

News from Copenhagen

Harstedt chairs meeting with international organizations working on Belarus



Kent Harstedt (second from right) chairs the Belarus-related meeting in Vienna on 3 Feb. 2017.



The Vienna meeting brought together representatives from international organizations including the OSCE, UN and EU.

A meeting chaired by OSCE PA Vice-President Kent Harstedt (MP, Sweden) last week in Vienna explored prospects for continuing to work with Belarus on developing democratic institutions. The 3 February event brought together a number of high-level officials from the OSCE and other international organizations, and was supported by the OSCE PA Vienna Liaison Office and the Parliament of Sweden.

Primary topics of discussion included the final report of the 2016 parliamentary elections in Belarus, the death penalty, lifting of visa requirements, and border issues. Participants, including UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus Miklos Haraszti, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Director's Office Jean-Pierre Froehly, and Co-Chair of the Euronest PA Working Group on Belarus Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, shared their activities, working methods and experiences, and stressed the importance of developing open political dialogue with Minsk.

Other participants included representatives from the European Union, Baltic Assembly, Nordic Council, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, Council of Europe, Austrian OSCE Chairmanship, OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, and the United States Embassy in Minsk. The Permanent

Representative of Sweden to the OSCE, Amb. Fredrik Lojdquist, also participated in the meeting and the Permanent Representative Belarus to the OSCE, Amb. Alena Kupchyna, joined the working lunch that followed.

Participants discussed the human rights situation in Belarus, and presented activities and ideas related to programmatic areas such as electoral reform, the economy, and freedom of movement. Harstedt, who serves as Chair of the PA's Ad Hoc Working Group on Belarus and was the Special Co-ordinator of the short-term OSCE observer mission to the September 2016 Belarusian parliamentary elections, discussed his work within the OSCE PA. He spoke about his visit to Minsk last month for the presentation of OSCE/ODIHR's final report on the recent elections, emphasizing that in meetings with President Alexander Lukashenko, election officials and stakeholders, he noted an openness on the part of authorities to engage in dialogue, which he said should be welcomed.

The meeting last week was supported by OSCE PA Special Representative in Vienna Amb. Andreas Nothelle, Deputy Director Marc Carillet, and Chief Political Advisor Francesco Pagani from the Liaison Office. Belarus is scheduled to host the OSCE PA's 26th Annual Session on 5-9 July 2017.

OSCE PA's Montella participates in PABSEC meeting of Secretaries General of parliaments

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella participated Monday in a meeting of Secretaries General from the parliaments of Black Sea Economic Co-operation Member States. The meeting, which also included the Secretaries General of the inter-parliamentary organizations that hold observer status in the Parliamentary Assembly of Black Sea Economic Co-operation, was held in Istanbul under the theme "Cooperation between Parliamentary Assemblies and challenges for the countries of the Black Sea Region."

In his intervention, Montella spoke about the common challenges facing the region, including terrorism, protracted conflicts, and the refugee and migrant crisis, underlining the need for enhanced multilateral engagement on these and other issues. He noted the important roles played by Secretaries General of both parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations, and emphasized the contributions of PABSEC countries to the OSCE PA, including by hosting meetings and actively participating in election observation.



Roberto Montella (fifth from left) addresses meeting of PABSEC Secretaries General, 6 Feb. 2017.

The gathering provided an opportunity to strengthen relations between the OSCE PA, PABSEC and the other international organizations that participated such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, and the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States. In his discussions with counterparts, Montella emphasized the need to focus on common approaches to real-world challenges, and offered the OSCE PA's continued co-operation in this regard.

Montella's visit to Istanbul was supported by Executive Assistant Anna di Domenico.