

Report on the 2007 Fall Meetings in Portoroz

- *Conference on Security Through Co-operation in South East Europe: The Role of Parliamentarians*
- *Standing Committee Meeting*
- *Mediterranean Forum*



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
STANDING COMMITTEE	2
CONFERENCE OPENING SESSION	4
CONFERENCE SESSIONS	7
Decentralization and Local Government in South East Europe	7
Education as a basis for Security: Knowing your Neighbour	9
Regional Co-operation in Energy Security	11
MEDITERRANEAN FORUM	13
Opening Session	13
Session on Minority Protection and Non-Discrimination in the Mediterranean	15

Introduction



From 29 September to 1 October, parliamentarians from across the OSCE region met in Portoroz, Slovenia, for the Assembly's annual Fall Meetings. The meetings consisted of a conference, a meeting of the Standing Committee, and a Forum on the Mediterranean. The parliamentary conference, organized within the Parliamentary Troika of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, focused on 'Security Through Co-operation in South East Europe: The Role of Parliamentarians'.

OSCE PA President Goran Lennmarker opened the Conference, stressing the importance of inter-parliamentary dialogue and the role of MPs in ensuring long-lasting security in the region. The opening session was addressed by senior OSCE and Slovenian officials. The Conference also included sessions on: Decentralization and Local Government in South East Europe; Education as a Basis for Security: Knowing Your Neighbour; and Regional Co-operation in Energy Security.

The Standing Committee of Heads of Delegations heard reports from President Lennmarker, Treasurer Hans Raidel and Secretary General Spencer Oliver. The Committee was also briefed on the OSCE budget by the OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut. The OSCE Secretary General stressed that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, one of the original OSCE Institutions established by the Charter of Paris, is "vital for the OSCE."

On Monday 1 October, parliamentarians focused their attention on the OSCE Mediterranean Dimension and particularly on Minority Protection and Non-Discrimination in the Mediterranean.

Standing Committee



OSCE PA President Goran Lennmarker welcomed Standing Committee Members and delivered a short overview of his work since the Annual Session in Kyiv in July. Among other things, the President had held a meeting with the Spanish Chairmanship on election observation and a working lunch with Josep Borell in Portoroz and made a recent visit to the Western Balkans.

Senator Carlo Vizzini (Italy), the OSCE PA Special Representative for the Fight against Transnational Organized Crime, emphasized the need for close international co-operation within this field, giving recent examples of transnational crimes. He called for harmonizing legislation of different states and increased investigation of illegal financial networks. Furthermore, he promoted an active role of the OSCE

in fighting international crime.

The Head of the Slovenian Delegation, Roberto Battelli, gave an overview of the three main topics of the Portoroz conference: the strengthening of local governments; security through education; and energy security.

Hans Raidel (Germany) presented his first report as Treasurer of the Assembly. He reported that the Secretariat continues to function within the approved budget. Mr. Raidel also noted that more money will be needed to fulfill the future work of the OSCE PA and called on parliamentarians to support such an increase.

OSCE PA Secretary General Spencer Oliver reported on the activities of the International Secretariat since the Annual Session, including the visit of Treasurer Hans





Raidel to the International Secretariat in Copenhagen, the election observation mission to Kazakhstan, the visit to Vienna by Vice-President Anne Marie Lizin (Belgium), Special Representative on Guantanamo, the visit to the Balkans by President Lennmarker, the OSCE PA fellowship programme and preparations for the upcoming Bureau meeting at the end of November in Madrid. Furthermore, he announced his decision to appoint Gustavo Pallares of Spain as Deputy Secretary General to replace Vitaly Evseyev. The Standing Committee confirmed the appointment of Gustavo Pallares as Deputy Secretary General.

The Special Representative for Central Asia, Vice-President Kimmo Kiljunen (Finland), announced that a seminar on Central Asia would be held on 10 and 11 December 2007 in Oslo. It will be hosted by the Nordic Council together with the OSCE PA, with representatives invited from all Central Asian countries, Nordic countries and Heads of OSCE missions from the region.

The Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs, President Emeritus Alcee L. Hastings (USA), outlined the Iraqi Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Security Act of 2007. This legislation, introduced by Mr. Hastings in the United States, addresses the impending humanitarian crisis and security breakdown as a result of the mass influx of Iraqi refugees into neighbouring countries.

The Standing Committee was then addressed by the Secretary General of the OSCE, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, who briefed the Members on the OSCE budget and its distribution within the Organization. Following his overview, the Secretary General answered questions on the budget and the legal status of the OSCE.

Finally, the date for the next Annual Session, to be held in Astana, Kazakhstan, was confirmed as taking place from 29 June to 3 July 2008.



Conference Opening Session



Opening remarks by Goran Lennmarker, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

President Lennmarker welcomed participants to the conference, and expressed the Assembly's thanks to the Slovenian Parliament for organizing and hosting the Fall Meetings. The President reminded Members that the conference is a part of the OSCE PA's contribution to its Chairmanship of the Parliamentary Troika on the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. He noted that the Stability Pact would expire at the end of 2007, to be replaced by a Regional Co-operation Council.

The President noted that the progress made through parliamentary co-operation in the Troika would help achieve concrete advances. However, he said, much work remains to be done to ensure long lasting security in the region. Lennmarker stressed the important role of parliamentarians in this work, particularly in regard to oversight to ensure implementation of commitments. Similarly, inter-parliamentary dialogue is critical to enable greater co-ordination of policies in the region, he said. Security sector reform is vital to the long-term stability of the region, and President Lennmarker also urged increased co-ordination at both regional and international levels in fighting organized crime. This is particularly acute in countries with developing state institutions, he said. The President also stressed the importance of effective solutions for refugee populations, and urged legislatures to engage the issue by addressing deficiencies in both property and citizenship laws.

President Lennmarker also urged the adoption of a strategy for European integration of South Eastern European states provided that they first achieve integration within the region.

Welcoming remarks by France Cukjati, Speaker of the Slovenian National Assembly

Mr. Cukjati welcomed all the participants on behalf of the Slovenian National Assembly, and emphasized that the conference theme of 'Security Through Co-operation in South East Europe: The Role of Parliamentarians' is very relevant. Encouraging a broad security concept in the Western Balkans is one of the highest priorities not only for the OSCE also for Slovenia and the European Union.

The Speaker noted the importance of parliamentary



organizations such as the OSCE PA to international co-operation; parliamentary involvement in international politics should be actively encouraged. Such international parliamentary work increases effective oversight of governments, and enhances the ability of Members of parliaments to fulfill their work at the domestic level. On the international scene, parliamentary diplomacy plays an important role in the solution of global problems, noted Mr. Cukjati. At the domestic level Members of Parliament ensure that society's values are upheld through the process of dialogue and parliamentary ratification – these must also be pursued at the international level.

Security within Europe and in the surrounding areas cannot be dissociated from co-operation. Mr. Cukjati outlined that this co-operation must take place on several levels and on many different subjects for true security in the region. All three of the OSCE's security dimensions – politico-military aspects, economic and environmental aspects and social and humanitarian aspects – are important for peace and long-term stability. In South East Europe, Mr. Cukjati stressed that particular emphasis must be placed on economic development and on consolidation of democratic institutions. These two aspects are closely inter-linked, he noted.

The Speaker particularly welcomed the OSCE's work in South East Europe of offering a forum for conflict-prevention dialogue among participants. Such dialogue, similar to the OSCE's support for democratic institutions, is critical to long-term stability in the region.

After a decade of instability and declining economic prospects, the Western Balkans have started a new chapter. Mr. Cukjati spoke of the experiences of establishing a pluralistic political ideology founded on the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, human rights and free market economics. Looking to the future, the Speaker stressed the goals of integration of the region into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Address by Josep Borrell, Special Envoy of the Spanish Chairmanship-in-Office of the OSCE

Mr. Borrell welcomed the opportunity to address the OSCE PA conference on behalf of the Spanish OSCE Chairmanship. He stressed the importance of gatherings of inter-parliamentary assemblies and their work including through conferences such as this in



Slovenia. The Special Envoy made reference to the Assembly's Kyiv Declaration of July 2007, stressing in particular the importance of recommendations on human rights issues. Mr. Borrell underlined that human rights concerns lie at the basis of the Organization's work and of international co-operation.

Inter-parliamentary discussions can bring an important added aspect to regular inter-governmental work, he noted. Mr. Borrell welcomed the fact that OSCE PA President Lennmarker had joined OSCE Chairman-in-Office Miguel Angel Moratinos on a trip to the South Caucasus.

Mr. Borrell gave a brief overview of the Chairmanship's work and priorities throughout the OSCE region, stressing the importance of OSCE field missions. He also reported on the Chairman-in-Office's efforts in contributing to a de-escalation of tensions following the 6 August missile incident in Georgia, including through the appointment of a Special Envoy. Josep Borrell also made reference to the important decision to be made at the Ministerial Council in November 2007 regarding the appointment of Kazakhstan as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, emphasizing that this was an important opportunity to include a Central Asian state for the first time in this role. The Special Envoy also raised addressed the issue of discussions concerning the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe, and stressed that this remained an important part of security in Europe.

Address by Matjaz Sinkovec, State Secretary, Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The State Secretary, on behalf of the government of Slovenia, welcomed all participants to Portoroz. He



noted that, as an area of ethnic diversity and openness, this was a particularly appropriate place to consider the challenges to be addressed by countries in South East Europe.

Mr. Sinkovec stressed the importance of work conducted by parliamentary assemblies such as the OSCE PA in providing oversight, increasing accountability and injecting fresh ideas into official inter-governmental work. The State Secretary also noted that Europe was undergoing rapid change, and that security thinking is increasingly focused on non-traditional areas. Fulfilling the aim of integration of the Western Balkans into Euro-Atlantic structures

remains a challenge, he noted, and efforts and increased inclusion must be pursued.

Welcoming remarks by Roberto Battelli, Head of the Slovenian Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Mr. Battelli welcomed participants to the Conference in Portoroz, noting that this was the first time that the Troika on the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe met within the context of a main OSCE PA meeting. It would also be the last meeting of the Troika, as the Stability Pact is due to transform into a Regional Co-operation Council in 2008. He noted that the Troika entailed many meetings and travel within the region, and had contributed to long-lasting stability in the region including through work on democratic control of the security sector and migration issues.

Mr. Battelli, who is also the OSCE PA Special Representative on South East Europe, noted that much progress had been made. Just a decade earlier, it would have been hard to believe that countries in the Western Balkans had the strength to push through the transitions and move towards integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. But these desires for integration must be supported, he said. Mr. Battelli noted a number of areas where increased support was needed, highlighting in particular education as a critical field for the future.



SESSION I: Decentralization and Local Government in South East Europe



OSCE PA Vice-President Barbara Haering welcomed participants and introduced the session's topic of "Decentralization and Local Government in South East Europe." Ms. Haering particularly highlighted that experiences in the region had shown the importance of reconstruction starting on the local level as well as national and international levels.

Autun Palaric, State Secretary, Central State Office for Administration of Croatia
"Effective Democratic Governance at Local and Regional Level in Croatia"

Mr. Palaric began his presentation with an overview of the framework for local self-government in Croatia. With a legal framework beginning in 1992, there are now 20 counties and 126 towns, the City of Zagreb and 429 municipalities. He stressed that the government intends to increasingly transfer responsibilities to local public authorities, which are well-placed to govern citizens at the local level.

The State Secretary also outlined several bodies aimed at strengthening local self-government. In particular, he referred to the Commission for Decentralisation, which is formed through Expert Groups on health issues, social welfare, education, agriculture and on strengthening fiscal capacity. Croatia has also established an Academy for Local Self Democracy which is run jointly by the Croatian Government, the Union of the Association of Cities and Association of Municipalities, and the Croatian

Association of Counties. The academy works for the continuous professional training of local officials and employees in local and regional government.

Finally, the State Secretary stressed that in Croatia particular emphasis had been placed on the representation of members of national minorities in representative bodies, executive bodies and professional services. Inclusion in representative bodies has been completely provided for, he said, while representation in executive bodies and professional services is in progress.

Trifun Kostovski,
Mayor of the city of Skopje

The speaker stressed that the experiences in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for local self-government were quite specific: while there is outspoken political will in favour of increased local government, results have been modest. This can be partially attributed to the parallel systemic changes of the country which is still in transition, as well as the poor level of economic development and insufficient institutional reforms, he said.

The city of Skopje is governed as an association of ten municipalities in a rather complex system. He noted that the administration of the capital city during this transitional process places it somewhere between the central government and municipalities. The role of the city of Skopje as a special unit of local government is still unclear, said Mr. Kostovski.



The Mayor argued that as the capital city, Skopje deserves a special position in financial construction projects from EU funding. He noted that there was wide-spread support within the country for increased integration into European structures. Mr. Kostovski asserted that there is an increasing appreciation for the role of decentralisation in this process.

Discussion

Delegates discussed a number of issues related to the theme of local government, and Members stressed the importance of this discussion not only for the OSCE PA, but also on a larger scale. There was some discussion regarding education and the degree to which this should be decentralized to local authorities. Members also discussed various mechanisms in place in the OSCE for representation of minority groups at local government levels. Several speakers also stressed that peace initiatives, also between neighbouring countries, are often best addressed at the local level. Experience has shown that co-operation at the local level on reconstruction efforts can lead to greater co-operation at inter-state levels.



SESSION II: Education as a basis for security: Knowing your Neighbour

The second session on “Education as a basis for security: Knowing your neighbour” was chaired by Azis Pollozhani, representative of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Mr. Pollozhani stressed the importance of education in society at large, and thanked the Slovenian Parliament for hosting this important Conference.

Smiljana Knez,
Chairman of COHOM during the
Slovenian Presidency of the EU,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia
*“How to teach human rights
in order to promote tolerance”*

Ms. Knez began her presentation by stressing the need for a broad approach to tolerance and respect education. Ms. Knez outlined the importance of tolerance promotion to security discussions as they are integrally linked to human rights and stability.

The speaker noted the work being done by the OSCE in regard to tolerance promotion through education, stressing that the process of learning about other peoples is important. This approach, she said, strengthens the efficiency of human rights promotion in general. Ms. Knez discussed a number of OSCE and other international projects within this field which enhance the socialisation of children and help teachers' abilities.

While work within the field of tolerance promotion

is increasing, the speaker also noted that violent incidents related to intolerance were increasing in the OSCE region. Ms. Knez encouraged effective use of OSCE/ODIHR expertise within the field of reporting incidents and tolerance promotion.

Mirko Markovic, Assistant Minister of
Science, Education and Sport of Croatia
*“The promotion of mixed shifts
schooling in Eastern Slavonia”*

The speaker gave a brief overview of the legislative framework governing education on the language of national minorities in Croatia, including the Constitution and specific legal Acts. He then outlined various models of minority language education that are followed. Firstly, there is complete education in the language and script of minority languages beginning in kindergarten for members of the Czech, Hungarian, Serbian and Italian minorities. Secondly, a bilingual approach can be followed, in which natural subjects are taught in Croatian and social subjects in the minority language. Finally, a ‘nurturing’ approach is offered through which students are taught additional courses in the native minority language, primarily in the fields of culture and history.

Members of national minorities are given the ability to propose and select the appropriate model and curriculum to be followed. Similarly, translated textbooks, as approved by the appropriate Ministry, are also approved by members of the national minorities.

Mr. Markovic offered a more detailed description of the models as outlined through the example of mixed shift schools in Eastern Slavonia. Finally, he outlined a project entitled “Children Together,” supported by the OSCE, which includes 30 multiethnic primary schools.

Aida Premilovac, Cabinet of the Head of the
OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina
*“Education in Bosnia-Herzegovina: a
Neglected Security Issue”*

Ms. Premilovac encouraged greater recognition of education as a security issue, and presented the Members with an overview of some of the



difficulties faced by educational facilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

By outlining the development of the educational system in the country, Ms. Premilovac demonstrated that a lack of focus on this issue had led to a situation in which schools began to pose a threat to the country's stability. As refugees returned, students returned to schools in communities that are still ethnically segregated. As a result, she said, many young students have little understanding of the other ethnic groups or national minorities that live in the country. The solidification of these lines has turned education into an issue of the security of the state.

Ms. Premilovac outlined some of the initiatives that had been attempted by international authorities to overcome the clear divisions in education. In particular, she noted work that was being done to write new textbooks with a 'multi-perspective' approach. However, it was noted that efforts to produce standard curricula throughout the country are hindered by the division of responsibility among many levels of government.

The speaker discussed some of the efforts that the OSCE Mission is undertaking to overcome these problems and contribute to greater commonality among what students throughout the country learn.

Alajdin Abazi, Rector of the South East European University in Tetovo

"The South East European University as an example of new multilingual and multiethnic education"

Mr. Abazin outlined the work of the South East European (SEE) University, and highlighted how it is unique in the region. Among other things, he stressed the importance of a clear European orientation and communication with European and American universities as well as opportunities for mobility.

The University was specifically established to promote interethnic understanding and to provide multicultural and multilingual education and research facilities. Students have the choice to learn in their native language but are also exposed to the language of the other ethnic community, as well as another major European language. Mr. Abazin also specified the use of languages in the programmes, as well as the range of ethnicities represented in the various programmes offered by the University.



Following the presentation by Mr. Abazi, two students from the University offered statements about their experiences. They praised the ability to study in such surroundings and the opportunity provided to break stereotypes and prejudices against other ethnic groups.

Discussion

Many parliamentarians took the floor to exchange experiences in education and tolerance from their own countries. Examples were presented, including the production of a joint history handbook for German and French scholars.

Members also discussed how knowledge of one's neighbour is important for creating stability. However, it was also noted that living together can create tensions, and so teaching respect for basic common principles was of utmost importance.

It was noted that in efforts to decentralize education responsibilities there is also the danger of diminishing the budget for this important area.



SESSION III: Regional Co-operation in Energy Security



The OSCE PA Special Representative for South East Europe, Head of the Slovenian Delegation to the Assembly, Roberto Battelli, opened the conference's third session. He gave a short presentation of the topic of energy security, stressing the importance of stable energy infrastructure in the region.

Renault van der Elst, Expert in Energy of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe

"Challenges arising from the Energy Community Treaty and conditions for attracting investments"

Mr. van der Elst gave a brief introduction to the work of the Energy Community Treaty (ECT), and its Secretariat, with a particular focus on work in the South East Europe. He noted that the key objectives behind the Treaty in South East Europe in particular is ensuring stable infrastructure to permit steady growth. This entails both the restoring of infrastructure, as well as building new infrastructure in certain cases. There have also been concerted efforts at building an integrated infrastructure and market in the region, enhancing the capacity of otherwise small individual markets.

The speaker also stressed that the initiatives within the ECT, particularly regional integration of markets, present an excellent opportunity to reduce reliance on any single energy source. He noted that there is also a clear political goal of increased co-operation, which had been quite successful so far. The incentive of greater integration into EU structures had helped



in this regard. In addition, mutual assistance across borders in cases of energy problems in individual countries had proven to be a strong advantage with the ECT.

Mr. van der Elst applauded the significant progress that had been made in South East Europe in this regard, stressing that improvements had been made in national legal frameworks. However, greater reform of the energy markets is still required.

Jelena Beronja, Regional Desk Officer of the Environment and Security Initiative

"Energy and Environmental Challenges to Security"

Ms. Beronja introduced the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative by outlining the growing recognition that security problems are no longer seen in purely militaristic terms. Environmental problems do have the potential to cause serious security concerns. The ENVSEC initiative, of which the OSCE is one active partner, is intended to help identify potential environmental security problems and assist appropriate policy development.

Active in Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia, ENVSEC aims to bring together relevant interlocutors on a national and regional level to counter environmental security risks.

In relation to work South East Europe, Ms. Beronja particularly mentioned projects aimed at countering environmental degradation caused by mining. Also, security of energy supplies in the



region was of importance, she noted. Looking to the future, Ms. Beronja mentioned that ENVSEC was working towards a greater focus on sustainable development of mountainous areas in South East Europe.

Discussion

In an active discussion, parliamentarians raised a number of issues related to energy security. The increasing importance of the topic and open debate on the field was noted. Delegates mentioned examples of international co-operation from their own experiences, noting the mutual dependence that this creates. Certain disputes related to energy supplies were also discussed. The potential for expansion of co-operation of the ECT was raised by one delegate, and there was further discussion of other potential joint projects.

The importance of reforms to implement modern energy policies was stressed. Several Members emphasised the potential and importance of renewable energy sources, and urged greater inclusion of this within discussions on the topic.



Mediterranean Forum Opening Session



Opening Remarks by Goran Lennmarker, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

President Lennmarker welcomed participants to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Forum on the Mediterranean. He pointed out that the Mediterranean is a region shared by different countries, and environmental protection, fishing, migration and other such issues should be a joint effort. Furthermore, he called for a balanced attitude towards this region and stressed the importance of interaction and increased co-operation, especially regarding non-military security threats.

The President emphasized that the Parliamentary Assembly did not have a long history of work on Mediterranean issues, and that it should find mechanisms for co-operation with other organizations.

Opening Remarks by Roberto Battelli, Head of the Slovenian delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

In his opening remarks, Roberto Battelli pointed out that the Mediterranean dimension remains high on the OSCE Agenda. He particularly welcomed the Israeli keynote speaker Amin Khalaf and underlined that better mutual understanding and co-operation, as well as the right education, would create more tolerance.

He called for peaceful solutions to conflicts, as well as greater transparency and increased co-operation.

Welcoming Remarks by Alcee L. Hastings, President Emeritus of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Special Representative for the Mediterranean

Congressman Hastings thanked President Lennmarker for the appointment as Special Representative for Mediterranean Affairs. Mr. Hastings highlighted the security breakdown due to refugees in the Mediterranean, with 2.2 million Iraqis internally displaced and another 2 million



displaced to Jordan, Syria and Iran. Mr. Hastings stressed the destabilizing effect of this humanitarian crisis. Therefore, he called on the Parliamentary Assembly to take a leading role and to introduce legislation for humanitarian assistance, highlighting the Iraqi Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Security Act of 2007, which he introduced in the USA.

In addition, Alcee Hastings expressed the need for greater work by OSCE Mediterranean Partners to solve the refugee crisis and proposed using linkages with NATO to better cope with environmental challenges which deepen risks to security. Finally, Congressman Hastings urged participation by parliamentarians from the OSCE's Mediterranean Partners in OSCE election observation project and he called on the Parliamentary Assembly to adjust its rules in a manner that would allow more active engagement in the organization.

Keynote Address by Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, Secretary General of the OSCE

The Secretary General welcomed the progress that has been made in the framework for partnership between the OSCE and its Mediterranean Partners. He highlighted the good integration of the Mediterranean Partners in the structures of the OSCE and lauded their regular attendance at OSCE meetings where they bring up matters of general interest.

Ambassador de Brichambaut stressed the importance of water management for the Mediterranean and praised the Finnish initiative which gives Mediterranean partners the chance for a detailed presentation of their work, highlighting the presentations from Morocco and Israel. He also announced a planned workshop on the security of travel documents and a conference on problems related to migration. The Secretary General referred to current problems in deciding the location for the 2007 Annual Mediterranean Seminar, pointing out two possibilities and urging a quick decision in this regard.

Ambassador de Brichambaut also expressed his regrets that no consensus had been found yet for a fund to establish partnerships and to help partners on ad-hoc initiatives. This fund would also give Central Asian Countries the chance for more active participation in OSCE activities. Mr. de Brichambaut



emphasized that the Mediterranean States are not only observers and expressed his hope that the OSCE Ministerial Council in November 2007 would further develop relations to give new impetus to co-operation. Furthermore, he underlined the vital role which the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly plays in this regard, acting as a forum for discussion.

Discussion

The opening session was followed by an open debate. The Mediterranean as region of joint heritage was emphasized. It was stated that there was need to invest further in the region and to strengthen the European-Mediterranean dialogue after the Barcelona process. It was noted that the refugee problem and problem of displacement are present throughout the whole region, not only Iraqi refugees. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the supply of resources should be taken care of, especially as China has been demonstrating greater interest in gas coming from the Mediterranean region.



Session on Minority Protection and Non-Discrimination in the Mediterranean



The session on minority protection and non-discrimination in the Mediterranean was chaired by Alcee Hastings, who opened the session with some remarks on his work as Special Representative for the Mediterranean. He repeated that the circumstances of the refugees in the Mediterranean are alarming. Furthermore, he talked about discrimination of individuals, stating that in reality no society is immune to intolerance, ignorance and hate. He emphasized that individuals have to take a stand and speak out against discrimination.

Ambassador Omur Orhun, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

In his address, Ambassador Orhun highlighted that Islam and Christianity in the Mediterranean cannot be isolated or separated from each other and he encouraged inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. Furthermore, Ambassador Orhun gave an overview of the OSCE's activities in promoting tolerance, mutual respect and understanding in the region, stressing that dialogue is a crucial tool of any effort aimed at conflict prevention and post conflict reconciliation. He called for specific policies to eliminate discrimination and promote integration.

Ambassador Orhun underlined that the OSCE needs to develop concrete measures to counter xenophobic stereotypes, intolerance and discrimination

in the media and encourage programmes to educate children and youth about prejudice or bias. Mr. Orhun also stressed that there are historical and deep rooted perceptions and prejudices between the Christian and Muslim world which need to be overcome. Finally, Ambassador Orhun called for a clear rejection of terrorism and violence and urged an integration of people with diverse backgrounds and a more just distribution of wealth and power.

Amin Khalaf, Co-Director of Hand-in-Hand, Centre for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel

In his presentation Mr. Khalaf gave an overview of the work of his organization Hand-in-Hand. The aim and challenge of the organization is to create a place where Jews and Arabs, a majority and a minority, could meet as equals and build a shared future. The organization works to build schools and educate Israelis from a young age while involving family and community at the same time. To prevent real war, Khalaf said, it is necessary to begin with the education of children.

The guiding principles of the Hand-in-Hand schools are equality of Jewish and Arabic pupils, bilingualism and multiculturalism. The schools are a place where children can learn about the cultural background of each other in order to overcome prejudices. The project is supported by several governments and has also won several prizes.

Ivan Vejvoda, Executive Director of the Balkan Trust for Democracy

Mr. Vejvoda stressed the importance of civil society organizations as part of dialogue. He reported on the Balkan Trust for Democracy, a long-term project intended to help citizens understand that they can achieve many things themselves, even without any help from governments. Mr. Vejvoda referred to experiences from the Former Yugoslavia after the fall of communism. However, he reported that entering the EU is now a major goal of Serbia. Furthermore, he discussed out the difficulties in solving the status of Kosovo and he expressed his hope that the NATO troops would soon leave. At the same time he stressed that all efforts of the EU, Russia and the USA would still be needed and called for an UN resolution to avoid unilateral independence and violence. He assured the Parliamentary Assembly that the citizens of Serbia are craving for normality.

Solomon Passy, Member of the Bulgarian Parliament, Former Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE

Mr. Passy applauded the project run by Amin Khalaf and noted that there was room for his idea in the OSCE as well, especially in the Balkans. Mr. Passy referred to Cape Verde as a stronghold of European values, leading the way by introducing a multi-party system on the islands which could be an example for West Africa. Therefore, Mr. Passy proposed that the OSCE should invite the Cape Verde to join the Mediterranean Partnership. The Parliamentary Assembly could go ahead of the OSCE governmental dimension regarding minority protection and non-discrimination, he said. Mr. Passy also expressed his gratitude that the case with the Bul-



garian nurses, being accused of having infected children with HIV in Libya, was resolved and he called on the Parliamentary Assembly to urge the OSCE to invite Libya to the Mediterranean dialogue. In addition, he remarked that Libya could be a good example for North Korea, as there were many parallels.

Discussion

During the ensuing debate it was mentioned that South East European countries should work out an effective international policy. Experiences were shared from individual countries regarding minority protection. However, it was noted that human rights organizations seem to be inadequately organized to fulfill their tasks. It was widely agreed that the role of education and the teaching of history plays an important role for promoting tolerance. It was noted that the OSCE has established guidelines for education, called the Toledo Guidelines, as well as country specific media guidelines related to religion. Furthermore, the Parliamentary Assembly was called upon to increase direct communication with the Mediterranean Partners instead of speaking about them.





The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Photo: Philippe Nobile

The OSCE PA is the parliamentary dimension of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, whose 56 participating States span the geographical area from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

The primary task of the 320 member Assembly is to facilitate inter-parliamentary dialogue, an important aspect of the overall effort to meet the challenges of democracy throughout the OSCE area. Recognized as a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, the OSCE is a primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in its area. The Parliamentary Assembly, originally established by the 1990 Paris Summit to promote greater involvement in the OSCE by national parliaments, has grown into a very active and esteemed member of the OSCE family.

The basic objectives of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly are:

- To assess the implementation of OSCE objectives by participating States;
- To discuss subjects addressed during meetings of the Ministerial Council and the summits of Heads of State or Government;
- To develop and promote mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts;
- To support the strengthening and consolidation of democratic institutions in OSCE participating States;
- To contribute to the development of OSCE institutional structures and of relations between existing OSCE Institutions.

To pursue these objectives, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly employs a variety of means:

- A Final Declaration and a number of resolutions and recommendations are adopted each year at the Annual Session in July;
- Committee work addresses important contemporary international issues;
- Programmes and Seminars designed to develop and strengthen democracy including an extensive election observation programme;
- Special parliamentary missions to areas of latent or active crisis.



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