



# What in the world is happening?

**W**hen I took office three years ago, I wrote a *Blue Wings* column about becoming foreign minister. I was naturally thrilled and honoured with my new post, but little did I know what I was getting into.

Two weeks in, a bus full of Finnish tourists crashed in Costa del Sol, Spain. Nine lives were lost in the tragedy. I'll never forget my first night in our situation room at the ministry for foreign affairs. It was heartbreaking.

Four months later a war broke out between Russia and Georgia. I was chairing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) at the time, and had to be directly involved in trying to broker a ceasefire. Together with French foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, we succeeded in five days. However, I will never forget my first, and hopefully last, encounter with a corps full of bullets.

If Georgia was not enough, the world was hit by a financial crisis which started in September 2008. Ever since, finance ministers around the world have been involved in serious crises management. And I would argue that they have done pretty well.

A war in the Gaza strip began late December. The war between Israel and Hamas lasted three weeks, and was devastating for the region. Fear of a full blown war in Middle East was real.

**DURING 2009** worries in the African Horn grew. Pirates off the Somalian coast were hijacking boats and vessels. The international community had to react with a naval operation which is still going on.

The focus was also on Afghanistan, a country in war for more than 30 years, and Iran, a country with nuclear aspirations and an unpredictable leadership.

In 2010 unrest broke out in Thailand. Our embassy in Bangkok did a great job in

helping Finnish citizens. They used social media, such as Facebook, for sharing information.

Tensions in the Middle East grew when a vessel carrying humanitarian aid was intercepted off the coast of the Gaza Strip. The Flotilla incident was a setback for peace in the region.

The year ended with Wikileaks revelations about the art of diplomacy.

**THERE HAS BEEN** more, much more, of the same in 2011. Winds of democracy and change are blowing in the Arab world.

It all began in the streets of Tunisia and continued to Egypt. Libya became a war zone. Bahrain, Yemen, Syria and many

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other Arab states are witnessing unprecedented demonstrations. People want freedom and opportunity.

As if things were not bad enough, Japan was hit by a devastating earthquake and tsunami in March. This combined with a nuclear disaster is more than anyone can cope with.

**AFTER THREE YEARS** in office I can only conclude that diplomacy is not what it used to be. The agenda is simply different. Yes, there are still wars and diplomatic efforts to prevent them. But most of the time we deal with natural disasters, financial crises, humanitarian aid and consular affairs.

I might have not known what I was getting into three years ago, but given a choice, I would surely do it all over again.

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