

Joint declaration of the Council of Europe and OSCE high-level "2+2" meeting

The Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Foreign Minister of Finland, Alexander Stubb, the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Foreign Minister of Sweden, Carl Bildt, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Terry Davis, and the Director of the Office of the Secretary General of the OSCE, Paul Fritch, met in Brussels on 15 September 2008 at the invitation of the OSCE Finnish Chairmanship for the 18th Council of Europe-OSCE High-level meeting.

The High-Level meeting focused on the situation in Georgia, election-related issues and co-operation in the four priority areas, namely action against terrorism, the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, combating trafficking in human beings and promoting tolerance and non-discrimination.

The participants underlined that all conflicts must be settled by peaceful means. With regard to the situation in **Georgia**, they called for a strict adherence to the six-point ceasefire agreement of the French and Russian Presidents. It is fundamental that the Russian troops return to their positions held prior to 7 August. They expressed their strong support for the six principles for ensuring human rights and providing humanitarian protection and assistance in the war affected areas, including human rights monitoring, presented by the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner, Thomas Hammarberg, on 8 September 2008. They also supported the statement by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Knut Vollebaek, to promote respect for international norms on the protection of minorities and citizens abroad and called on both Russia and Georgia to adhere to these standards.

The participants recalled that as member States of the Council of Europe and participating States of the OSCE both Russia and Georgia are bound by human rights obligations and commitments which must be respected in all circumstances. They called for further urgent action by the OSCE and the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the UN, the EU and other international partners, to protect the human rights and address the humanitarian and protection needs of those persons affected by the conflict. Their safe and voluntary return to their homes and the reconstruction of the infrastructures destroyed are key priorities.

The participants called for in particular the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities as well as other relevant Council of Europe and OSCE institutions and structures to continue to assess the overall human rights situation in the war affected areas, including South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

On **election-related issues**, the participants welcomed the continued close co-operation in election observation between the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) and the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. They also highlighted the continued strengthened co-operation between the OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe, including through its Venice Commission, in election-related issues.

The participants also welcomed the invitation by **Azerbaijan** to observe its Presidential elections on 15 October 2008. They encouraged Azerbaijan to continue its efforts for the full implementation of the election-related commitments it has undertaken to implement in the framework of the Council of Europe and of the OSCE.

The participants welcomed the invitation by **Belarus** to the OSCE to observe the parliamentary elections on 28 September 2008 and encouraged the Belarusian authorities to ensure full and unhindered access to the election observers throughout the whole election process, including during vote counting and tabulation. They noted the release of the political prisoners Alexander Kozulin, Andrei Kim, and Sergei Parsyukevich. The participants agreed to continue to follow closely developments in Belarus.

The participants called on all participating States of the OSCE and member States of the Council of Europe to continue inviting observers to their national elections in accordance with their commitments. They encouraged both organisations to co-operation in the use of new voting technologies such as e-voting.

The participants recalled that both organisations are based on the **respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law**. They recalled the significance of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a source of inspiration for the development of the human rights framework of both Organisations. They stressed the importance of fully adhering to all human rights obligations and commitments undertaken, in particular those enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, and the key role of the civil society, including human rights defenders, in the full realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The participants committed to deepen further the co-operation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE **in the four priority areas**, while ensuring complementarity and best use of synergy effects in the work of the two organisations, and taking into account their different memberships and mandates. They committed themselves to enhancing co-operation and information exchange between the organisations, especially in field activities within the four priority areas.

They welcomed the strengthened co-operation and joint initiatives between the two organisations to promote **tolerance and non-discrimination**. They encouraged further close co-operation between the Council of Europe Commissioner on Human Rights and the OSCE institutions and structures (High Commissioner on National Minorities, ODIHR/Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues and the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions) to promote and protect the human rights of Roma and Sinti.

Combating trafficking in human beings was highlighted as a priority of both organisations. The participants stressed the need to fully implement commitments undertaken by the member States of the Council of Europe and the participating States of the OSCE to prevent human trafficking, to render assistance and protection to the victims of trafficking and to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice. They welcomed the forthcoming publication of the OSCE commitments and the Council of Europe legal standards on anti-trafficking as a resource to be used for awareness-raising and promotion of a human rights-based approach in combating trafficking in human beings.

The participants reaffirmed that **terrorism** remains a major concern for both organizations and highlighted the excellent co-operation between the two organizations in this area. They expressed support for the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, as a comprehensive blueprint for global anti-terrorism action, stressing the need to fully adhere to the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law in combating terrorism.

They welcomed the Recommendations on **National Minorities** in Inter-State Relations by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to be launched in Bolzano/Bozen in October

2008. The participants encouraged both the Council of Europe and the OSCE to make full use of the recommendations and ensure their dissemination as widely as possible.