

Janne Taalas/Kari Möttölä

The Spirit of Helsinki 2.0 – The Finnish OSCE Chairmanship 2008

The Legacy and Challenge of the Finnish Chairmanship

Finland started its Chairmanship-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in 2008 with an awareness of the expectations raised by the history of the Helsinki process, with a view not only to Finland's role at the outset of the entire process, but also to Helsinki's hosting of the tenth anniversary Ministerial in 1985 and the 1992 Follow-up and Summit Meetings. Equally conscious of its responsibilities in challenging circumstances, Finland was committed to looking forward rather than reminiscing about the past.

The acronym CSCE/OSCE has had a special place in the genealogy of Finnish foreign policy since the late 1960s, when the Helsinki government took an initiative that ultimately led to the launch of the Helsinki process in 1972.¹ At the same time, with the spirit and impact of the 1975 Helsinki Summit and the subsequent proliferation of national Helsinki Committees, "Helsinki" has been one of the most powerful brand names in international relations, not only within the CSCE/OSCE but also beyond. It signifies both the adjustment of mutual interests among great powers and other states, and the power of value politics and civil societies to promote change.

Finland's turn at the helm of the OSCE took place in a tense international climate. The ratcheting up of tension in the South Caucasus led to a crisis in Georgia in the summer that very much shaped the Chairmanship in the latter part of the year. Notwithstanding the drama of a violent conflict in the OSCE region, the year was full of activity in the pursuit of all three sides of the process: the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions.

This contribution argues that the Finnish Chairmanship achieved its main goals of strengthening the OSCE's role as a forum for political debate and bolstering the Organization's ability to act. It begins by sketching the international context of the Chairmanship and looking at the goals set at the start of the period. Thereafter the focus moves on to key aspects of Finland's management of the Organization's "routine agenda" and to a separate chapter on the OSCE's crisis management activities during the Georgian crisis. Fi-

Note: The opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the authors.

¹ For an account of the early years of the process by a veteran Finnish diplomat, see Markku Reimaa, *Helsinki Catch – European Security Accords 1975*, Helsinki 2008.

nally the results of the Helsinki Ministerial Council are assessed, before some concluding remarks.

A Start in Stormy Weather

The augurs were not good for the management of European security in late 2007. On 12 December, Russia suspended its implementation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), after its demands for the expedited ratification of the adapted CFE Treaty were not met by the NATO signatories. Furthermore, the deadline for the UN-mandated negotiations on the status of Kosovo lapsed on 10 December 2007, casting a long shadow over the OSCE Mission in Kosovo even if there was an agreement to extend its mandate from 1 January 2008 on a monthly basis.

There was also turbulence inside the Organization. The restrictive conditions placed by Russia on the activities of the monitoring team of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) made a full OSCE observation of the Duma elections on 2 December impossible. The divergence of views on election observation – widely recognized as a core activity of the Organization – was further highlighted by the challenge directed by a group of participating States led by Russia against the OSCE's practice in this area at the Madrid Ministerial Council.² In addition, the discussion of the Organization's budget and scales of contribution for 2008 was dragging on with no prospect of being wrapped up before the beginning of the Finnish Chairmanship.

The decision of the Madrid Ministerial Council to grant the OSCE Chairmanship to Greece in 2009, to Kazakhstan in 2010, and to Lithuania in 2011 provided some balance to the internal turbulence. It brought a very difficult set of discussions to a conclusion and offered the Chairmanship to a country in the post-Soviet space and a CIS member state for the first time. The decision on future Chairmanships also created an opportunity for enhanced co-operation between the traditional OSCE Troika and future Chairmanships.

The heightened atmosphere of uncertainty meant that the Finnish Chairmanship not only had to prepare to take charge of the everyday life of the Organization, but also needed to brace itself for a possible crisis that could shake its foundations. The international situation also meant that preparations were concluded very late on the eve of the Chairmanship.

2 See *Statement by Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the Fifteenth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, MC.DEL/34/07, 29 November 2007, pp. 2-3, at: http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2007/11/28525_en.pdf.*

As a part of its preparations, the Finnish Foreign Ministry had commissioned an independent think-tank report on the OSCE.³ The report reflects the crisis atmosphere and refers to the OSCE's "crisis of both political substance and moral legitimacy". It proposes new consultations on the politico-military and human dimensions with a view to forming a new consensus on the substance of these two dimensions, including through political trade-offs as needed between "a Political East and West".

The report argues that the participating States should take steps to save the CFE and update the concept and scope of confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) as contained in the Vienna Document 1999. They should also start a high-level discourse on the common core elements and different forms and traditions of democracy, and secure the implementation of OSCE election observation as a key practice. With regard to the changed geopolitical situation, the report further foresees a strengthened OSCE role in interreligious and intercultural dialogues and an intensified co-operation with Asian Partners for Co-operation, including the option of bringing China into the framework. The future of the OSCE was discussed in a seminar jointly organized by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) and the Finnish Foreign Ministry on 14 January 2008, where the report was released.

The Chairmanship Programme

In a context of international turbulence and a crisis-ridden atmosphere, it was no surprise that the two leitmotifs of the programme of the Finnish Chairmanship were continuity and co-operation in the work of the OSCE, qualities that are useful in fair weather conditions as well as crisis situations. In addition, as a third key concept, the programme underlined the coherence of action across the broad set of OSCE commitments as well as with other international organizations.⁴

The programme, which was finalized in the early days of January 2008, laid out comprehensively the aims of the Finnish Chairmanship, from regional issues to the development of the organization. These included:

- to foster political dialogue, including on difficult issues,
- to strengthen the Organization's capacity to act,
- to re-energize efforts to resolve frozen conflicts,
- to intensify activities on small arms and light weapons (SALW) issues,

3 Wolfgang Zellner in consultation with Pál Dunay, Victor-Yves Ghebali, P. Terrence Hopmann, Sinikukka Saari, and Andrei Zagorski, *Identifying the Cutting Edge: The Future Impact of the OSCE*, CORE Working Paper 17, Hamburg 2008.

4 Cf. *Programme of the Finnish Chairmanship of the OSCE 2008*, CIO.GAL/7/08, 9 January 2008.

- to operationalize the OSCE Border Security and Management Concept (BSMC), particularly in Central Asia,
- to increase co-operation on water transport issues with a focus on improving security and protecting the environment,
- to stress the implementation of commitments related to elections and election observation,
- to combat trafficking in human beings,
- to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti,
- to pursue gender mainstreaming.

At the launch of the Chairmanship on 10 January 2008 in Vienna, the Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva, assessed the challenges the Organization faced and showcased his country's programme.⁵ In addition, Mr Kanerva presented an idea of "the Quintet" format – informal co-operation between the OSCE Troika of Spain, Finland, and Greece and the future Chairs of Kazakhstan and Lithuania – as a means of identifying common priorities for the purpose of better planning, and invited representatives of the foreign ministries of all five countries to meet in Finland. The idea of the Quintet was received positively among the participating States and the countries in question.

These priorities were reiterated when Alexander Stubb, as the new Finnish foreign minister, took the helm of the Organization from Kanerva in April. In his first speech as the Chairman-in-Office, Stubb stressed the value of the all-inclusive scope of the OSCE and its unique tools in promoting co-operation and resolving conflicts in the region.⁶

The Routine Chairmanship – Managing the Everyday Life of the Organization

The Finnish Chairmanship placed a high priority on re-energizing efforts to resolve the frozen conflicts in Transdniestria, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Accordingly, Chairman-in-Office Kanerva travelled directly from the Chairmanship launch event on 10 January to Ukraine and Moldova (15-17 January), and a visit to South Caucasus followed suit in February (25-28). The visits aimed at giving new impetus to the moribund negotiations, and were followed by diplomatic efforts on the part of the Special Envoy of the Chairman-in-Office, Ambassador Heikki Talvitie.

The efforts succeeded in giving new momentum to the negotiations on the Transdniestrian conflict. As a result, the sides met in the informal 5+2

5 See *Speech by Chairman-in-Office, Minister Ilkka Kanerva at the OSCE Permanent Council*, CIO.GAL/10/08, 10 January 2008.

6 See *Address by the Chairman-in-Office, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Alexander Stubb at the OSCE Permanent Council*, CIO.GAL/59/08, 10 April 2008.

format several times, and the leaders of Moldova and Transdniestria met twice during 2008 after a hiatus of seven years. Discussions continued throughout the year, notwithstanding developments in other conflict areas, but they did not produce a breakthrough in conflict settlement.

In the South Caucasus, expectations of progress were more modest, as both Armenia and Azerbaijan prepared for presidential elections. The outbreak of violence in Yerevan in the aftermath of the Armenian presidential elections on 17 February spurred the Chairmanship to take action to reduce tensions by sending the Special Envoy to bring the sides to the negotiating table. The turmoil in Armenia had a bearing on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, where the worst fighting since the 1994 ceasefire broke out in early March. With the active mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group, the alarming situation was brought under control. Moreover, in Moscow in December, in the aftermath of the Georgian war, the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan issued a joint request for a peaceful settlement of the conflict together with Russia.

The Finnish Chairmanship made a special effort to deepen the engagement of the Central Asian participating States in the work of the OSCE and, consequently, enhance the impact of the Organization in facilitating stability and democracy in the subregion. A related consideration was the role of the Central Asian states in supporting international state-building efforts in Afghanistan. A focus was placed on the border security missions in Tajikistan, where Finland is funding several projects. Chairman-in-Office Stubb visited the region twice (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan on 2-5 June and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on 29 June-2 July).

The Finnish Chairmanship also placed an emphasis on implementing the decision by Madrid Ministerial Council 2007 on Enhanced OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan.⁷ The Secretary General was able to put forward a portfolio of projects in and around Afghanistan, but despite the Chairmanship's active support, the participating States could not agree on broad-based OSCE engagement with Afghanistan. This was because participating States had diverging views on OSCE action inside Afghanistan.

In the field of politico-military security, the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC), which Finland chaired during the last third of the year, had an active year. The Annual Security Review Conference (ASRC) in early July brought together many of the priority themes of the Chairmanship. In addition to the frozen conflicts, the small arms issues featured prominently on the agenda. With its small arms work, the OSCE made a strong contribution to the UN process in this field, and to the UN Third Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action on

7 Decision No. 4/07, OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan, MC.DEC/4/07/Corr.1 of 30 November 2007, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Fifteenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council*, 29 and 30 November 2007, Madrid, 30 November 2007, pp. 19-22.

SALW in particular. Equal attention was paid to the FSC's project activities and normative work.

It is also worth noting that the Finnish Chairmanship continued working on strengthening co-operation between the FSC and the Permanent Council. Three Joint and three Special Joint Meetings were held to address cross-dimensional issues relevant to the work of both the FSC and the Permanent Council.

There were dark clouds hanging over some of the OSCE field missions. In the western Balkans, the focus was on preserving the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMIK) in the midst of the political repercussions of that territory's declaration of independence of 17 February. As a pillar of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), OMIK was accepted by Russia and Serbia, the key critics of Kosovo's independence, but it had to brace itself for the forthcoming withdrawal of the UN Mission and its replacement by the EU Mission EULEX.

Chairman-in-Office Kanerva paid a visit to Serbia and Kosovo in early February to argue for the continued relevance of the OSCE Mission. OMIK was indeed able to continue its work after Kosovo's declaration of independence, as there was wide recognition of the importance of the Mission's activities in the areas of institution building, democratization, and strengthening the rule of law. Towards the end of the year, it became evident that the OSCE Mission would be able to sustain its presence in the young country.

Turning to Central Asia, Tajikistan proposed major restrictions on the mandate of the OSCE field presence in the country and triggered lengthy negotiations on the new mandate. The thorny issue was resolved only in early June during the visit of Chairman-in-Office Stubb to Dushanbe. The OSCE Office in Tajikistan retained a comprehensive mandate, which was adopted on 19 June 2008.⁸

In an effort to foster rapprochement, Chairman-in-Office Stubb visited Belarus on 7 October to discuss with the Belarusian leadership issues related to the OSCE presence in Minsk and, more generally, Belarus's engagement in the European process of security and co-operation. The visit – the first of its kind since 2004 – contributed towards the European Union's efforts to carefully improve its tense relations with Belarus, including by lifting or modifying its sanctions.

The issue of election observation was another hot topic in the spring of 2008, particularly during the run-up to the Russian presidential elections on 3 March. Russian authorities and ODIHR engaged in a serious attempt to resolve their differences concerning the observation of the elections, but they did not reach an understanding on the terms of what would have been a credible OSCE election observation. This time, neither the OSCE nor the

⁸ See Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Permanent Council, Decision No. 852, OSCE Mission in Dushanbe*, PC.DEC/852, 19 June 2008.

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly observed the elections, whereas the latter had conducted a separate mission to the Duma elections in December 2007.

In order not to let the lingering disagreements on election observation hamper the OSCE's human dimension work more widely, the Chairmanship launched a discussion on election-related issues under the Chairman's Special Envoy Dr Kimmo Kiljunen and held a seminar on 21 July in Vienna to keep dialogue open. The approach managed to keep the OSCE's election observation work on track and lower the temperature of the political debate. However, these efforts did not reduce the gap between the fundamentally divergent views on the principles and methods of election observation that several OSCE participating States hold.

The OSCE was able to observe every election held in the OSCE area in 2008 apart from the Russian presidential elections. The Chairmanship also acted to improve co-operation between ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly, building on the practices established by the previous Spanish Chairmanship. They succeeded in working side by side, and only produced separate press statements regarding the US presidential elections.

Work on the other two human dimension priorities of the Finnish Chairmanship – beefing up the implementation of the 2003 OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti (on the basis of ODIHR's report⁹) and intensifying the OSCE's activities to combat trafficking in human beings – received solid support among participating States, and work proceeded without problems.

The annual centrepiece of the economic and environmental dimension – the Economic and Environmental Forum – was arranged in two parts, in Vienna in January and in Prague in May. As the focal theme, the Finnish Chairmanship had chosen maritime and inland waterways co-operation, with its implications for comprehensive security in the economic and environmental spheres, support for regional and subregional processes and initiatives, and ability to highlight the role of seas and waterways in binding the OSCE countries together. The Forum was prepared in two expert meetings – one in Helsinki in September 2007 and the other in Ashgabat in March 2008. This was the first international conference within the OSCE framework to be held in Turkmenistan.

On the housekeeping side, the fierce negotiations over the OSCE budget led in early March to an agreement that allowed for increases of funding in priority areas set out by the Chairmanship. These areas were border management, gender activities, the fight against trafficking, combating terrorism, and projects in Central Asia. In May, a compromise was reached on the vexed issue of scales of contribution, whereby previously agreed scales remained the same until the end of 2009. The Chairmanship also launched a serious

9 See OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area*, 24 September 2008.

discussion aimed at improving the budgetary and planning process of the OSCE to be followed by the incoming Greek Chairmanship.

Notwithstanding the tense international situation and previous bruising experiences, the nomination of Janez Lenarčič as the new director of ODIHR and the extension for three more years of the mandate of Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut proceeded on schedule, with both being decided before the summer recess.

The meeting of the ministers of the Quintet in Helsinki on 2 June 2008 provided an opportunity to go beyond the burning issues at hand and discuss long-term planning on the role of the OSCE in responding to new challenges in the 21st century. The ministers agreed on the sustained significance of continuity, coherence, and co-operation in the OSCE process.¹⁰ The Quintet ministers met also during the United Nations General Assembly ministerial week on 23 September and on the eve of the Helsinki Ministerial Council.

Alongside the well established Troika, co-operation among the Quintet at ministerial and other levels provided the Chairmanship with both a planning framework and a sounding board that has proved to be very useful on many occasions.

The Crisis Chairmanship – Conflict Management and Resolution in Georgia

The worsening security situation in the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zones and deteriorating Russo-Georgian relations were evident in the spring. All the parties involved assumed more aggressive postures, and provocations and tit-for-tat type escalation dynamics started to prevail. The Chairmanship was increasingly involved in stopping escalation and preventing the outbreak of hostilities via three sets of activities.

Starting with his first formal statement on April 17, in which he expressed his concern about the establishment of official relations with de facto governments by Russia and called all sides to return to the negotiating table, Chairman-in-Office Stubb issued a total of six increasingly strongly worded public press statements before the outbreak of large-scale fighting on the evening of 7 August.¹¹ He also raised the issue in international meetings with many ministers, including the Georgian foreign minister in May. Drawing international attention to a potential hot spot was a case of the OSCE successfully fulfilling its early-warning function, but it failed to prevent the outbreak of hostilities.

As well as drawing attention to the deteriorating situation, the Chairmanship actively used the conflict-prevention mechanisms at its disposal. At

10 Cf. *Chairmanship countries pledge enhanced co-ordination to strengthen OSCE*, SEC.PR/212/08/Rev.1, 2 June 2008.

11 See OSCE press releases 107/2008, 28 March 2008; 130/2008, 17 April 2008; 141/2008, 30 April 2008; 244/2008, 4 July 2008; 275/2008, 2 August 2008; 278/2008, 7 August 2008.

the behest of the Chairman-in-Office, the OSCE Secretariat produced a paper on the use of OSCE conflict-prevention mechanisms and procedures in what was an escalating situation in Georgia.¹²

On May 2, the Chairmanship triggered one of the mechanisms by asking for expert advice from the Forum for Security Co-operation as per Bucharest Ministerial Council Decision No. 3 on Fostering the Role of the OSCE as a Forum for Political Dialogue.¹³ On May 28-30, both Georgia and the Russian Federation activated Chapter III of the Vienna Document 1999, which provides a mechanism for consultation and co-operation on unusual military activities. These instruments – one of them invoked for the first time ever – were used to defuse tension between Georgia and Russia. Most importantly, this meant consultations between the Russian and Georgian delegations in Vienna. The Chairmanship's role was to provide the necessary framework for consultations between the parties.

The third line of conflict prevention activity was the active mediation between the parties that was mainly carried out via the OSCE Mission in Georgia. Supported by the Chairmanship, the Mission and the Head of Mission, Terhi Hakala, in particular, were actively engaged in bringing the sides together. The efforts culminated on 7 August – the eve of the outbreak of hostilities – when the Mission facilitated a meeting between Georgian and Russian negotiators in Tshkinvali. The South Ossetian negotiators did not turn up and the conflict flared up later that evening.

Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, the Chairmanship sprang into conflict management action. Together with Bernard Kouchner, Chairman of the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC), Chairman-in-Office Stubb travelled to Georgia on 10-11 August, then went on to Moscow on 12 August and to Brussels for a special session of the GAERC on 13 August. The aim of the mission was to work towards an immediate ceasefire and pave the way for humanitarian action. Their work in Georgia and Moscow provided a foundation for the mediation by France's President Nicolas Sarkozy that resulted in the Sarkozy-Medvedev ceasefire agreement of 12 August.

After the ceasefire was reached, the focus turned to implementation of the agreement, and particularly to increasing the number of OSCE monitors on the ground. As early as 13 August, the Chairmanship proposed to increase the number of OSCE monitors by 100, and after a week of blitz negotiations and ministerial level interventions, on 19 August – the same day the UN Security Council failed to agree on a resolution on Georgia – the OSCE Permanent Council decided to immediately dispatch 20 monitors and to deploy

12 See Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Compendium of OSCE Mechanisms and Procedures*, SEC.GAL/121/08, 20 June 2008.

13 Cf. Decision No. 3, Fostering the Role of the OSCE as a Forum for Political Dialogue, MC(9).DEC/3, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Ninth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 3 and 4 December 2001*, MC.DOC/2/01, Bucharest, 4 December 2001, pp. 25-27, here: pp. 26-27.

an additional 80 after the agreement of a detailed modalities for their work. The deployment of additional monitors proceeded with great speed and Chairman-in-Office Stubb was already able to visit Georgia on 21 August to launch the OSCE's enhanced monitoring activity.

In addition to monitoring, the Chairmanship aimed at initiating a process to seek a political settlement of the conflict. In a non-paper issued on 4 September entitled "*Next Steps in Georgian Conflict Settlement*",¹⁴ the Chairmanship proposed that the negotiations should be convened jointly by the UN, EU, and OSCE and include all the main stakeholders. The idea was favourably received, and what were later to become known as the Geneva discussions were launched in the Swiss city on 13 October by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, Chairman of the GAERC Kouchner, and Chairman-in-Office Stubb.

The Geneva discussions, two further rounds of which took place during the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship, were complicated by Russia's decision to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia on 26 August, which drew widespread condemnation among the OSCE participating States, as it was seen to contradict fundamental OSCE principles. The issue created insurmountable obstacles for the decision to deploy a further 80 observers, and eventually to agree on an extension of the mandate of the OSCE Mission in Georgia. The other participating States were not willing to acknowledge – directly or indirectly – the de facto independence of the two entities, which was the Russian prerequisite for extension of the OSCE Mission in Georgia.

Throughout the crisis, stress was laid on effective co-operation between international organizations. The OSCE's close co-operation with the EU, and particularly with the very active French EU Presidency, continued during the practical matter of observation as well in the Geneva negotiations with the EU Special Representative Pierre Morel. The Chairmanship also emphasized co-operation with the UN, and Chairman-in-Office Stubb briefed the UN Security Council on 26 August and worked closely with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Johan Verbeke. In addition, Chairman-in-Office Stubb addressed the North Atlantic Council at ministerial level on 19 August in Brussels. The Council of Europe, in turn, was involved in a project to assess the human rights situation in the war-affected areas following the conflict in Georgia.¹⁵

14 CIO.GAL/125.08, 4 September 2008.

15 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia*, CIO.GAL/181/08, 28 November 2008; Council of Europe, *Human Rights in Areas Affected by the South Ossetia Conflict. Special Mission to Georgia and Russian Federation*, CommDH(2008)22, 8 September 2008.

The Helsinki Ministerial Council – The Future of Security in Europe at Stake

As the conclusion of an eventful, even dramatic year for the OSCE, the Helsinki Ministerial Council was given a taste of high politics by the ongoing discussions around President Dmitry Medvedev's proposal for a new European security treaty.

In Berlin, on 5 June 2008, President Medvedev proposed convening a pan-European summit to frame negotiations on a legally-binding "European Security Treaty". High-ranking Russian representatives reiterated the idea several times, including at the ASRC on 1 July 2008. President Medvedev himself returned to the issue at a press conference he held in Evian on 8 October 2008 with President Sarkozy, and at the Nice EU-Russia Summit on 14 November 2008. The Russian argument was essentially that European security was not indivisible, but that two decades after the Cold War, it was still characterized by bloc thinking that created different levels of security, resulting in friction.

It was clear that an initiative of this kind by the principal critic of the OSCE's role in the European security architecture needed to be given a hearing in the Organization itself. It was also natural because, even though the practical implications of the Russian proposal remained largely undefined, the OSCE would be a principal forum for whatever discussions would emerge on the topic.

Accordingly, in his letter to his colleagues on 26 November, Chairman-in-Office Stubb suggested holding a discussion on the future of security in Europe at a working luncheon of the foreign ministers on 4 December. The opportunity to engage in the discussion on such an important issue was instrumental in bringing a record crowd of forty-seven foreign ministers to Helsinki.

The frank luncheon discussion with some twenty interventions served to clarify a number of *a priori* points of departure that would frame any follow-up activity on European security. At the end of rather a long meal, Chairman-in-Office Stubb listed eight such points: The OSCE is the right forum for these discussions; dialogue was welcomed by all; there are still more questions than answers; there is no need to consider new institutions; the focus should be on substance; the OSCE concept of comprehensive security should be the basis for the discussions; settling unresolved conflicts should be a priority; and the substance of the matter should be clarified before any agreement is reached to hold a Summit.¹⁶

The OSCE Ministerial Councils have been able to agree on a political declaration only twice (2001 and 2002) since the Istanbul Summit (1999) mainly due to diverging views regarding the so-called Istanbul Commit-

16 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Discussion on the future of security in Europe at the OSCE Ministerial working lunch on 4 December 2008*, MC.DEL/92/08, 15 December 2008.

ments. So the odds were stacked against the Finnish Chairmanship. Finland tried to renew both the format of the political declaration and the process through which it was negotiated. The one-and-half-page draft of the political declaration, entitled “Renewing the Spirit of Helsinki”, released to the participating States only a few weeks before negotiations began in the capitals, was more focused than in previous years. After direct input from national delegations, the text went through three revisions in the negotiations in Helsinki.

There were two particularly troublesome obstacles: Disputes over the CFE Treaty and the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia following the Russian-Georgian conflict proved to be intractable. There was simply no common ground over these difficult issues upon which a joint text could be built. Moreover, with the discussion of the Russian security initiative gaining momentum, there was no readiness or consensus among the principal parties to outline the status and future of the European security scene in a general or prescriptive manner. The Chairmanship finally issued the draft declaration as a perception paper.¹⁷

The Helsinki Ministerial Meeting produced a rich array of texts to guide the future work of the OSCE across all three dimensions. They included a declaration on regional security and 13 decisions. The outcome ensured continuity in the OSCE’s work and improved the Organization’s capability to take practical action in a number of fields. The large number of human dimension decisions was particularly significant, as these are traditionally difficult to pass and hence scarce, as was the achievement of an agreement on a declaration on human rights. As a consequence, the Helsinki Meeting in the difficult year of 2008 fulfilled and in some cases even surpassed the expectations of the Chairmanship.

In the area of regional conflicts, a declaration on Nagorno-Karabakh prepared by the Minsk Group,¹⁸ which had been encouraged by the progress seen in recent meetings, urged the parties to draft a comprehensive peace agreement. It was significant that the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers committed themselves to the text.

The negotiations on a declaration regarding the conflict related to Moldova have proceeded better than ever since the 2002 Porto Ministerial Meeting, with the only insurmountable issue turning out to be a reference to the CFE Treaty.

A total of six human dimension decisions were adopted at the Helsinki Ministerial. The Ministerial Declaration on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is one of the most sig-

17 See Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Helsinki 2008, *Perception Paper of the Chairman-in-Office on Renewing the Spirit of Helsinki*, MC.GAL/13/08, 5 December 2008.

18 Ministerial Statement, MC.DOC/1/08, 5 December 2008, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Sixteenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council*, 4 and 5 December 2008, Helsinki, 5 December 2008, p. 3.

nificant human rights texts agreed among the OSCE participating States in several years.¹⁹ The declaration confirmed their adherence to the principal UN and OSCE commitments, and reiterated the principle of the historic 1991 Moscow meeting, according to which such OSCE commitments are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the state concerned.

Other outcomes in the human dimension include an enhanced OSCE contribution to improving the situation of Roma and Sinti by means of education and participation in public life, and combating trafficking in human beings by enhancing the means available to the criminal justice system.

Concluding Observations

The scope and nature of the discussion in the OSCE as well as its ability to react are intractably linked to the state of international politics beyond the Organization's immediate agenda and competence. As an ossified conference, the OSCE still reacts to these changes more directly than many other international organizations.

The challenge for the OSCE Chairmanship is to weather the storms and harness positive developments at international level to take the Organization forward and contribute to co-operative security in Europe. The international climate during the Finnish Chairmanship was characterized by storms rather than positive developments, but the Organization was able to fare well in the crisis situation. The OSCE increased its relevance both as a forum for political debate and as an actor in crisis management.

The debates in the Permanent Council and the Ministerial Council covered all the relevant security issues, and dialogue was also maintained on difficult issues and during difficult periods. The launch of the discussions on the future of security in Europe at the Helsinki Ministerial further underlined the key role of the Organization in political dialogue.

The successful action undertaken by the OSCE during the Georgian war and after the ceasefire agreement demonstrated that the Organization can still punch above its weight in crisis management. The action showcased the OSCE's strengths in crisis management: Provided the political will exists, the OSCE can act swiftly and put assets on the ground at lightning speed. This is because it can tap the resources and expertise of all participating States and easily co-operate with other international organizations. The OSCE can still be a successful first responder in European crisis management. In this context, the Russian refusal to prolong the mandate of the OSCE Mission in Georgia will weaken the Organization.

19 *Ministerial Declaration on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, MC.DOC/2/08, 5 December 2008, in: *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

While the OSCE delivered strongly on its two main functions during 2008, questions about long-term adaptability remain. The above-mentioned study commissioned from the Hamburg-based Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) prior to the Finnish Chairmanship recognized that protracted conflicts together with the continued challenges of political, economic, and social transformation in the OSCE area made the OSCE's strategy essentially defensive. By ensuring the continuity of its strategic and operational activities in all its dimensions, the OSCE was better poised to adopt an "offensive" strategy when the time is politically ripe.²⁰

A more offensive strategy could be based on launching a new generation of politico-military and human-dimension measures as well as strengthening the linkage with the wider geopolitical context in Asia. These steps would require strong political backing by the participating States and a re-energized common view of co-operative security from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The Finnish attempt to renew the spirit of Helsinki – Spirit of Helsinki 2.0 – was aimed to contribute towards this goal.

20 Cf. Zellner, cited above (Note 3), p. 34.