

OSCE PA President Ranko Krivokapic

Introductory speech for plenary

13 February 2014, Vienna

Mr. Secretary General, President Prammer, Parliamentarians, Distinguished Guests,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to our 2014 Winter Meeting here in Vienna. This year, as in years past, we, the Parliamentary Assembly, bring to the Hofburg the collective voice of our region: the concerns, hopes, and dreams of over 1 billion individuals. It is precisely this diverse yet collective voice that makes the PA one of the OSCE's most important institutions and is the source of our novel perspectives, proposals, and contributions to the OSCE as a whole.

The Swiss Chairmanship has recently outlined an ambitious agenda whose priorities are timely and relevant. As parliamentarians, we possess both the insights of our constituencies and knowledge of local realities; we are therefore uniquely equipped to shape, adapt and implement OSCE commitments within our respective states. It is my hope as President that we not only closely cooperate with the Chairmanship to realize their objectives, but also lend our distinct voice to the debate.

The depth of your discussions over the next two days should provide an impetus for strong proposals and concrete actions at our Annual Session in Baku this summer, which will be organized on the theme "Helsinki +40: Towards Human Security For All." The outcome of that Annual Session should inform OSCE delegations on the full breadth of the Parliamentary Assembly's collective concerns, and inspire them to reach consensus and take action – especially as we approach the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975.

It is through your active participation that the voices of 1 billion are heard. That is why this Winter Meeting's agenda is so important.

Ladies and gentlemen, individuals across the OSCE region today too often find their rights, security, and livelihoods threatened. We have just had an enlightening discussion in the 3rd Committee regarding political prisoners and rule of law in the OSCE area. Whether we are talking about opposition leaders in Belarus, journalists in Turkey or inmates at Guantanamo Bay, these issues are particularly pertinent for our Assembly.

Later this afternoon, the First Committee will discuss parliamentary control of armed and security forces, a topic of growing importance due in part to our region's protracted conflicts. Ensuring transparency at the national and international levels is not only vital for building trust and cooperation among states, but also assures governmental accountability to their citizens.

At the same time, the Second Committee will discuss co-operation in sustainable water management -- a timely and crucial confidence-building measure, as water scarcity is exacerbated by climate change. In our Annual Session in Istanbul last year, we urged action on the topic, and I welcome the Swiss Chairmanship's prioritization of this issue. This is an invaluable opportunity to build on our prior work and proactively confront a potential source of conflict.

Tomorrow's Joint Session will feature a special debate on the rise of extremism, radicalism and xenophobia. Mutual respect and equality is the bedrock of our common security, yet the ongoing economic crisis and other factors have eroded this foundation and provided a fertile soil for growing intolerance. As parliamentarians it is our responsibility to confront and denounce any manifestation of this trend.

I look forward to a lively debate and hearing your contributions on the aforementioned topics. We should not shy away from disagreements, but rather embrace them. Our strength is not only in our diversity, but in our steadfast commitment to bridging our differences and reaching mutual understanding.

While here in Vienna, I also encourage you to take the opportunity to strengthen relationships with your delegations, and help them to positively integrate your unique

perspectives into the work of the OSCE. Our cooperation is vital to overcoming the immense challenges we face.

Thank you for your attention.