

**Statement by H.E. Laila Freivalds, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden,
at the Twelfth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, Sofia 6-7
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Mr. Chairman,

Let me begin by thanking the chair for the skilful way it has handled the duties this year.

I would further like to express my full support for the statement made by the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Chairman,

The events in Ukraine concern us all. It is of paramount importance that the will of the Ukrainian electorate can be expressed in a free and democratic way. I therefore call upon all participating states to support Ukraine in its efforts to this end. I commend the OSCE and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for their great contributions in the process now under way. Sweden welcomes the decision to repeat the second round of the presidential elections. We intend to increase the number of observers that we offer for these elections.

The OSCE acquis and the Helsinki principles have once again proven to be the platform on which we stand. Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are indispensable components for developing stable, democratic societies.

Over again the OSCE has shown that this notion - in a practical way paired with the flexibility of the organization, its institutions and its broad field presence - is an asset that can hardly be overestimated.

However, no organization is perfect. Also the OSCE needs reform. We all have a common interest and responsibility in making the OSCE more efficient. I very much welcome a decision to set up a panel of eminent persons to work on this matter. But I also clearly state, that reform cannot come at the expense of the acquis, that underpins the OSCE.

Let me briefly turn to some regional issues. The situation in Belarus is of serious concern. We must continue to support the democratic forces and civil society in this country. We must also see to that the Belarusian population is not isolated.

In Moldova and Georgia the OSCE plays an important role in finding solutions to the conflicts, thereby providing opportunities for a democratic and stable future. The fulfilment of the Istanbul commitments remains the key to this effect and must therefore be fulfilled without further delay.

Mr. Chairman,

Trafficking in human beings is a heinous crime. An especially abhorrent form is the kind leading to sexual exploitation of children. It is our responsibility to fight this awful phenomenon. A decision here today addressing the special needs of child victims of trafficking is a step in the right direction. Sweden is an ardent defender of children's rights and has participated actively in the work leading to such a decision.

I would like to commend the OSCE for its important work in the combat against terrorism. The terrible acts of violence carried out in Madrid, Beslan and elsewhere since we last met show that this threat to our societies continue to be a reality. The decisions we are to take in this field will lead to concrete measures that will contribute to prevent further human suffering.

I also welcome the efforts that OSCE is making to control the flow of small arms and light weapons.

An important Sofia-decision is the one on the “OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality”. This is a Swedish priority. Gender mainstreaming is not just a question of equal rights and opportunities of men and women. It is also a matter of making efficient use of all the potentials of society.

In this context I would like to inform you about the intention of Sweden to arrange a seminar next year on the role of women in crisis management. This as a follow up of the United Nations resolution 1325 adopted by the Security Council in 2000.

Mr. Chairman,

But we will only succeed in dealing with the security threats and challenges of today and tomorrow if we cooperate across the Euro Atlantic area - in the various dimensions of the OSCE as well as in other fora.

In May next year, Sweden will host the first “Security Forum of the Euro Atlantic Partnership Council”. This should provide another opportunity for a high-level exchange on key security challenges facing our region and beyond.

I would like to end my statement by once more expressing Sweden's strong commitment to the OSCE as one of the key pillars of the European security. We live in a period of continuous change. The challenges ahead of us are clearly different from those of the past. I am convinced that the OSCE will continue to play an important role also in the future.

I thank you