

**SCEPC Plenary in EAPC Format
Helsinki 25-26 April, 2005**

**Welcome Remarks: State Secretary Kari Salmi,
Ministry of the Interior**

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me today to be able to welcome you all to this meeting in Helsinki. Almost exactly a year ago the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, wrote to the Secretary General in NATO to invite the SCEPC in EAPC format to hold its Spring 2005 Plenary Meeting in Helsinki. On the behalf of the Finnish organisers I would like to warmly thank the Secretary General's acceptance of the invitation, as well as SCEPC Chairman, Assistant Secretary General Mr. Adam Kobieracki and following agreement in the Political Committee.

Conducting this meeting here in Helsinki is a joint effort by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, supported by the Finnish National Emergency Supply Agency, as well as the NATO International Staff in Civil Emergency Planning. Thank you all very much.

This venue of the meeting, The Finlandia Hall Conference Center, has a long and successful history of organising high level international meetings, including the historic Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe meeting of 1975. I hope you will be happy with the arrangements of this meeting and enjoy your stay in Finland.

Cooperation between Finland and NATO is working well and is being continuously developed. The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Partnership for Peace provide the framework for Finland in its cooperation with NATO. Modern partnership activities include such areas as disaster preparedness, scientific and technological cooperation, reform of the military as well as enhancing interoperability. Cooperation in the civil emergency planning sector as well as other collaboration to protect societies in crisis situations and to combat terrorism is an area where, in Finland's view, cooperation will be developed further. At the same time, Finland is contributing to the support given to the transition countries participating in the Partnership for Peace programme.

As an active member of EU, Finland is developing its response to new threats and challenges, including terrorism, within the framework of EU in particular, but also within other international organisations. Since we only have one set of national resources at our disposal, Finland strongly advocates pragmatic cooperation between EU and NATO in all areas where it may bring added value, such as in the area of the civil emergency planning. It is crucial that the emergency response capabilities are developed within both organisations in a coherent and transparent manner, without unnecessary duplication.

Finland emphasizes the responsibility of the international community in preventing crises and humanitarian disasters and in protecting the civilian population. SCEPC with its Planning Boards and Committees offers a very important civilian forum for Finland for working together with other nations in order to respond to new security challenges and threats. Approximately 20 Finnish ministries and other authorities are involved in NATO's civil emergency planning sector. In this cooperation Finland can contribute in the field of expertise and capabilities. On the other hand participation is useful for us as a way of exchanging information and forming an overall picture of the situation.

One example of this cooperation is the originally Nordic initiative, together with Norway and Sweden, to start developing Non Binding Guidelines and Minimum Standards for first responders. This Ad Hoc Group has now extended to more than 10 participating nations and its work, which is a concrete implementation of the Civil Emergency Planning Action Plan, is progressing well. As a product of this project Finland is going to arrange next autumn a pilot CBRN Curriculum course for first responders, based on Guidelines set out at the Kuopio seminar in October last year.

Another topic in the EAPC framework, based on the Istanbul Summit decision to enhance the cooperation with the Partners in the Caucasus and Central Asia, is the fresh cooperation with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. This project, which will be conducted together with Estonia, aims to support the improvement of emergency planning and the civil crisis management capabilities in these two countries.

I would also like to mention, that Finland has offered to host a NATO/EAPC field exercise in the year 2008.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you very much for coming to Helsinki. The agenda for the next two days is challenging and full of important issues. I hope this meeting will give many opportunities to productive discussions of these issues and will substantially contribute to their implementation. Expressing my warmest welcome to all participants I wish you a productive and successful SCEPC Spring Plenary Session here in Finland.