



**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 695th (SPECIAL) MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

10 JANUARY 2007

**RE: ADDRESS OF THE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE OF THE OSCE, MINISTER
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF FINLAND,
MR. ILKKA KANERVA**

Mr. Chairman,

1. The Holy See also joins other Delegations in congratulating Minister Kanerva on the assumption of his duties as 2008 OSCE Chairman-in-Office, as well as in warmly welcoming him to his first appearance before the Permanent Council in this new capacity. Congratulations also to you, Ambassador Turunen, and to your co-workers!

2. Minister Kanerva has mentioned several aspects of contemporary international life, appropriately recalling the role Finland has played in the development of European relations, especially within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, whose foundation has been linked to his land by the signing of the Final Act in Helsinki on 1 August 1975. All the countries on the continent are invited to take part in building a Europe of peace and solidarity, so that the institutions are at the service of peoples. In this regard, my Delegation appreciates the constant efforts of Finland to achieve peace throughout the Continent, encouraging dialogue with hostile forces and offering constant technical assistance, so that the interested parties may equip themselves with democratic institutions indispensable to public life and give a new momentum to their economies for the good of all.

Finland was active in the conflicts in South-Eastern Europe at the end of last century. South-Eastern Europe is once again in the spotlight, especially in the desire to find a negotiated solution to Kosovo's status. Yes, the OSCE has invested a great amount of capacity and resources in Kosovo over the years. That is also the reason why every effort should be made to continue the OSCE's work for the benefit of the people in Kosovo and the region. Just a few days ago Pope Benedict XVI, in his Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, expressed the hope that "*the definitive status of Kosovo will take*

account of the legitimate claims of the parties involved and will guarantee security and respect for the rights of all inhabitants of this land, so that the spectre of violence will be definitively removed and European stability strengthened'.

3. The new challenges to the military equilibrium and to the agreements concluded in the OSCE in this regard mentioned by Minister Kanerva require continued dialogue and cooperation. However, persistent threats and unresolved conflicts are witness to the fact that, unfortunately, stability and peace still remain goals yet to be achieved. As is known, it is not the place of the Holy See to enter into issues which are strictly political and neither does it wish to do so. Nevertheless, the Holy See is convinced that Finland, which has always aimed at multilateral relations in the heart of the European Union, will help the EU carry out its responsibilities in the global family of nations..

4. Challenges are clearly emerging in the economic and environmental activities that also have a clear security aspect. It is thus imperative to protect critical energy infrastructure from attack. It will also be important, on the issue of environmental protection, for the OSCE to support the various initiatives concerning waterways and water management, thus contributing to cooperation, stability and the equitable and sustainable development of each country. Obviously, water is necessary for health and for life, but it is also an indispensable resource in the production of wealth.

5. It is equally very important to oppose with determination and clarity the exploitation of religion as a pretext to justify violence, which violates human dignity. In this regard, my Delegation has observed with pleasure the promulgation in Finland, a few years ago, of a new law on religious freedom, which guarantees **real** freedom of religion and gives religions greater autonomy and equality under the law, especially in the area of education and formation. Hence, the contribution that each one of them can make to the well-being of the whole people is being promoted. Freedom of religion for all, and education to implement such freedom, become the main road for respect of all beliefs and convictions. Unfortunately, however, there are still places where the right to religious freedom cannot be fully exercised. The Holy See defends this right, demands that it be universally respected, and looks forward to working with the Finnish Chairmanship to overcome intolerance and discrimination against Christians and against followers of other religions.

Mister Chairman,

6. Good relations have long existed between Finland and the Holy See, which was among the first in the international community to recognize the independence of your country. Later, at the height of the Second World War, the Holy See and Finland came to establish official diplomatic relations. The intervening years have further consolidated our good relations and our effective working together in the pursuit of an international order more solidly based upon justice, peace and an authentic development of peoples.

There is yet another barometer of our good relations: *Nuntii Latini* - News in Latin - is a weekly review of world news in Classical Latin, the only international broadcast of its kind in the world, produced by YLE, the Finnish Broadcasting Company (*Nuntii Latini, conspectus rerum internationalium hebdomadalis, est programma Radiophoniae Finnicae Generalis (YLE) in terrarum orbe unicum*).

Minister Kanerva: at the beginning of your term as OSCE Chairman-in-Office I wish you a successful mission and, at the same time, assure you of the support and assistance of my Delegation. May your efforts further promote the good of all individuals, of all nations and peoples – “from Vancouver to Vladivostok”.

Thank you, Mister Chairman.