

*REPORT OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON SOUTH EAST EUROPE
ROBERTO BATTELLI FOR THE OSCE PA ANNUAL SESSION*

Helsinki, 5-9 July 2015

During the 2006 Winter Meeting in Vienna, President Alcee Hastings appointed me as the Parliamentary Assembly's Special Representative on South East Europe. This appointment was renewed by President Lennmarker in 2006, President Soares in 2008, President Efthymiou in 2010, as well as by President Migliori in 2012, President Krivokapic in 2013 and President Kanerva in 2014. In renewing my mandate, the Presidents have ensured the continuity of observing developments in South East Europe. A main objective of my functions as Special Representative is the facilitation of parliamentary dialogue in the region.

My mandate also includes:

- Promoting dialogue in all segments of society, in particular at the parliamentary level, so as to encourage reconciliation and rehabilitation in the region, most especially in the Western Balkans, and to contribute to the transformation and construction of democratic institutions.
- Maintaining close contact with, and serving as a focal point for, the Assembly's work in the region in general and with the Regional Cooperation Council.
- Advising and reporting back to the President on the situation in the region, with a focus on developments pertaining to Kosovo.
- Communicating with relevant actors within the OSCE that work on South East Europe regional issues

Summarizing my activities since my last report to the Bureau in Copenhagen:

During the reporting period I have continued to witness the added value, vis-à-vis South East Europe, of having an OSCE Chairmanship from the region. This has continued to provide ample opportunities for enhanced cooperation on regional issues and developments.

In terms of travel, as announced in my last report, I visited Belgrade, Pristina and Skopje during the first week of June. The visit has been extensively covered in the context of two Press Releases which are still available on our website and in our News from Copenhagen. My visit involved extensive planning and preparations. Besides others, it included meetings with high-level officials and representatives of the three respective OSCE Field Operations on political developments in the region, including the ongoing dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, as well as the situation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I was accompanied by our Special Representative in Vienna, Ambassador Andreas Nothelle.

In Belgrade, I met with the Vice-President of the National Assembly of Serbia, Vladimir Marinkovic, and with members of our Serbian Delegation, including the Head of Delegation, Dijana Vukomanovic and PA Human Rights Committee Rapporteur Gordana Comic. I also met with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ambassador Peter Burkhard, as well as representatives of the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, and representatives of the International Community.

I emphasized the strong leadership role of the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship and the active contribution of Serbian members of parliament to the work of our Assembly. In talks on the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, I particularly noted the success of the continuing cooperation between prominent Serbian and Kosovar women in the framework of the so called Budva Process, an initiative facilitated by the two respective OSCE Field Operations.

In Pristina, I met with Kosovo President Atifete Jahjaga, as well as Kosovo Assembly Chair Kadri Veseli, the Chief of the Srpska Lista group in the Assembly Sasa Milosavljevic, the Chair of the Kosovo Assembly Committee on Rights, Interests of Communities and Returns, Jasmina Zivkovic, the Chair of the Kosovo Assembly Committee on European Integration and former Chair of the Women's Caucus, Teuta Sahatqija, and Kosovo former Foreign Minister and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Kosovo Assembly, Enver Hoxhaj. I also met with representatives of the International Community, including the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Ambassador Jean-Claude Schlumberger, the Head of the Mission of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), Gabriele Meucci and his staff, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Kosovo and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (SRSG), Farid Zarif, as well as the Commander of the NATO Kosovo Force (COMKFOR), Major General Francesco Figliuolo, and representatives of the Council of Europe (CoE).

My interlocutors in Pristina confirmed the importance of following through the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue with concrete implementation of mutually agreed issues and initiatives. Kosovo interlocutors also called for a more inclusive approach to Kosovo's representation in international organizations, including the OSCE. At the same time, while most of the necessary legislation seems to be in place, implementation is largely deficient. A very positive example of a successful change is demonstrated by the high trust of the people in the Kosovo police, which is also a success of the OSCE's good work. It is also clear that more efforts are needed to show a more inclusive approach towards the communities, which – despite some significant improvements - still have a number of valid reasons for complaints.

I also discussed ways of enhancing our cooperation with the Kosovo Assembly without violating the status-neutral approach of the OSCE. In the same connection, I am pleased to note that a Side Event on the Budva process which sees the participation of one representative of the Kosovo Assembly alongside representatives of the National Assembly of Serbia is taking place at the margins of our Annual Session here in Helsinki. The Side Event is co-organized by the Mission to Serbia and by the Mission in Kosovo.

In Skopje, I have focused on the long-lasting political crisis which, in my view, has for some time now assumed a worrisome dimension. I discussed all aspects of the crisis at length with Prime Minister, Nikola Gruevski, Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki, the leader of the largest opposition party the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), Zoran Zaev, Speaker of Parliament, Trajko Veljanovski and the leader of the Albanian coalition party, Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), Ali Ahmeti. I also met with representatives of the OSCE Mission to Skopje and of the International Community, including the Acting Head of Mission, Ambassador Marianne Berez, the ambassadors of the EU, NATO, and numerous bilateral missions accredited to Skopje.

Despite the agreement brokered by the EU and signed by the heads of the four main political leaders on 2 June and several other meetings between the same political leaders facilitated by Commissioner Johannes Hahn, a resolution is not yet in sight. I received information about an increasing climate of suspicion, intimidation and a return of inter-ethnic tensions. Non-governmental organizations put in

doubt the capacity of overwhelming parts of the political class to tackle these issues and to take the steps badly needed to change this dangerous course and stop ethno-centric rhetoric. The agreement on holding early Parliamentary Elections in April 2016, however, seems to hold, as well as having the opposition return to parliament during the interim period in addition to reviewing the composition of the State Elections Commission and implementing all OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. There is, however, no agreement on the request of the opposition for Prime Minister Gruevski to resign and to establish an interim Government between now and the elections. Subsequent meetings in Brussels have not yielded additional results. It is clear that the situation will continue to demand my attention alongside the attention of our Assembly.

Furthermore, I discussed the country's political crisis and the recent tragic incidents in Kumanovo, which caused a number of casualties. I am glad that practically everybody, including Prime Minister Gruevski, assesses that the Kumanovo incident was one initiated by criminals who wanted to destabilize the country through terrorist attacks and that they did not receive any kind of support by neighboring countries or the Albanian community in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. When meeting with the leader of the Albanian party DUI currently in the governing coalition, Ali Ahmeti, I did, nevertheless, support his request for a thorough and unbiased investigation into the incidents.

In my meetings with the Speaker of the Parliament of the country, Trajko Veljanovski, with the OSCE PA delegation, I emphasized the need to fully implement the agreement in all parts also in order to make it possible that the badly needed discussions about the country's future and the reforms necessary take place where they belong, in parliament. I am happy about the readiness by the opposition to end their year-long blockade of the parliament, but I also have to remind the majority of its duty to enable the opposition to play its critical role in the democratic process. The government needs to further enhance all efforts to regain credibility, including by creating dialogue formats with opposition and NGO participation, and to speed up the necessary reforms. It is high time to move from negotiations and legislation to implementation. This is not up to the international community, but rather the responsibility of the country and its leadership. Ownership of the process is key.

At its last year's Annual Session in Baku, the OSCE PA approved a resolution on regional cooperation in South East Europe, inter alia encouraging the countries of the region to continue to engage in regional co-operation processes and fostering good neighborly relations and calling upon the European Union, in particular, to avoid creating artificial obstacles along the accession track. I can only underline that a clear European perspective is what the countries of the region need in order to do the necessary, often painful homework of reforming their countries.

Given the productiveness of my visit, especially in boosting effective coordination with other international actors, I do not exclude another follow-up visit sometime in the near future.

In keeping a close eye on developments in Skopje, I will continue to act as proxy vis-à-vis our national counterparts in Skopje so as to offer our assistance in the best interest of the country and of the region. In doing so, you can be reassured that I will attain to the highest standards of ethics and impartiality, while also respecting the sovereignty of the country. I will continue to report as the situation evolves.