



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**Statement by the
OSCE Secretary General,
Ambassador Marc Perrin de Brichambaut,
at the 16th OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting**

**Helsinki
4 December 2008**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Finnish Chairmanship of the OSCE has paid fitting tribute to the ‘spirit of Helsinki.’ Resilience and result-oriented dialogue have been the hallmarks of the OSCE in 2008. Much of this comes down to your personal commitment, Mr. Chairman, for which we are grateful. I also take this opportunity to thank your team in Helsinki and Vienna for their hard work and dedication.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2008 has been challenging in the OSCE area and beyond.

For one, we must be mindful of the impact the unfolding international financial crisis could have on OSCE participating States and its Mediterranean and Asian Partners, on the environment in which the OSCE operates and on the Organization’s budget and activities themselves.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed concern recently that the implementation of key programmes, such as the Millennium Development Goals, could be hampered, as developed and developing countries battle the global crisis.

And although the OSCE is relatively small and lean, bureaucratically speaking, we cannot assume that we will remain immune from this phenomenon.

Indeed, the OSCE is a platform where the potential security implications of such adverse developments can be discussed, and where sustained political will can be mobilized to honour existing commitments and to agree on additional steps.

The OSCE cannot provide answers to all challenges at any given moment. Nonetheless, it can act as a forum where answers may be found over time, in ways that restrain violence and confrontation among all stakeholders. I have no doubt that the OSCE area needs the OSCE -- to air differences, to promote peaceful change on the basis of shared values, and to find common ground for joint action.

The OSCE's role in Georgia embodies this complex effort. The Organization and its participating States have been mobilized throughout 2008 in the search to attenuate tensions and build positive momentum.

In the spring, OSCE crisis management mechanisms and procedures were invoked in Vienna and allowed for in-depth debate. In early July, a group of OSCE Ambassadors travelled to the conflict zone. The Mission to Georgia continued to perform essential monitoring activities in the zone of conflict and to promote confidence-building through economic rehabilitation. Early warning of rising tensions was ample and regular.

In August, we saw only too clearly the limits of all our painstaking early warning and conflict prevention work. Once hostilities erupted, the OSCE reacted very quickly, led by the personal shuttle diplomacy of the Chairman-in-Office. Within days, an additional twenty Military Monitoring Officers were dispatched to help restore confidence and stability. I would add that more could have been done in this respect as the decision in principle to deploy 80 more Military Monitoring Officers was taken.

In early October, the OSCE Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities undertook, along with the United Nations Environmental Programme, a joint mission to assess the environmental impact of the conflict. A joint report has been prepared to serve as the basis for future action.

Also in October, at the request of the Chairman-in-Office, the ODIHR and HCNM sent an expert team to assess the human rights and minority situation in the areas affected by the armed conflict. A report has been circulated to the participating States.

Throughout this challenging period, the Representative on Freedom on the Media has remained vigilant. Two weeks ago, RFOM organized its fifth OSCE Media Conference in Tbilisi, attended by journalists from across the South Caucasus.

At the political level, the OSCE is a co-chair of the Geneva Discussions, working with the European Union and the United Nations. The Discussions, which opened on October 15th and continued on November 18th, focus on issues of security and stability as well as those related to refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. First steps have been taken to restore dialogue among the parties. Further efforts and compromise are required to move toward concrete action on this set of questions.

Throughout all of this, the OSCE Mission to Georgia has worked ceaselessly to implement all aspects of its cross-dimensional mandate with the Georgian government and society. There should be no doubt that the OSCE stands ready to continue this comprehensive role on the ground.

This experience highlights the respective roles of the OSCE's Executive Structures – the Institutions, the Field Operations and the Secretariat – in carrying out concrete practical work as a complement to the OSCE's political dialogue. With diverse structures and specific mandates, Field Operations in particular work with host governments and local societies to help them in implementing their commitment to a cross-dimensional approach to security.

In another part of the OSCE area, the work of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan also exemplifies this spirit. I am pleased here to draw your attention to the launch of the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe. A centre of excellence, the Staff College will provide participating States and Partners for Cooperation with access to the latest thinking, methodologies, techniques and technology in border security and management. The project will encourage cross-border dialogue and the exchange and development of best practices. It will also promote the implementation of international norms and legislation within participating States and Partners for Cooperation.

This is a concrete example of the OSCE at its best, responding in innovative ways to regional needs.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The inclusive composition of the OSCE, its flexible and varied toolbox, and its comprehensive mandate – all of these are unparalleled in the Euro-Atlantic area – indeed worldwide.

Despite difficulties and differences, this unique instrument binds together North America, Europe and Eurasia within a forum of permanent dialogue and an effective platform for joint action based on agreed standards and commitments. Today's OSCE has the potential to weave together all the strands of our diverse region, along with its various institutions, around the idea of common security through shared values. The Organization is constantly exploring new perspectives, serving as a laboratory for new practical ideas and in co-operation with partner organizations and with civil society.

This is not an easy task. But the message that the OSCE carries remains as vibrant today as it was in 1975, and in all parts of the OSCE area. At a time when

fundamental questions of pan-European security are being raised, the OSCE remains a unique and flexible platform for debate and action. The Organization stands ready to take forward all ideas for renewed dialogue as and when the participating States see fit.

The OSCE is much more than a forum. A constantly refined body of commitments across the three Dimensions lie at the core of the OSCE and act as a compass to guide the behaviour of participating States in all instances. These commitments are ambitious. They are a reason for pride as well as a responsibility.

For the OSCE to achieve its full potential, it is up to you, the Ministers gathered here today, to work as closely as possible with the Organization the States you represent helped to create. The OSCE is here to serve you. It is up to you infuse it with political will and energy in order to make it more than the sum of its parts.

The Helsinki process has been constantly refined since 1975. As we return to the birthplace of our Organization, the 16th Ministerial Council offers us a moment to renew our commitment to this promise and to set a clear course for the future.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next two days, you will agree to decisions and declarations that will guide the future activities of the OSCE. As the Organization's Chief Administrative Office, it is my duty to remind you of the resource implications of these decisions. With appropriate and steady allocation of resources, both budgetary and extra-budgetary, the OSCE can effectively help the participating States to implement the commitments they have taken.

Human resources are vital for the success of the Organization. The OSCE must continue to attract and retain staff of the highest quality. In this regard, I wish to thank the participating States for their contribution in terms of seconded personnel.

As Secretary General, I will continue to ensure efficient use of the Organization's resources. You may rest assured also that I remain dedicated to gender mainstreaming as a key element of a diverse and representative Secretariat.

The OSCE Executive Structures work to ensure that the decisions and taskings that you set are implemented effectively and efficiently, within agreed mandates and within the resources that you allocate. This is the case for the Secretariat's work to co-ordinate economic and environmental activities, to fight trafficking in human beings, to prevent and combat terrorism, to promote OSCE standards in police training and co-operation and to promote equal opportunity for women and men throughout the OSCE area, just as it is the case for the work of the Institutions and the Field Operations.

Significant progress has been made in recent years in advancing the management agenda of the Organization. Under your direction, we continue our efforts to strengthen further the effectiveness and efficiency of the OSCE Executive Structures. We aim continually for better management of human and financial resources, sound implementation of the regulatory framework, and more strategic planning of activities on the basis of desired medium- and long-term impacts.

This is a work in progress, and one which becomes more challenging under current conditions of a gradual decline in the resources available to the Organization. In this regard, the positions that participating States take on the management of the Organization, in particular on its Unified Budget and their extra-budgetary and in-kind contributions, are every bit as meaningful as the political stands they take.

I look forward to working with the participating States as they develop priorities of action within the resources that are required to advance them.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I wish to draw your attention to an unusual meeting that occurred this year in Vienna.

In early July, for some 48 hours, 150 students from more than thirty OSCE countries filled the corridors and meeting rooms of the OSCE in the Hofburg. The Model OSCE Conference was the first of its kind, a new way to reach out to a younger audience throughout our diverse region. The idea was to give students a chance to learn about security and co-operation in Europe and to experience the challenges of multilateral diplomacy.

The event was a great success. Mainly, I believe, because the students grasped something of the spirit that lies at the heart of this Organization – the same spirit that guided the participating States when they first met in Helsinki to draft what became the Final Act and the spirit that brought us today once again in Helsinki. Let us now make sure this spirit remains just as vibrant when this new generation comes of age.

My final words are of thanks. I am honoured by the confidence the participating States have shown to my person. I consider the renewal of my mandate, which permits me to serve for three more years as your Secretary General, as a gesture of trust in all of the excellent staff working hard to take forward the ideals of this Organization -- in the Secretariat, in the Institutions and in the Field Operations.

Our agenda is full, and I look forward to working with the incoming Greek Chairmanship in 2009 to tackle these and other challenges.

Thank you for your attention.