

News from Copenhagen

OSCE Parliamentarians hold debates at Autumn Meeting in Geneva



PA President Ilkka Kanerva

Some 200 parliamentarians from more than 50 countries gathered in Geneva, Switzerland from 3 to 5 October for the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's 13th Autumn Meeting, held under the theme of "New Security Challenges: The Role of Parliaments."

In opening the Parliamentary Conference, OSCE PA President Ilkka Kanerva

(MP, Finland) noted that the PA is in a unique position to foster public debate and build support for strengthening the Organization. OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Didier Burkhalter and Speaker of the Swiss Parliament Hannes Germann also addressed the opening.

In a special debate on Ukraine, keynote speakers Simon Lunn of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces and OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Astrid Thors addressed the Assembly and nearly three dozen OSCE parliamentarians participated, including Russian State Duma Chair Sergey Naryshkin and Head of the Ukrainian Delegation to the OSCE PA Oleg Zarubinskyi.

Parliamentarians also took part in the OSCE PA's Mediterranean Forum, held under the theme "Facing Current Challenges to Security in the Mediterranean Region: the OSCE Model." Chaired by OSCE PA Vice-President Alain Neri (MP, France), the Forum included addresses by parliamentary delegations from the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation and featured debate on topics including the crises in Iraq, Libya and Syria, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and migration.

Climate change and the connections between environment and technology were discussed in session two of the Parliamentary Conference, with Roza Aknazarova (MP, Kyrgyzstan), Chair of the Second Committee, highlighting the links between climate change and security and the particular toll taken on low-lying and mountainous countries.

In opening the session on human rights and humanitarian issues, Mehmet Sevki Kulkuloglu (MP, Turkey), Vice-Chair of the OSCE PA's Third Committee, referred to the enduring connection between human rights standards and security.

In a keynote address, Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, urged parliamentarians to help better link international humanitarian challenges to their national legislation, noting that when political processes fail to prevent or stop conflict, the minimum needed from parliamentarians is to enable humanitarian workers to help those in need.

Addressing the Standing Committee, OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier presented a detailed description of the proposed OSCE budget for 2015, and fielded questions from the parliamentarians, including from Treasurer Roberto Battelli (MP, Slovenia) and Special Representative on the OSCE Budget Petur Blondal (MP, Iceland).



Secretaries General Spencer Oliver and Lamberto Zannier

The Standing Committee also unanimously approved an invitation from Speaker of the Georgian Parliament David Usupashvili, delivered by Georgian Head of Delegation Victor Dolidze, for Georgia to host the Assembly's 25th Annual Session in the summer of 2016.

PA-ODIHR Election Co-operation

At the request of ODIHR Director Michael Georg Link, PA Secretary General Spencer Oliver organized a meeting on the sidelines with PA Director of Elections Andreas Baker and leaders of the election observation missions to Bosnia-Herzegovina and to Ukraine. Secretary General Oliver welcomed Director Link and introduced him to the key PA officials involved in the upcoming election observation missions, including Vice-President Doris Barnett (MP, Germany) for the Ukrainian mission as well as Bureau Member Marietta Tidei (MP, Italy) and Treasurer Battelli, who will be leading the mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Oliver briefed Link and his team on preparations for the U.S. election observation mission, which the ODIHR has chosen not to observe. OSCE PA representatives welcomed the stated intent of the ODIHR to co-operate closely during the upcoming missions and to engage in earlier joint work on a draft statement. However, they regretted Link's insistence on treating the OSCE PA in the same manner as other parliamentary assemblies not linked to the OSCE, thereby undermining the purpose of the 1997 Co-operation Agreement, which the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and the OSCE Ministerial Council have insisted must be followed by the two OSCE Institutions. The OSCE PA again emphasized the importance of having the OSCE bodies work together as one organization during election observation.

Also participating in the discussions were Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares, Communications Director Richard Solash, Special Representative Amb. Andreas Nothelle, and Director of Political Programmes Roberto Montella, all of whom will be involved in the PA's upcoming election efforts.