

Address by Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland at the Seminar "OSCE – The Litmus Test of an Evolving Security Community"

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First I would like to thank STETE and the Finnish Institute of International Affairs for this opportunity to share with you thoughts on the OSCE in this seminar. It is good to be among friends of the OSCE.

This event is timely indeed. The crisis in Ukraine is shaking the European security environment, and also the concept of co-operative security which is at the heart of the OSCE. The OSCE – which could be described both as a process and as an organization – is going through critical times, just ahead the upcoming 40-year anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act.

The current Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE has done commendable job in dealing with the Ukrainian crisis, and this work deserves everyone's full support. The OSCE has a key role in the efforts to de-escalate the situation, both through its instruments on the ground and through its support to broad political dialogue.

At present it is not possible to talk about the OSCE without tackling the recent events in and around Ukraine. By annexing Crimea and destabilizing other parts of Ukraine, Russia has violated several key principles of the OSCE, such as territorial integrity, refraining from the threat or use of force, sovereignty or non-intervention in internal affairs.

Talking about a return to the Cold War is nevertheless unfounded. We are living in fundamentally different times. Iron curtains – whether between countries or inside countries – cannot be resurrected. The rest of the world outside the OSCE will not be drawn into a new Cold War either.

We live in a world of interdependence, even more strongly in Europe than elsewhere. We may not always like everything this entails, but there is no going back.

This is one factor that everyone has to consider in the context of the Ukrainian crisis. How it will ultimately affect in the efforts to de-escalate the situation and promote a political solution that will respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine remains to be seen. But at this point, there is a serious effort to find a political solution. The Minsk protocol on the ceasefire and the peace process promoted by President Poroshenko –are welcome steps forward.

It is a paradox that when the principles of the OSCE have been violated and when efforts to find a solution to the conflict take place mostly outside the OSCE framework it is again the OSCE that is recognized universally as the most appropriate instrument to support and implement any solutions agreed upon.

In this matter, the OSCE has all the tools and mechanisms available to support the political dialogue and the work on the ground: among them, the Trilateral Contact Group; the Special Monitoring Mission; the Observer Mission; the autonomous institutions High Commissioner on National Minorities Astrid Thors; OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović; the ODIHR headed by Michael Link and the election observation of the institution. All these elements are actively used in Ukraine.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the midst of the Ukrainian crisis, the ongoing effort in the OSCE under the so called Helsinki +40 process has not produced much. This process was established in the Dublin OSCE Ministerial meeting in December 2012, with the aim of strengthening the OSCE and providing forward looking perspectives. Such a reflection about the state of the OSCE was initiated already when Finland was chairing the OSCE in 2008, soon after the war in Georgia. Thereafter, the Astana Summit mandated the OSCE to do further work in all areas and dimensions of the OSCE.

Much now depends on how the effort to de-escalate the Ukrainian crisis will succeed, and what are the political conditions to move ahead in the practical preparatory work under the eight key themes identified. This work within the Helsinki +40 process doesn't start from scratch. There is a sound basis for this work – commonly agreed principles, commitments and practical tools. The question is how to build on the vast and sound OSCE acquis.

Let me briefly highlight a few issues that, in my view, would merit consideration in the context of the Helsinki + 40 process:

The OSCE could do more outreach and be more transparent. Civil society has a special role within the OSCE, especially in the context of human dimension. There is room to increase transparency also on other OSCE dimensions and activities. Another example is the input that the academic community has made to the Helsinki +40 process. Such a dialogue is welcome and can bring fresh ideas to the work of the governmental representatives in the OSCE. STETE and numerous other NGOs in Finland have actively contributed to the OSCE work throughout the years. Let me also mention the parliamentary dimension which has its own important role within the OSCE, and the value of dialogue between the parliamentary dimension and other OSCE structures.

The Swiss Chairmanship has recently proposed to launch a reflection process on how to address the crisis of security and cooperation in Europe. Preliminary thinking would be done by a high-level panel of eminent persons, which would work hand in hand with the OSCE academic network. We welcome this initiative.

Gender equality. Enhancing gender equality is a fundamental part of inclusive dialogue. It is time that we truly put this issue on the top of our agenda. Finland has been in the forefront advocating an OSCE wide action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security. We believe that such an action plan would bring added value to the OSCEs own activities as well as promote the implementation of 1325 goals in the participating States.

Human dimension. During the OSCE's reflection discussions, Finland has proposed some practical steps to improve the implementation of the human dimension, such as peer reviews. The OSCE could also do more work in support of human rights defenders.

Conflict Cycle. We fully share the goal of the current Chairman-in-Office: It should become a habit to look to the OSCE mediation services whenever international assistance is required to resolve a conflict in the OSCE area. There are a number of practical issues on the table to improve the OSCE capacities in the areas of conflict prevention and crisis management.

Arms control. There is a broad consensus that the arms control tools agreed in the OSCE framework should be modernized. That also included the CFE Treaty – Treaty on the reductions of Conventional Forces in Europe – which has been in limbo for years. But the talks in Vienna have not progressed much beyond this recognition.

These examples are by no means an exhaustive list of what should be taken up to strengthen the OSCE. Switzerland has shown leadership in taking forward this work and deserves our full support. Finland does its part also by coordinating the work on the protracted conflicts within the Helsinki +40 process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When we now assess the OSCE, we should also remind ourselves of what we have achieved in the last 40 years. First, during the last two decades our joint efforts through the OSCE made a large scale war in Europe between states or alliances less probable. We should still recall this as it was the permanent threat during the era of East-West confrontation. The OSCE has helped to bring about democracy and has increased interdependence and commitment to the common principles in Europe. All OSCE participating states have declared their adherence to common values and norms - including respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law.

The Helsinki Final Act was signed on 1 August 1975, during the era of East-West confrontation. Initially, there were skeptics who held a critical view on the process and the result. The subsequent years proved that the skeptics were wrong. The Final Act has stood the test of time. It was complemented with the Paris Charter at the end of the Cold War, with a headline message "Europe whole and free". In the 1992 Helsinki Summit we were able to further strengthen the commitments of participating states.

In the 1990s OSCE struggled during the ethnic conflicts in the Balkans. And we are still dealing with the remains of the Soviet-era conflicts of Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and the Transdniestrian region. The OSCE's strength and also weakness has always been its consensus rule. It can only produce results if there is a common view and the necessary political will of all the participating States. But that is part of the OSCE's concept of co-operative security.

Some of us here today can recall and have lived personally the Helsinki events in 1975. No miracle took place then but it was in this Helsinki spirit that a forward-looking attitude was adopted. This attitude is equally needed in the current situation.

Finally, my dear colleague, foreign minister Ivica Dačić, the Chairmanship is a heavy and complicated task. Yours will not be less demanding than ours in 2008. In your efforts you can count on our support.