

Welcome to the 24th Annual Session

Message to OSCE PA Delegations from the Secretary General



Welcome to the OSCE PA's 24th Annual Session in Helsinki. It is an honour and a privilege gathering here under the theme "Recalling the Spirit of Helsinki" on the eve of the Organization's 40th anniversary.

Over the years, we have used the term "Helsinki" as a metaphor for the spirit of co-operation that led to the détente-era signing of the CSCE/OSCE's founding document here in Helsinki four decades ago. But at a time of great challenges facing the OSCE area, it is not only symbolic gathering in this iconic city, it is an opportunity to reaffirm the founding principles of the Organization by reestablishing mutual trust between participating States and promoting reform of the OSCE itself to maintain and further increase its political relevance.

We are grateful to our Finnish hosts for their excellent organization of this important meeting, and we very much look forward to fruitful and lively debates in the coming days.

Since last year's Annual Session, the Assembly has met in Geneva and Vienna for timely and provocative debates on the crisis in and around Ukraine, including the OSCE's response to this crisis. Other debates have been held on Mediterranean issues, energy security and migration. We have observed elections in Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, the United States of America, Moldova, Tajikistan and the United

Kingdom. The depth and breadth of our observation missions involving hundreds of parliamentarians deployed across the OSCE area demonstrate the value we place on applying the same OSCE election-related commitments to countries both east and west of Vienna.

We have also held a number of seminars as part of our Helsinki +40 Project, bringing together experts, practitioners and parliamentarians for wide-ranging and in-depth discussions on the OSCE's past, present and future. In events held in Moscow, Washington, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Belgrade – and culminating here with a commemorative Helsinki +40 event at the Opening Plenary on 6 July – the Helsinki +40 Project has helped identify areas where change is needed in order for the Organization to stay relevant and effective. As the OSCE's democratic backbone, the Parliamentary Assembly has taken its role seriously in spearheading this ambitious initiative, and I am pleased to say it has been a great success.

It has been an honour serving as Secretary General of this vital OSCE Institution, working with the exceptionally capable multinational staff of the OSCE PA in Copenhagen and Vienna. We look forward to serving you in the coming days and working together to ensure a successful meeting.

R. Spencer Oliver
OSCE PA Secretary General

Programme - Sunday, 5 July

- 09.00 – 19.00 Registration
(*Finlandia Hall, Lobby*)
- 12.30 Briefing for Secretaries of Delegation
(*Grand Ballroom*)
- 14.00 – 17.00 Meeting of the Standing Committee
(*Finlandia Hall*)
- Evening Time reserved for hospitality by diplomatic missions

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WiFi is available during the Annual Session on the network OSCE_public (password: Finlandia). The International Secretariat will be tweeting using the hashtag #PAHelsinki15 and we encourage others on Twitter to join the conversation by using this hashtag, and to follow us @oscepa. We can be found on Facebook at www.facebook.com/oscepa. Other resources worth keeping an eye on during the Session are the Assembly's YouTube and Flickr pages (www.youtube.com/oscepa and www.flickr.com/oscepa), where videos and photos will be uploaded daily, as well as the Flickr page of the Finnish Parliament (www.flickr.com/finnishparliament), which will also be updated regularly.