

Current News from the International Secretariat

- Dr. Thomas Onken, former Rapporteur of the Second Committee and former member of the Delegation of Switzerland to the OSCE PA, sadly passed away on 14 March. An OSCE PA member since 1995, Mr. Onken made a substantial contribution to the work of the Assembly, particularly in his capacity as Rapporteur between 1998 and 1999. Condolences have been extended by the Assembly leadership to Mr. Onken's family and colleagues.
- Sixty-five parliamentarians from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will take part in the OSCE Observation Mission to the **Presidential Elections in Russia** on 26 March. President Helle Degn has been appointed Special Representative for the elections by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Austrian Foreign Minister Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner. In this capacity the President will lead all OSCE observers and deliver the preliminary post-election statement.
- Secretary General Mr. R. Spencer Oliver, attended the **OSCE Permanent Council** meetings in Vienna, on 10 and 24 February. At the latter meeting Mr. Oliver was joined by Deputy Secretary General Mr. Vitaly Evseyev.
- On 15 and 16 February, **Vice-President Ihor Ostash (Ukraine) visited Kazakhstan** to discuss the follow-up to the OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on the Parliamentary Elections which were held last October and to which Mr. Ostash was the Special Representative of the Chairman-in-Office. Mr. Ostash met, among others, the Presidents of both Houses of Parliament, Mr. Oralbay Abdykarimov and Mr. Zharmahan Tuyakbai. During the discussions it was agreed that a Round Table on election issues should be organised, possibly in May of this year.
- During President Degn's visit to Romania, 21-23 February, the agreement between the Assembly and the Romanian Parliament on **the 9th Annual Session** was signed. Whilst in Bucharest Secretary General R. Spencer Oliver and Deputy Secretary General Vitaly Evseyev discussed, with the hosts, the practical arrangements for the Session, which will be held from 6-10 July 2000. In early May, Mr. Evseyev and other members of the International Secretariat will again visit the premises in Bucharest to undertake further preparations.
- **The Parliamentary Team on Moldova** visited the country for the first time between 29 February and 3 March 2000. The Team included Mr. Kimmo Kiljunen Chair (Finland), Mr. Roberto Battelli (Slovenia) and Ms. Tone Tingsgård (Sweden) They were accompanied by Mr. Pentti Väänänen, Deputy Secretary General of the Assembly. The other members of the Team are Mr. Kazys Bobelis (Lithuania) and Mr. Jerahmiel Grafstein (Canada). In Chisinau the Team met with the President of Moldova, Mr. Petru Lucinschi, Speaker of Parliament, Mr. Dumitru Diakov and other leaders. The discussion focused on the status of the Trans-Dniestrian region. The Team aims at promoting dialogue between parties concerned in order to bring about a solution. The Team works in close co-operation with the OSCE Mission to Moldova.
- The OSCE PA, represented by Mr. Adrian Severin (Romania), Chair of the ad hoc Working Group on Belarus, took part in a **Parliamentary Troika visit to Belarus** on 2-3 March. The other members of the Troika are the European Parliament, represented by Mr. Jan Marinus Wiersma, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, represented by Mr. Wolfgang Behrendt. The Troika was briefed by the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk before holding meetings with all of the principal political forces in Belarus, including President Lukashenko, leaders of the democratic opposition and representatives from civil society. At the conclusion of their visit the Parliamentary Troika stated: *"We were dismayed at the interruption of the negotiation process started last year. Nevertheless we have been encouraged by the willingness expressed by all sides to finding an acceptable solution to the outstanding political difficulties, and this gives us some grounds for cautious optimism about the future course of events."*

- On 9 March in Washington D.C., the Chair of the **ad hoc Working Group on Belarus**, Mr. Adrian Severin, testified before a US Congressional **Helsinki Commission** hearing on recent developments in Belarus. In his address to the Commission Mr. Severin said: *“The Working Group will maintain its commitment to the process and provide support and assistance as needed...time is short and much needs to be done in order for free, fair and recognizable elections to take place in Belarus this year.”* Commission Chairman, Mr. Christopher H. Smith heavily criticized the Lukashenko regime for its *“..broken promises, and the continued climate of repression”* but expressed his hope that *“..real dialogue will begin, based on last week’s round-table conference in Minsk between the Belarussian Government and the opposition and NGOs, with the participation of a joint delegation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and European Parliament.”* In a statement Vice-President Steny Hoyer, a member of the Commission, said: *“Genuine dialogue with democratic forces is essential if Belarus is to move beyond the current period of stagnation...free and fair elections should be held this year consistent with relevant OSCE standards and norms.”* On invitation by the Chairman, Secretary General Mr. R. Spencer Oliver also testified at the hearing. Vice-chair of the First Committee, Mr. Alcee Hastings also appeared at the hearing.
- At the passing of the 1 March deadline for the **OSCE Prize for Journalism and Democracy** candidates, the International Secretariat had received 11 nominations. The Prize Committee will meet on 10 April 2000 in Antalya, Turkey, in conjunction with the Expanded Bureau Meeting. The Secretariat is pleased to announce that the George and Thelma Paraskevaides Foundation of Cyprus has decided to become a sponsor of the Prize. The other current sponsors are: Bertelsmann AG, Germany; Bonnier Group, Sweden; Den Berlingske Fond, Denmark; Southam Inc., Canada and Shipsted ASA, Norway.
- **Mrs. Helle Degn** visited Japan, a Partner for Co-operation, on 5 March in her capacity as President of the Assembly. In Tokyo, Mrs. Degn held meetings with: The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr. Solchiro Ito; the President of the House of Councillors, Mr. Juro Saito; State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ichita Yamamoto as well as with members of the House of Councillors who attended the OSCE Summit in Istanbul.
- **President Degn will visit Georgia and Armenia** at the end of April. During the visit to Georgia, Mrs. Degn will hold meetings with President Edouard Shevardnadze; Chairman of the Parliament, Mr. Zhurab Zhvania; Deputy Chairman of the Parliament and Head of Delegation to the OSCE PA, Mr. Vakhtang Kolbaia, and several Ministers. Mrs. Degn will also visit the OSCE Mission and meet with members of the Opposition. Mrs. Degn will then visit Armenia where she will meet the Chairman of the National Assembly, Armen Hovanesian, President Robert Kotcharian and key Ministers, as well as representatives of the OSCE Mission.
- **Ms. Ritt Bjerregaard**, a former Vice-President of the Assembly and EU Commissioner for the Environment, has been appointed Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries in the Danish Government.
- Mr. Eric Rudenshiold, the Director of Programmes, will be leaving the Secretariat at the end of April to take up his new position at OSCE/ODIHR as Head of the Democratization Section. For the time being his responsibilities are divided between the other senior staff members. Mr. Alexander Staun-Rechnitzer, a former Research Fellow, has joined the Staff on a temporary basis as Adviser to the Secretary General and will co-ordinate the Assembly web-site.

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