

**Address by Joao Soares**  
**President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**  
**16th OSCE Ministerial Council,**  
**Helsinki, Finland, 4 December, 2008**

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Madame President,

Mr. Foreign Minister and OSCE Chairman-in-Office,

Mr. Secretary General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to address the Ministerial Council and lead the delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly. I am delighted, in particular, to see Finland's President, Madame Tarja Halonen, here, as she was previously an active member of our Assembly.

This is, indeed, a special occasion, because it was here, with the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, that the idea of the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe became a reality.

The Helsinki Final Act was a milestone. Much courage and perseverance was needed. More than thirty years later we need to have the same strategic vision to strengthen the OSCE. We have to be bold and realize that this is a completely new world that needs new solutions to new problems. Let me quote President-elect Barack Obama, it is change we need.

This Organization cannot be tangled up, year after year, in a bureaucratic and unproductive debate, failing to have a common position after each Ministerial Council or to approve its own annual budget. If necessary, the OSCE has to reinvent itself. More than any other international organization we have the potential to do it.

The Parliamentary Assembly has long urged reforms in the OSCE. To maintain and increase its relevance, the OSCE needs to improve its decision making mechanisms. The consensus rule in Vienna should be adjusted. The meetings of the Permanent Council should be open just like this Ministerial Council. We cannot expect anyone to care about what we do if we continue to meet behind closed doors without transparency and accountability.

The OSCE has a precise goal: to bring stability, security and freedom from Vancouver to Vladivostok. If we really want to deliver on our promise, we must understand that new threats also represent new opportunities to act in an innovative way.

The OSCE field missions are the heart of the Organization. The Parliamentary Assembly has often re-iterated that the OSCE must continue making full use of its field presence, providing them with all necessary means to increase their effectiveness, and that is where we should put our money, not in our bureaucracy in Vienna.

We have witnessed Finland's Chairmanship of the OSCE in action and I would like to thank them for what they have done. Looking ahead to next year, I am pleased with the ambition and audacity of the Greek chairmanship and look forward to working with the Greek Foreign Minister and new Chair-in-Office, Madame Dora Bakoyannis, whom I recently had the pleasure of meeting in Athens.

This year, the OSCE region has faced numerous challenges, including a war between two of our participating States. Although the OSCE remains the most flexible and responsive Euro-Atlantic security instrument, we were not able to prevent the hostilities. The recent clarification by President Saakashvili of the events leading to the war supports the widely reported statements by a former OSCE mission official. Our organization should have been able to act more effectively on the information.

Our organization is an instrument for political dialogue that ensures peace, security, and freedom and has to continue working for a secure Europe without divisions. In this regard, we support President Sarkozy's and President Medvedev's proposals of a summit in the framework of the OSCE.

I urge all participating states to embrace this unique opportunity. We should be at the forefront of change. Looking back is not an option.

The Cold War is a thing of the past. We must now use modern thinking to overcome our current challenges. To have long-term success, we need to adopt an inclusive approach, in the spirit of the Helsinki Final Act. If we want real solutions to today's problems, we should forget about the old "us versus them" attitude.

Excellencies,

Parliamentary oversight is vital in international organizations including the OSCE -- as we need to be accountable to the people we serve and whose tax money we spend. Critical audits should be made public, not covered up.

As an integral part of the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly is involved on many fronts, contributing to dialogue; assisting the OSCE in trying to solve remaining conflicts and preventing new ones from erupting; increasing the respect for human rights; fighting against human trafficking; and strengthening OSCE election observation.

Election observation is an important part of OSCE's work. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has ever since the first Russian Duma elections in 1993 taken the lead in OSCE election observation, completing over 90 election observation missions with the participation of almost 3,000 parliamentarians.

I am sure you'll agree that there is no doubt that parliamentarians provide unmatched credibility to OSCE's efforts in election observation. As directly elected officials, we are

the real election experts, and we will continue to play the leading role in this important field.

The relations with our Asian and Mediterranean Partners also play a pivotal role in our future strategy.

In this sense, Afghanistan is a key to regional stability in Central Asia. More than any other country, the experience of the OSCE field missions should also be utilized in Afghanistan to face the growing difficulties. Soft power, in this case, can be more helpful than hard power.

I also want to underline the importance of a greater involvement in the Mediterranean area. We have increased our contacts with our parliamentary partners around the Mediterranean, and next year, we will strongly continue to involve our partners.

In the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I will continue to work to encourage debate on the most difficult security topics facing us all. I was proud to preside over a major debate on the crisis in the Caucasus during our recent Fall Meetings in Toronto.

Next year will be full of challenges. I want to assure you that you can count on your Parliamentary Assembly. Let us all try to bring to the OSCE the change we need.

Thank you.