

ADDRESS BY THE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE,
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF FINLAND, ALEXANDER STUBB
AT THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL 10 APRIL 2008

Distinguished Ambassadors of the OSCE Participating States,
Distinguished Ambassadors of Mediterranean and Asian Partner States,
Mr. Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address the Permanent Council today. I was honoured to assume the duties of the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe last week.

At the outset, I would like to extend my appreciation for the committed work of my predecessor, Mr. Ilkka Kanerva, in steering the organisation. Thanks to his efforts, I have a solid basis on which to build.

I would like to take up three themes today: the role of the OSCE as a European organisation, its ability to make a difference, and the work ahead of the Finnish Chairmanship.

Europe and European affairs have been my passion for years. As a Member of the European Parliament, I have been closely involved in the tremendous change that has transformed the European landscape in the 21st century. We have overcome the divisions of Europe and are now building a continent based on a genuine partnership and co-operation. The OSCE must remain fully involved in these efforts.

The OSCE is the only all-inclusive multilateral forum that brings together the states of the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian area around the common values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It provides us with unique tools to promote co-operative security, and to prevent and resolve conflicts across our region. The enlargement of other European organisations will not render the OSCE obsolete. I underscore the need for ever closer co-operation between our organisations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am convinced that the OSCE needs to work harder on the issues where it can make a real difference.

We must seriously look for solutions to the so called frozen conflicts. My aim to re-energise efforts towards peaceful settlement of these conflicts. I sincerely hope that the efforts of the Finnish Chairmanship are met with constructive engagement by all parties. I continue to support the existing negotiation mechanisms, including the Minsk Group and its Co-Chairs.

I am concerned about recent incidents in Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia and appeal to all parties to refrain from violence.

The OSCE has already made a difference in Kosovo. Over the years it has managed to make the lives of Albanians, Serbs and others living in Kosovo safer and better. Participating States continue to have diverging views about the future of Kosovo, but this should not prevent us from seeing the value of continued OSCE involvement in Kosovo, along with other international actors. Its long experience, its institutional expertise and its deep ties to all communities are distinct strengths of the OSCE. I appeal to the leadership of both Serbia and Kosovo to work for a prosperous and peaceful future for Kosovo and the region.

In this juncture, I would like to thank the OSCE mission in Kosovo and its members for their dedicated work in the middle of uncertainties.

The OSCE can also make difference by supporting the Central Asian countries in building up their societies. The recent launch of projects to bolster border security and management in Tajikistan is a case in point. I thank Turkmenistan for hosting a most successful conference on maritime and inland waterways cooperation last month in Ashgabat. I hope to be able to visit to all of the OSCE's Central Asian participating States in the near future in order to get better acquainted with their wishes and our possibilities.

The OSCE can also bring added value to current international efforts and support Afghanistan in an effective and cost-efficient manner. I will push forward the implementation of the Madrid Ministerial Council decision on OSCE engagement with Afghanistan.

The OSCE is engaged in fighting the scourge of trafficking in human beings, which undermines human security and dignity. We must look ways to prevent better cases of trafficking and to assist the victims of this particularly egregious human rights violation more effectively. I am pleased to announce that Finland, in co-operation with the office of the Special Representative for Trafficking in Human Beings Ms. Eva Biaudet, will host a conference on successful prosecution of cases of trafficking on 10-11 September in Helsinki.

The OSCE should also contribute towards a smooth transition to digital democracy. Building on our common commitment to democratic elections, we should analyse the political and technical issues related to electronic voting. In Finland, e-voting will be tried out for the first time in the municipal elections this autumn. We will be inviting other participating States to observe our pilot project.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Finnish Chairmanship will continue to work on the basis of the programme we outlined this January. The three Cs - continuity, coherence and cooperation - will guide us in our endeavours.

I see a lot of merit in long-term planning. Capitalizing on the unique opportunity provided by the Madrid Ministerial Council decision on future Chairmanships, Finland proposed close co-operation in the "Quintet" format between Spain, Finland, Greece, Kazakhstan and Lithuania. We have been pleased with the positive comments by the "Quintet" countries and others. I wish to confirm the invitation to an informal meeting of "Quintet" Foreign Ministers to be held 1-2 June in Helsinki.

I am aware of the important appointments to be made this year. I believe that with your support, there is realistic chance to make them on time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Heads of Delegations for your support and the contributions your governments have already made in working towards our common goals.

I very much appreciate the close co-operation the Finnish Chairmanship has had with Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut and the Heads of Institutions and Field Operations.

The Chairman-in-Office's Personal Representatives are engaged in valuable work in the fields of preventing and resolving conflicts, promoting tolerance, combating trafficking in human beings and fostering dialogue on election-related issues. I am asking all of them to continue their important activities.

I recognise the key role of the OSCE's parliamentary dimension in furthering the goals of our organization. I am pleased with the good cooperation the Finnish Chairmanship has had with the Parliamentary Assembly. I pledge to continue this cooperation, and I will convey this to President Göran Lenmarker.

Thank you.