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Mariani meets with parliamentarians, government leaders on Kazakh visit



Thierry Mariani (L) and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Special Representative for Central Asia Thierry Mariani (France) has completed a visit to Kazakhstan, where he discussed a broad range of national and regional issues with parliamentarians and government officials. The Special Representative met Senate Chairman and Head of Kazakhstan's Delegation to the OSCE PA Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the Vice-Speaker of the Mazhilis (the lower house of Kazakhstan's Parliament) and MPs from a range of committees in both houses. Mariani's schedule also included meetings with the First Deputy Prosecutor General, officials in the Presidential Administration and the Foreign Ministry and members of the diplomatic community in Astana. He was accompanied by OSCE PA Programme Director Anna Chernova.

"During my visit I have particularly focused on the role and development of civil society, as well as recent legislative reforms aimed at reducing

incarceration rates. We also discussed broader issues of regional co-operation, water management, transnational crime and other cross-border threats to human security, Interpol reform, and OSCE priorities in different dimensions," he said.

The Special Representative encouraged Kazakhstan to continue active engagement with the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly. He also expressed support for the work of the OSCE Centre in Astana. At the conclusion of his visit, Mariani flew to Moscow to discuss regional issues concerning Central Asia with officials from the Russian Foreign Ministry, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and other interlocutors.

Helsinki Commission leadership underscores value of PA

The leadership of the U.S. Helsinki Commission underscored the value of the PA and the importance of co-operation between the OSCE's institutions during a hearing in Washington on 25 February. The hearing, which featured Didier Burkhalter, the President and Foreign Minister of Switzerland and Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, was called to examine the priorities and goals of the Swiss Chairmanship.

In his opening remarks, Commission Chairman Benjamin Cardin acknowledged the presence of PA Secretary General Oliver and said, "We are active participants in the Parliamentary Assembly and will want to work with [the Swiss Chairmanship] as we organize how all of the arms of the OSCE can work together to accomplish our objectives." Cardin also noted the upcoming 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, saying, "It's time to calculate how the OSCE's incredible importance will be elevated to the next level."

The co-chairman of the Helsinki Commission, Christopher Smith, also serves as the Head of the U.S. Delegation to the OSCE PA and as the PA's Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues. At the hearing, he commended Oliver and the PA for "outstanding work." He also drew attention to the OSCE PA's 2013 resolution on combatting human trafficking in the context of the Swiss Chairmanship's focus on the issue. The hearing also considered the role that the OSCE can play in Ukraine.



Benjamin Cardin (L) and Christopher Smith at the hearing on 25 February.

During his visit to Washington, PA Secretary General Oliver also met with the staff and members of the Helsinki Commission, including members of the U.S. Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly: Senators Cardin and Smith, Senator Roger Wicker and Congressman Robert Aderholt, who is an OSCE PA Vice-President. Oliver is also expected to hold consultations with officials responsible for the OSCE in the U.S. State Department.

He is also meeting with experts who are commissioned by the German Marshall Fund to produce working papers for the OSCE PA Helsinki +40 seminar that the think-tank is hosting in June.