

News from Copenhagen

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More than 250 Parliamentarians to attend Winter Meeting

From 20-21 February 2003, more than 250 parliamentarians from 48 OSCE participating States will meet in the OSCE premises for the second OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Winter Meeting. The President of Austria, Dr. Thomas Klestil and the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Dutch Foreign Minister Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, will address the parliamentarians at the opening meeting on 20 February.

During the Winter Meeting the Assembly's three General Committees will be briefed on current OSCE developments by senior OSCE representatives, including the Chair of the Permanent Council Mr. Justus de Visser, the Chair of the Forum for Security Co-operation Mr. Roland Bimo, Co-ordinator for OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities Mr. Marcin Swiecicki, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Mr. Rolf Ekéus, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Mr. Freimut Duve, and acting Director of the ODIHR Mr. Steven Wagenseil.

During the Closing Session on 21 February, Delegates will hear a presentation by OSCE Secretary General and concluding remarks by the Chairs of the Committees and by President Bruce George.

During a special ceremony on 20 February the 2003 OSCE Prize for Journalism and Democracy will be presented to Russian Journalist Anna Politkovskaya.

The Winter Meeting will be preceded by a meeting of the Standing Committee which will hear welcoming remarks by the President of the Austrian Nationalrat, Dr. Andreas Khol, followed by reports on the various current and upcoming activities of the Assembly.

The OSCE PA Winter Meeting is the second largest event in the OSCE PA calendar, only topped by the Annual Session held each year in July. This summer, Rotterdam will host the 12th Annual Session which will focus on "The Role of the OSCE in the New Architecture of Europe".

Parliamentary Field Visit to Croatia

From 10-11 February 2003, an OSCE PA Delegation, including nineteen Members of Parliament representing twelve countries, visited the OSCE Mission to Croatia. OSCE PA Vice-President Rita Süßmuth headed the Delegation. The purpose of the visit was for Members of the Parliamentary Assembly to get acquainted with the work of the OSCE Mission to Croatia as well as to learn more about the general situation in the country.

During the visit the Delegation was briefed about the mandate and work of the OSCE Mission to Croatia by Head of Mission, Ambassador Peter Semneby, his Deputy, Ambassador Todd Becker and members of the staff. The Delegation also met with the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, Zlatko Tomčić, representatives of the Croatian Delegation to the OSCE PA, including Deputy Speaker Zdravko Tomac, Deputy Prime Minister, Goran Granić, representatives of the International Community Principals and NGOs. During a visit to the OSCE Field Centre Sisak, the Delegation was briefed by OSCE Regional Representative Michel Dreneau, before visiting refugee return areas in Sisak-Moslavina county, including Petrinja, Hrvatska Kostajnica and Sunja.



From right to left: Ambassador Peter Semneby, Vice-President Rita Süßmuth, Mr. Pieter De Crem, MP (Belgium) and Mr. Johann Raidel, MP (Germany).

Working Group on Belarus Visits Minsk

Three members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly ad hoc Working Group on Belarus, Ms. Uta Zapf (Germany), the Chair of the Group, Mr. Urban Ahlin (Sweden) and Lord Ponsonby (United Kingdom) visited Minsk from 5-7 February 2003. The delegation was accompanied by Programme Officer Paul LeGendre.

This visit, the Group's first in 2003, aimed to assess the progress made with the four criteria and was organized in light of the upcoming meeting of the OSCE PA Standing Committee on 20 February, at which time Belarus' representation in the Assembly is to be discussed.

During the course of the visit, the delegation met with Mr. Voitovich, Chairman of the Council of the Republic, Mr. Konoplev,

Deputy Chairman of the House of Representatives, as well as other parliamentarians from the two chambers of the National Assembly. From the government, the delegation met with Mr. Khvostov, the Foreign Minister, and Mr. Podgajny, the Minister of Information. The delegation also met with representatives of opposition parties, civic organisations, independent media outlets and trade unions, as well as OSCE Ambassadors and representatives of international organisations. Finally, the delegation met with the family members of those who have disappeared and been imprisoned in circumstances widely believed to be politically motivated.

A press release issued at the conclusion of the visit can be found at www.osce.org/pa