

OSCE ministerial - a failure or a success?

I was to end up with having a bottle of champagne, but now it seems like its gonna be just beer.

With these words Aleksander Stubb, the young and energetic minister for foreign affairs of Finland and acting chairman of the OSCE evaluated the OSCE Ministerial, that took place December 4-5th in Helsinki. After that he passed the traditional Finnish "sisu" candy to his successor - Greek colligue Dora Bakoyanis as a sign of chairmanship in OSCE in 2009.

The politicians named the meeting both a success and a failure. Started under the optimism of accepting a political declaration and 50 (among 56 member countries) ministers as participants the OSCE ministerial seemed to have greater results. Discussions on the joint political declaration according to ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Eka Tkeshelashvili, because president Saakashvili fired her 5th December right after the OSCE meeting was finished, "were stuck up because of Russia's unacceptable position". On the other side, the OSCE ministers in a very sharp way explained their concern of Russia's August intervention to Georgia and the recognition of South Osetia and Abkhazia as independent states. "Meeting was very supportive for Georgia", - said Tkeshelashvili. Other expectations from OSCE Ministerial voiced by minister Stubb on December 3rd - were the regional statements of OSCE on Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniestria unresolved conflicts. And while Karabakh issue got a wide space for discussions, on Transdniestria ministers ended up with common statements on territorial integrity and the format of negotiations.

On Karabakh there were two statements by OSCE Minsk Group countries and by Finland, as a chairman country. Both statements call on the conflict parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to build on the positive momentum established during the meeting of the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Moscow on November 2, 2008. Statements support Moscow declaration and call to work with the Co-Chairs to finalize the Basic Principles in coming months, and then begin drafting a comprehensive peace settlement. And for the first time ever, it was mentioned that the conflict sides are called to work with the Co-Chairs to develop confidence-building measures, beginning with pulling back snipers from the Line of Contact to save lives of innocent civilians and soldiers.

Another core discussion was held on the Russian president Medvedev's proposal on European security. Initiative was discussed, but the ministers came to a decision that there should be more meetings on that point. And actually that was the answer on all the discussions held during these days. "This isn't a historical meeting, but another step, an important one", - said Finnish MFA in the beginning, and he was absolutely right.

Although the meeting failed on many initiatives, mainly on political declaration and the decision on holding an OSCE summit, yet the spirit of Helsinki has revitalized the OSCE, and the meeting of foreign ministers gave new impetus to discussions on European security challenges, said the OSCE Chairman-in-Office at the close of the OSCE Ministerial Council. "During these two days the ministers have had the unique opportunity to share views and exchange ideas on security challenges and possible next steps. From our point of view the OSCE is a natural forum to discuss European security issues, also at the high level if needed," - stated the prime minister of Finland.

Thirteen decisions were taken by the OSCE ministers, and also the foreign ministers agreed to enhance OSCE efforts to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti, and to combat trafficking in human beings. Other decisions concerned, among other issues, small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition, and countering terrorism.

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9.12.2008