



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Address by Finnish FMA Mr. Ilkka Kanerva

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 10, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We are honored and join other delegations in welcoming Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva to the Permanent Council as our Chairman in Office for 2008. The United States fully supports the objectives that you have set out in your intervention. I can assure you that my country will do everything it can to support you in reaching these goals and strengthening the OSCE. These are challenging times for the OSCE, but we see Finland as uniquely suited to deal with them.

Your message that participating States need to focus more on the implementation of existing commitments is especially timely. All of our hard work over the years will be for naught if we do not put those Ministerial and Permanent Council decisions into practice. As Undersecretary Burns noted in his intervention at the Madrid Ministerial, we are especially concerned that fundamental human rights commitments at the heart of this organization's identity and purpose are being ignored or, in many cases, actively questioned.

We agree with you, Mr. Foreign Minister, of the particular importance of the commitments dealing with the human dimension, especially on elections. We have said it before and we will say it again: OSCE election monitoring must not be undermined in any way. Moreover, those commitments that help ensure free and fair elections, such as freedom of speech and the media, freedom of association, and the right to peaceful assembly, must also be respected. For this reason, we support an active discussion of such commitments during meetings of the Human Dimension Committee and in special events that Finland will organize during the course of the year.

Mr. Chairman, we encourage your active engagement to help resolve the protracted conflicts. We applaud your imminent trip to Moldova and believe that Ambassador Terhi Hakala, the Head of Mission in Georgia, will remain a visible symbol of your active involvement in the Caucasus. We urge all parties concerned to support an increase in the number of monitors for South Ossetia as soon as possible and again call for a monitoring post at Didi Gupta and international monitoring of the Roki Tunnel to halt the illicit flow of armed groups, weapons, and ammunition into the region.

Mr. Foreign Minister, we welcome the long termed vision you have outlined today. But your Chairmanship will also face some immediate challenges.

The OSCE will have to deal with the impact of Russia's decision to cease implementation of its obligations under the CFE Treaty. Russia has said it will no longer accept inspections; it did not participate in the Annual Exchange of Information on December 14 in Vienna. The U.S. and its NATO Allies have engaged intensively for the last several months in a serious dialogue with Russia to address the issues it has raised while taking account of the concerns of all 30 States Parties to the CFE Treaty, including issues relating to Russia's commitments on Moldova and Georgia. Actions by NATO countries have been scrupulously consistent with the letter and the spirit of the Treaty. By contrast, Russia's unilateral actions have the potential of undermining the viability of the CFE regime. We hope that Russia will reverse its decision on "suspension" and resume implementation of its Treaty obligations.

I fear that all too soon in your Chairmanship we may also have to come to grips with challenges to a continued OSCE role in Kosovo. Over the past eight years, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo has played an essential role in supporting peace and democracy. The United States particularly values the work the mission is doing to monitor and report on the welfare and security of Kosovo's minority populations and to promote ethnic reconciliation. OMiK's work, however, remains unfinished. We regret that two participating States last month insisted on a month-to-month renewal of the Mission mandate rather than joining consensus to renew the mandate for the full year, and that they have threatened its closure in the event Kosovo declares independence. Such short-sightedness could impair the Mission's effectiveness and its ability to retain qualified staff. We hope the Chair can convince all participating States of the need for the OSCE to remain engaged in Kosovo regardless of how the status process is resolved. If, however, OMiK is forced to close its doors in Kosovo, we urge all efforts be made to ensure a proper closeout period that allows a successor organization to take on OMiK's key Ahtisaari-related functions, as well as allowing OMiK's valued staff to transition to new employment.

Mr. Minister, the United States will also look to you, as our Chairman in Office, to move our Organization forward toward new horizons. We consider the decision taken at Madrid, tasking the Secretary General to examine the potential of greater OSCE engagement with Afghanistan, as one of the most important of that Ministerial. It addresses an issue which has a direct impact on security throughout the OSCE region. We look forward to receiving the Secretary General's assessments for border work by the OSCE involving Afghanistan, and will support you, Mr. Chairman, in your efforts to make this a reality. In this regard, your announcement today of Finland's own financial commitment to this is extremely timely and welcome.

The Organization's work in Central Asia, especially in the areas of policing, counternarcotics, customs reform, and border security, is critical to improving the daily lives of Central Asians and the security of the entire OSCE region. We look forward to your leadership in strengthening the OSCE's work in this critical region across all three dimensions and will support your efforts to do so.

Finally, the United States regrets that, despite the hard work of the Finnish Chair of the Advisory Committee on Management and Finance, the OSCE has not yet approved its budget for 2008. We look forward to working with the Finnish Chairmanship to bring the budget discussion to a quick and successful conclusion in a way that puts our organization on a sound, financial footing, but that also appropriately reflects the relative importance of the Secretariat, the Institutions and the Field Missions.

This is an ambitious and sometimes contentious agenda. We wish you and your mission here the best of luck. Please be assured of the full support of the United States as you move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman