



2008 FINNISH CHAIRMANSHIP

# “And then there were five”

## First Chairmanship “Quintet” sets its sights high

BY **SONYA YEE AND PATRICIA N. SUTTER**

*As the birthplace of the OSCE, Helsinki served as a fitting backdrop for discussions on the way forward for the Organization, mid-way through Finland’s Chairmanship. On 1 and 2 June, Foreign Ministers and special envoys of the five countries holding the rotating OSCE Chairmanship from 2007 to 2011 came together as the “Quintet” for the first time, at the invitation of the Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb.*

**A**t the meeting of the Ministerial Council in Madrid in November 2007, the 56 participating States had agreed that, following Finland’s term in 2008, Greece would hold the OSCE Chairmanship in 2009, Kazakhstan in 2010 and Lithuania in 2011. The decision marked the first instance in the history of the OSCE of its leadership being officially set four years in advance.

“Finland wanted to seize this unique window of opportunity and convene the first-ever Quintet of Chairmanships, with the aim of bringing about more co-ordination, coherence and continuity in the work of the OSCE,” said Minister Stubb. “We’re trying to create something new here. It could be a way of defining more specific tasks for the Organization.”

Taking part in the meeting were Kazakh Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Petras Vaitiekunas, Secretary of State Ángel Lossada representing the 2007 Spanish

Chairmanship, and Special Envoy Christos Zacharakis representing the incoming Greek Chairmanship.

OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut and Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Eva Biaudet presented an overview of the latest developments in the Organization’s activities. Goran Lennmarker, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, also attended the meeting at the invitation of the Chairman-in-Office.

The informal gathering began with a relaxed dinner at the Sundmans Krog restaurant on Helsinki’s harbour front. After greeting his guests, Foreign Minister Stubb launched a discussion on shared priority areas, ranging from the fight against intolerance and discrimination to the OSCE’s engagement with Afghanistan.

Welcoming the group the following day, Finnish President Tarja Halonen underscored the significance of the Organization’s comprehensive approach to security and its inclusiveness and the need to address the plight of the Roma population in the OSCE area.

Indeed, during the discussions, the Quintet reaffirmed their commitment to the comprehensive approach, which gives weight to three distinct fields of activity: strengthening politico-military co-operation, fostering better economic and environmental governance, and supporting human rights and democratic institutions.

Helsinki, 2 June 2008.

Left to right: Secretary of State Ángel Lossada representing the Spanish Chairmanship, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Petras Vaitiekunas, Chairman-in-Office and Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, Kazakh Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin and Special Envoy Christos Zacharakis representing the Greek Chairmanship.

Photo: Finnish Foreign Ministry/Petri Krook



Helsinki, 2 June. The flags of Spain, Greece, Finland, Kazakhstan and Lithuania (left to right) are displayed at an informal meeting of representatives of the OSCE "Quintet".

The Quintet agreed on the importance of multi-year planning to strengthen coherence in the Organization's activities. Priority areas included the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan, border security and management, combating terrorism, small arms and light weapons and conventional ammunition stockpiles, tolerance and non-discrimination, gender, economic and environmental challenges, combating trafficking in human beings, and strengthening the dialogue with the Partners for Co-operation.

The Quintet also stressed the Organization's vital role in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation, and pledged to intensify efforts to settle the protracted conflicts in the OSCE area.

By the time the Quintet talks ended in the splendid surroundings of the nineteenth-century Government Banquet Hall on Helsinki's Esplanade, it was clear to all five parties that the new format was an invaluable tool. They will continue discussions on the sidelines of the meeting of the Ministerial Council in Helsinki on 4 and 5 December.

"We think that this instrument *will* and *can* continue in the years to come," said Spanish Secretary of State Ángel Lossada, noting that priority tasks such as combating terrorism and promoting gender issues were not meant to be tackled under a single Chairmanship. "We're very proud of the fact that the Ministerial decision [on the series of Chairmanships] was taken in Madrid."

Calling the long-term collaboration of five Chairmanships "unprecedented", Kazakh Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin said the Finnish initiative was in keeping with the spirit of the OSCE and came at a crucial time in its history. The time had come to find "new ways and new mechanisms" to deal with its "well-known problems".

Still, Minister Tazhin said, "change and possibilities" were there, as in the case of the

OSCE's work — now under way — in border management matters related to Afghanistan and its neighbours, and beyond. After all, he said, although "it's a very long way to Afghanistan from Helsinki", issues such as drug-trafficking posed serious problems for Europe too.

At a news conference, the Chairman-in-Office said that the meeting's positive and constructive outcome was encouraging and that the participating States, through the work of the Quintet, could issue a political declaration at the Ministerial Council meeting in Helsinki. The last one was issued in Porto at the end of the Portuguese Chairmanship in 2002; since then, efforts by succeeding Chairmanships to come up with a declaration have failed because of a lack of consensus among participating States.

A Helsinki declaration was an ambitious goal, Minister Stubb said, but the Quintet was sufficiently spread out geographically to make a division of tasks possible. Besides, he added, "The time is ripe for the OSCE to create solutions that can develop the Organization's activities considerably." He noted that power had recently changed hands, or would soon change hands, in many important OSCE participating States.

A few hours after the Quintet's meeting with the press, Alexander Stubb, who has been Foreign Minister only since April, left for Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on a Central Asian tour that would also take him to Tashkent in Uzbekistan and Ashgabad in Turkmenistan — to be followed by a visit to the Kyrgyz and Kazakh capitals in July.

"This shows you the diversity of the OSCE area and its tasks," he said, "and that the Chairmanship is trying to cover as much ground as possible."

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## Meet Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb

**Since 4 April 2008:** Foreign Minister of Finland

**2004-March 2008:** Member of the European Parliament

**2003-2004:** Counsellor, Finnish Permanent Representation to the EU, Brussels

**2001-2003:** Adviser to the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, and member of the Commission Task Force on the Convention, Brussels

**2000:** Professor at the College of Europe, Bruges

**1999-2001:** Counsellor, Finnish Permanent Representation to the EU, Brussels

**1997-1998:** Researcher for the Finnish Academy, at the London School of Economics

**1997:** Columnist for various publications

**1995-1997:** Adviser, Foreign Ministry

**Foreign Minister Stubb** is a graduate of the London School of Economics (Doctor of Philosophy, 1999), College of Europe, Bruges (Master of Arts, 1994) and Furman University, South Carolina, USA (Bachelor of Arts, 1993). He holds a *Diplôme de Langue et Civilisation Française* from the Sorbonne University in Paris (1995). He has published nine books and numerous academic articles on the EU.

