

Mr Carl Bildt  
Minister for Foreign Affairs

## OSCE Ministerial Meeting 29-30 November, Madrid

Mr. Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

I wish to join others in thanking foreign minister Moratinos for his able service as Chairman-in-Office and his government for hosting us.

We are also – obviously - looking forward to close co-operation with the incoming Finnish chairmanship.

Sweden associates itself with the EU statement, naturally. But I would like to make a few additional remarks.

Mr Chairman,

One of the most important tasks of our organisation has been in helping to promote, develop and stabilize the institutions of democracy throughout our entire area.

That focus during the past decade has been on those parts of our continent only recently coming out of dictatorship and oppression is only natural.

As many of us have learnt, it sometimes takes its time until democratic institutions and practices become firmly anchored in a society.

Overall it is obvious that the efforts of the OSCE – and in particular ODIHR – have been important in helping nations in this regard.

Ukraine is a clear example.

After obvious attempts at election manipulation previously, the country has now demonstrated its commitment to free and fair elections according to European standards.

It is against this background that we highly regret that ODIHR was not given the possibility of carrying out its tasks prior to and during the Duma elections in the Russian Federation this Sunday.

Unprecedented restrictions, attached to the invitation issued by the Russian Federation, together with a number of bureaucratic obstacles made an ODIHR observation mission impossible.

This is a setback for the OSCE - as well as for Russia.

I can only express the hope that ODIHR will be given the possibility to observe the 2008 Presidential election in the Russian Federation.

In the coming months we also welcome the opportunity for ODIHR to fully observe the upcoming Presidential as well as Parliamentary elections in Georgia.

Recent events in that country have demonstrated the fragility of the otherwise impressive democratic transformation underway there. A strong ODIHR role can help and assist. The freedom of the media is obviously of critical importance.

When looking at these questions we must understand that an election is not just a one-day event - and that quality election monitoring is different from just short-term election observation.

This must be the basis for the activities of the OSCE/ODIHR also in the future. We must not allow our ambitions or our standards in these respects to be

devalued. We must remain an organisation committed to democracy, the rule of the law and respect for human rights in all of our participating states.

While this means more than just free and fair elections, there is no doubt that these remains something of a litmus test for whether a society develops according to the values and principles on which the OSCE was founded.

Mr Chairman,

Let me commend the often excellent work carried out by the OSCE's field missions.

These are flexible and, on the whole, cost-effective. They respond to the needs and requests of the host nations.

In this context, I sincerely hope that we will all be able to agree to the proposal of the Spanish Chairmanship to extend the mandate of the Kosovo mission until December 31, 2008.

In this region as well, it is important that we keep the regional perspective.

The reduced OSCE presence in Croatia has an important role in assessing also the process of refugee return – critical also in the perspective of the negotiations for the accession of Croatia to the European Union which my government attaches great importance to.

We should all have an interest in resolving the long-standing disputes in Georgia, Moldova and over Nagorno-Karabakh.

As we saw with the missile incident in Georgia in early August – which was clear-cut – as well as in other incidents here as well as elsewhere, there is a serious risk that events in and around these areas will escalate out of control.

Thus, not only efforts at true conflict resolution, but also the firm handling of the different incidents arising, are of great importance.

Let me finally welcome OSCE's efforts to translate the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security into action.

Sweden would like to see participating States report yearly on the implementation of 1325 within the framework of the Politico-Military Code of Conduct.

Mr Chairman,

As we set out for a homecoming to this organisation's cradle during the next ministerial meeting, we should recall that what was true when the Helsinki Final Act was signed in 1975 is just as true today.

Respect for fundamental freedoms remains essential for peace, justice and well-being. May we all recommit ourselves to advancing these freedoms, not only in words but certainly in our deeds as well.

Thank you.