

News from Copenhagen

SG Spencer Oliver sends Season's Greetings and Farewell

As 2015 comes to an end, so too does my tenure as Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. This year, therefore, I would like to wish not only warm holiday greetings to the OSCE PA family, but also offer my heartfelt thanks. I deeply appreciate the expressions of gratitude and kindness that you have extended to me in these final months and will never forget the unwavering support that I have received during more than two decades of service.

When I was chosen as the first Secretary General of the Assembly at the first Bureau meeting in October 1992, the PA was little more than an idea. It was through the commitment and dedication of OSCE parliamentarians over the years – supported by the best international staff in the world – that this Assembly has become the respected and influential organization that it is today.

I arrived in Copenhagen 23 years ago with two suitcases, no staff and no office. The PA had no formal budget, but thanks to the generous support from the Danish Parliament, which has continued through today, we were able to build a small Secretariat that has grown into a highly respected international staff with offices in Copenhagen and Vienna. I want to give special thanks to the OSCE PA delegations from the United States Congress, for their encouragement and support throughout my PA career.

Over the years, we have gone from holding one Annual Session in the summer to holding three major events, as well as various elections, seminars and other meetings, every year. Since our first election observation mission to the Russian Federation in December 1993, we have deployed some 5,000 parliamentarians to observe elections in more than 30 countries. The PA's political influence in the OSCE has steadily grown throughout the years, exemplified by the now established rule that the Assembly President addresses the meetings of the Ministerial Council immediately following the Chairman-in-Office.

We have further expanded our influence in the OSCE through the work of our Liaison Office in Vienna and representation at the Permanent Council. Close working relationships have been established with counterparts in the parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe and NATO, as well as the European Parliament. Needless to say, I am very proud of



the OSCE PA's achievements, not the least of which being the fact that we have stayed within our approved budget for 23 years, with perfect independent audits every single year – a rare accomplishment among international organizations.

Another source of pride is our weekly newsletter, *News from Copenhagen*, which through the years has served as the PA's primary communication tool linking the Secretariat with national delegations across the OSCE area. Parliamentarians, OSCE and government officials, representatives of civil society and academia, and diplomats receive the newsletter every week, ensuring that all interested parties are well aware of the work of the PA and its International Secretariat. With its one-page format, *News from Copenhagen* has become probably the most well-read publication in the OSCE world.

And of course, I can't help but mention our highly regarded research fellowship programme, which we started in 1995 to increase our language and research capacity. The fellows provide not only high-level academic research capabilities, but also support our fast-reacting media outreach with press releases and public statements. Many of our former research fellows have gone on to successful careers in government, academia and the private sector, maintaining and building on their experiences in the Secretariat.

Finally, let me say how much I appreciate the opportunity to help build this organization into what it is today. I am particularly grateful for the valued friendships I have made during these exciting and eventful years. I now expect to begin a new chapter in my life as a Washington lawyer and I hope that our paths will soon cross again.

Again, my sincerest thanks and I wish everyone a happy holiday season.

-- Secretary General Spencer Oliver

