

News from Copenhagen

National minorities in focus at OSCE PA Retreat in Villach, Austria

More than 20 OSCE parliamentarians from 13 countries gathered this week for a retreat in Villach, Austria, to explore ways to improve public support for national minorities in areas such as education, culture, and language.

OSCE PA President Christine Muttonen (MP, Austria) opened the conference Monday by noting that the reality of the OSCE area's multi-ethnic societies can be a source of conflict both within countries and between countries, but can also help expand perspectives and promote co-operation.

"The friction between national minorities and the majority is at the center of many of our current security challenges," Muttonen said. "For this reason, it is important to find sustainable ways to ensure a peaceful and just mode of co-existence between all peoples in our countries. We would all profit from utilizing the potential of cultural diversity."

President Muttonen expressed satisfaction in the new constitution of her home state of Carinthia, which hosts a sizable Slovenian minority. The constitution, expected to be adopted this week in the Carinthian parliament, will be the first state constitution in Austria to name an autochthonous ethnic group.

Also addressing the opening session on Monday were Governor of Carinthia Peter Kaiser and Mayor of Villach Gunther Albel. OSCE PA Vice-President and Special



Representative on South East Europe Roberto Battelli (MP, Slovenia) addressed a session on parliamentary support of minority politics, with an emphasis on his experience as a representative of the Italian minority



in the Slovenian parliament.

Sessions at the Villach retreat, held on 29-30 May, focused on ways that national parliaments can increase their support for national minorities, lessons to be learned from the case of Carinthia, and reconciliation efforts in South East Europe. Speaking at the session on South East Europe, OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella stressed the valuable contribution made to the region by the OSCE, including through its field presences.

The retreat, hosted by the Austrian parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly, was intended to facilitate the sharing of best practices focusing on the potential contribution of parliaments to promote adequate structures and a supportive environment for national minorities and how a region itself can profit from positive development. The conference sought to highlight the potential of parliamentarians to create the conditions for the protection and promotion of minorities.

In addition to nearly two dozen members of parliament from across the OSCE region, the retreat included the participation of several high-ranking diplomats, including Henrik Villadsen, Director of the Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Director of the Office of the OSCE Secretary General Amb. Paul Bekkers, former UN High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Wolfgang Petrisch, and Deputy Chief, ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues Tatjana Peric.

Upcoming deadline reminders

OSCE PA Delegations are kindly reminded that supplementary items must be received at the International Secretariat no later than today, **31 May**. Amendments to the three general committee draft resolutions must be received no later than **21 June**, and amendments to supplementary items by **28 June**.

Committee reports and draft resolutions are available at www.oscepa.org, where supplementary items and other relevant documents will also be posted in official OSCE languages as they become available.

OSCE PA welcomes Marco Bonabello



Marco Bonabello (Italy) has joined the OSCE PA's Vienna Office as a Liaison Officer and Advisor. Assisting the Special Representative and Secretary General, Bonabello will work on issues related to the economic and environmental dimension, anti-trafficking issues, and gender issues.

Prior to joining the PA, Bonabello worked in the Office of the OSCE Special Representative for Combating Human Trafficking, the Office of the OSCE Secretary General, and OSCE missions in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.