio broadcasters. She holds degrees in Organizational Psychology (BS/MS) from Heidelberg University, a MA in Media Studies from The New School, and an advanced diploma in General Management as part of IESE Business School's Senior Executive Programme.

**Ville Savoranta**

Knowledge Management & Organisational Learning Policy Officer, Civilian Planning and Conduct, European External Action Service

Ville Savoranta is seconded by Finland to the European External Action Services Civilian Operations Headquarters and has worked on integrating Youth, Peace and Security into civilian crisis management since 2014. He has contributed to the crisis management aspects of the first Finnish national action plan on YPS, driven inclusion of YPS into the EU civilian CSDP Compact of 2023 and co-developed the operational mini concept for YPS as part of EU civilian CSDP missions.



Anja Jokic

Bureau member, Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth

Anja Jokić is committed to promoting inclusive youth participation and gender equality in peace and security processes. With experience across the Western Balkans, she has worked with civil society organisations, public authorities, and international institutions to support peacebuilding, reconciliation, and intercultural dialogue. She has contributed to policy and programme development and has designed and led numerous initiatives aimed at empowering young people, women, and civil society actors. Her work has focused on building capacities for the implementation of the YPS and WPS agendas, as well as encouraging meaningful engagement in dialogue, confidence-building, and democratic reform of the security sector. Currently serving as a Bureau Member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, Anja coordinates efforts on Inclusive and Peaceful Societies, leads the portfolio on Youth, Peace and Security, and chairs the working group preparing a Committee of Ministers Recommendation on “Peace Education By, With, and For Young People”. Anja holds a BA in International Relations and an MA in Peace Studies, with research centered on women’s participation in peace processes and the implementation of the WPS agenda in post-conflict contexts and is currently finalizing an LL.M. in European Integration. Her academic background is further supplemented by ongoing professional development in mediation, negotiation, conflict prevention and resolution, and arms control.



Lucija Tacer

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Special Representative on Youth Engagement

Lucija Tacer is the youngest female member of the National Assembly in Slovenia. She completed her law degree in Slovenia at the University of Ljubljana, after obtaining a Bachelor of Arts in economics and public policy at Vanderbilt University in the United States. Before her election, she was active in youth organizations and represented Slovenian youth at the United Nations as the UN Youth Delegate for Slovenia. In parliament, she works in the European and foreign affairs committees as well the justice committee and committee for Slovenians abroad. Additionally, she serves as the vice president of the constitutional committee and coordinates proposals for constitutional changes within her parliamentary group. Since her path has been interconnected between the United States and Europe, she is honored to serve as the President of the parliamentary friendship group between the United States and Slovenia. In the OSCE PA, Ms Tacer serves as the Head of the Delegation of Slovenia, as well as the OSCE PA Special Representative on Youth Engagement and Chair of the OSCE PA Network of Young Parliamentarians.



Assel Murat

Assistant Project Officer on Youth and Security, OSCE Secretariat

Assel Murat is co-ordinating youth portfolio at the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna. She has over six years of progressive experience in project management focusing on human rights, gender equality, youth, media freedom, and the rule of law. She also served as a human rights project manager and researcher at international and civil society organizations and think tanks in Central Asia.



Sölvi Karlsson

Specialist, Children and Youth, Search for Common Ground

Sölvi Karlsson is an expert in meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding. He has spent over a decade grappling with questions on how the peacebuilding sector can best support youth at the front lines of transforming conflicts and rebuilding trust. In his role at Search for Common Ground, he develops innovative methods for meaningful and safe participation of and partnerships with youth. He supports teams across countries in Africa, Asia and the MENA region in developing and implementing high-quality youth peacebuilding programs. Prior to joining Search, Sölvi co-led the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders) during the lead-up to, and immediate aftermath of, the landmark UN Security Council resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security. Previously, he has been involved in the youth sector from various sides, including working for the EU's Erasmus+ Youth programme's funding agency in his native Iceland, and as a youth worker and a youth activist.



Paula Pättikangas

Chair of the Youth, Peace and Security Network of Finland

Pättikangas is a societally active and innovative young leader committed to building a sustainable and just future, with fair decision-making processes and where the rights of future generations are recognized and safeguarded. Pättikangas has 7 years of experience in management and development roles, both in national and international organizations. Currently serves as the Chair of the Youth, Peace and Security Network of Finland, and has previously represented Finland as a UN Youth Delegate, among other roles. With an academic background in foresight and cultural history, Pättikangas specializes in organizational and international policymaking.

**Camilla Ojala**

Global Citizenship Education and Peacebuilding Specialist, YMCA Finland

Camilla Ojala is a long-time advocate for the Youth, Peace and Security agenda and has taken part in both Finnish National Action Plan processes. She has previously coordinated the work of the Youth, Peace and Security Network of Finland as well as the Nordic Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security. Currently she works as a specialist on YPS and Global Citizenship Education at YMCA Finland.



Cevor Tikerpuu

United Nations Youth Delegate of Finland

I am one of Finland's UN Youth Delegates for 2025. As a lawyer with a focus on social justice, I work to bring youth and youth perspectives—especially those of underrepresented groups—into decision-making. My delegate role centers on advancing social sustainability, equal opportunity, and meaningful youth participation.



Katja Ahlfors

Ambassador-designate to Senegal; Senior Adviser, Unit for Northern and Western Africa, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Katja Ahlfors serves as Senior Advisor in the Unit for Northern and Western Africa since October 2024. Prior to her current position she served as the Director for the Centre for Peace Mediation at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. During her career, Katja has engaged in particular with issues related to European Union, Africa-relations and peace mediation. At the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Helsinki she has i.a. worked as the Director for the Unit for Development Policy, Team Leader for EU Development Policy and Regional Manager for Southern Africa. Katja's foreign postings include serving as Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of Finland in Addis Ababa 2005-2008 and Political Counselor at the Embassy of Finland in Stockholm 2013-2017. In 2008-2010 she served as the focal point for conflict prevention and mediation at the European Commission in Brussels. In 2017-2018 she served as Senior Advisor at the CMI Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation. Katja holds a Master's Degree in Political Science from Helsinki University. She also studied at Uppsala University. Katja is married with four children.

**Anu Apo**

National Coordinator for Youth, Peace and Security and Women, Peace and Security, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Counsellor Anu Apo has worked as a National Coordinator for Youth, Peace and Security and Women, Peace and Security at the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs since January 2022. Before her present position, she has served in various tasks at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, including Security policy, Crisis management and NATO, Russian Affairs and European Department. She joined the Ministry in 2001 and has been posted at the Finnish Embassy in México. Ms. Apo holds a Master's degree in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies at Lancaster University, UK.



Emilia Uljas (MC)

Vice-chair of Youth, Peace and Security Network of Finland

Emilia Uljas is a speaker known from Finnish morning television programme, as well as being a Vice Chair of the Youth, Peace and Security Network Finland. Uljas is also a former EU Youth Delegate of Finland. She studies politics at University of Helsinki.