

Discussion on the future of security in Europe at the OSCE Ministerial working lunch on 4 December 2008

Finland would like to share with delegations of other participating States the following summary on the working lunch that took place at the OSCE ministerial meeting in Helsinki.

The discussions concentrated on the future of security in Europe, including the recent initiatives presented by Russia and France. The host, Chairman-in-Office Minister Alexander Stubb underlined in his opening remarks that in his view, the OSCE provided the most suitable framework for the discussions, given its wide geographical scope, extending from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The Helsinki principles of 1975 and the three baskets/dimensions of the OSCE remain valid. The participating States should seek ways to refresh the present security system. Minister Stubb expressed the view that the discussions should be based on an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the current system, and ways to develop the system and improved ways to prevent conflicts should be examined.

Altogether 20 foreign ministers of the participating States and the EU High Representative took part in the discussion.

Chairman-in-Office Minister Stubb drew the following eight conclusions:

- 1) There was a broad understanding that the OSCE is the most suitable venue for these discussions.
- 2) There were no objections to the idea of having discussions on the future of European security; there was a wide agreement that they should be open to different ideas.
- 3) At this stage, there may be more questions than answers.
- 4) The institutions contributing to European security are unique, and many expressed strong support for these institutions; in this context, many also underlined the importance, for example, of NATO-Russia Council and the EU-Russia dialogue.
- 5) It was generally agreed that the focus should be on substance rather than on form; the Helsinki Principles of 1975 and the 1990 Paris Charter remain relevant, with the three baskets carrying equal weight.
- 6) Discussions should be based on a comprehensive concept of security that covers both the "hard" and "soft" security, and a broad approach is required.
- 7) While there is a need for the development of broader security concepts, the so-called frozen conflicts must be addressed as well.
- 8) Regarding the issue of a possible summit, with a view of pursuing the talks on the future of European security, there seemed to be certain reluctance at this stage. It is difficult to commit to such an idea unless there is a clearer understanding on the objectives of the suggested summit. Should there be more clarity on the issue in the coming months, the possibility of convening a high level meeting could be revisited. The working lunch was a useful kick-off for further discussions.