

ENGLISH only

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland,
at the Thirteenth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council
In Ljubljana, Slovenia, 5-6 December 2005**

Mr. Chairman, Dear Colleagues,

Finland aligns itself with the statement of the United Kingdom on behalf of the EU.

As the host of the 1975 Helsinki Conference, Finland is pleased that a number of high-level conferences and colloquia have been arranged this year to assess the past thirty years of European security and cooperation and the OSCE's future role.

It was an achievement that the Panel of Eminent Persons managed to reach a nearly consensual set of recommendations building on the idea of a common purpose of the participating States. Reform processes in international organizations seem to follow a strikingly similar pattern. While an overhaul is sometimes necessary, it should not be allowed to overshadow or disrupt the conduct of activities.

- - -

The OSCE has proven its ability to respond quickly and innovatively to the need for conflict prevention and political crisis management in the Balkans, in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. It has become a linchpin for conflict resolution, providing often an anchor for the activities of other international actors in this endeavour. These are some of the reasons why Finland has made her bid for the Chairmanship-in-Office in 2008.

The OSCE's ability to face new challenges should be secured. Our goal is a modern and efficient OSCE. The Organization's activities must be well coordinated with other international actors, in particular with the Council of Europe, to utilize each organization's comparative advantages while avoiding unnecessary duplication. In addition to the four already identified priority fields, we believe that the OSCE and the Council of Europe can profit from each other for example in developing measures to combat violence against women.

Finland, having the presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2006, will continue to strengthen the cooperation between the EU and the OSCE.

- - -

In resolving regional conflicts, the OSCE's record this year is hardly better than in the previous years. Still, the agreement between the Russian Federation and Georgia on the withdrawal of Russian troops was a welcome step.

Unfortunately, a similar move in the Moldovan/Transnistrian conflict is not yet in sight. The parties and the mediators should spare no effort in seeking common ground. It is positive that the EU and the US were invited as observers in this process.

As to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, the parties are signalling willingness to negotiate. The window of opportunity should be used. The parties should receive all possible support from the international community, including the OSCE.

Progress has been made in post-conflict efforts in the Western Balkans region, and the EU has a growing role in setting the pace. The Kosovo status negotiations have begun under the leadership of President Martti Ahtisaari. The OSCE should continue to support post-conflict rehabilitation in Kosovo and elsewhere in the region.

- - -

The role of the OSCE in election monitoring and election assessment has been somewhat controversial. The Helsinki Group - the high-level body of the 21st Century Helsinki Process on Globalisation and Democracy - has proposed making election monitoring a universal practice, based on universal standards and procedures. Monitoring these principles should be automatically applied to all and any elections, thus removing the perceived implication of expected unfair play whenever a monitoring mission is sent on a selective basis. This could be the right way to build confidence and reduce political controversy. On the basis of our shared democratic principles all participating States should support ODIHR in its continuing work for free and fair elections.

Finland reaffirms its condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations whatever its motives and origin. In the action against terrorism, human rights and the rule of law should be always be respected.

Finland is pleased to see that the OSCE field missions have taken an increased role in reducing the threat arising from excess stockpiles of small arms and light weapons and ammunition. We are prepared to continue our support to such projects, enhancing human security, also in the future.

Tolerance has been in the focus of the OSCE in the recent years. While some forms of intolerance such as anti-Semitism still haunt Europe, a growing emphasis on immigrant communities and their integration is called for. Europe has always been a mosaic of peoples and cultures. Old and new minorities should have a place in European societies. Minorities should not only be tolerated but their rights should be respected, while persons belonging to these groups can be expected to respect the rules based on democratic standards.

A vibrant civil society is essential in any well-functioning democracy. Equal access to judicial and democratic institutions as well as to the media should be guaranteed to all - men and women alike as well as to those belonging to different minorities. We should not seek to unduly restrict the activities of non-governmental organisations, human rights defenders and other civil society actors, but rather enter into a meaningful dialogue with them.

- - -

I wish to commend Slovenia for a successful chairmanship and for providing excellent circumstances for our Ministerial in beautiful Ljubljana. I thank you personally, Minister Rupel, for the close contact that we have had throughout the year.

I would also like to thank all participating States for the trust that they have placed on Finland when supporting our bid for the OSCE chairmanship in 2008.