

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

REMARKS

By Mr. R. Spencer Oliver
Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary
Assembly

Winter Meeting
February 13 – 14, 2014

Mr. President, Members of the Bureau, Delegation Heads, esteemed guests --

I'd like to begin by thanking the Permanent Council and the Department for Conference Services for hosting our OSCE PA Winter Meeting here at the Congress Center Hofburg. Each year, this meeting makes an important contribution to our work and strengthens the continuing cooperation between the parliamentary and governmental dimensions of the OSCE.

I would also like to thank our Austrian hosts, who have generously supported our Winter Meetings since our very first in 2002. They have also hosted a wonderful reception for us every year during this popular annual event. This has become an occasion that we all look forward to, where OSCE Parliamentarians have an opportunity to meet, talk and exchange views on matters of mutual interest with each other as well as with their national representatives in Vienna.

At the same time, the annual reception provides a unique opportunity for Parliamentarians to meet and mix with officials and diplomats, not only from their own country, but from all OSCE states.

I must also recognize that our Austrian hosts make a significant financial contribution to the maintenance of our Vienna Liaison Office, and we continue to be grateful for their support.

As always we warmly thank the Danish Parliament for its continuing support of the Assembly's International Secretariat in Copenhagen. As you know, they have hosted our headquarters since it was first established twenty-one years ago.

The Parliamentary Assembly's Standing Committee last met in Budva in conjunction with our Autumn Meeting, where the Montenegrin Delegation organized an excellent programme for almost 300 participants. Speakers included PA President Ranko Krivokapic, Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic, Montenegrin Foreign Minister Igor Luksic, and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Astrid Thors. I would like to extend my thanks to the Montenegrin Delegation

for the excellent job they did in hosting our Parliamentarians and guests.

Particular thanks and appreciation also go to all of the Delegations and staff who have hosted or will be hosting the Assembly's meetings and events. Without the support of national parliaments in hosting our important meetings, our work would simply not be possible. We look forward to initiatives from those participating States who have not yet done so to host one of our meetings in the foreseeable future.

Preparations are also well under way for our Annual Session in Baku, which will take place from June 28 to July 2. The theme for this year's Annual Session is: "*Helsinki +40: Towards Human Security For All*". The session will provide a forum for parliamentary action and debate, and this year, a key opportunity for us to consider the OSCE's legacy and future ahead of the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2015, including of course, the role of the Parliamentary Assembly now and into the future, which the OSCE's 1999 Istanbul Document described as "one of the most important OSCE institutions" and "a key component in our efforts to promote democracy, prosperity and increased confidence within and between participating States."

To quote President Krivokapic's speech before the Ministerial Council in December, "Just as the OSCE works to strengthen democracy in its member countries, the strengthening of the role of the Parliamentary Assembly is the precondition for the enforcement of democratic processes within the organization."

As you have likely heard, the Parliamentary Assembly is in the process of organizing a series of three seminars in co-operation with leading think tanks in Sweden, Russia, and the United States, to remember and evaluate the OSCE as it approaches the Helsinki Anniversary. The process will culminate in a Final Colloquium in 2015 in Helsinki, where the original Final Act was signed by Heads of State and Government. This important project is chaired by former OSCE PA President Joao Soares and co-chaired by PA Vice President Ilkka Kanerva and the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency and Reform, Francois-Xavier de Donnea.

Since our last Standing Committee meeting in Budva, we have had a very busy election observation schedule. Here are some highlights:

Joao Soares served as Special Co-ordinator for the short-term OSCE observer mission to the presidential election in Georgia in October. It was the tenth election in Georgia that the OSCE PA has observed. Former Deputy Secretary General Tina Schoen, an expert on the Caucasus, was in charge of organizing the PA election observation mission, assisted by Operations Officer Iryna Sabashuk and Special Adviser Andreas Baker, along with Director of Presidential Administration Roberto Montella and myself.

A team of 34 observers from the Assembly were in Tajikistan to observe the presidential election in November. Gordana Comic, Rapporteur of the OSCE PA's Third General Committee, was appointed by the OSCE Chair-in-Office to be the Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observer mission. Margareta Cederfelt of Sweden headed the PA Delegation.

OSCE Parliamentarians also completed an historic monitoring mission to Turkmenistan in December, assessing the quality of the country's first multi-party parliamentary elections. The Assessment Visit was organized after the PA received, for the first time, an invitation from Ashgabat to observe a parliamentary vote. PA President Ranko Krivokapic appointed a small delegation of senior Parliamentarians, which was led by Senator James Walsh of Ireland. OSCE PA Programme Director Anna Chernova coordinated this mission.

Many of you follow the activities of the Assembly and the International Secretariat through our weekly publication, "*News from Copenhagen*." Our newsletter is sent to each Delegation, as well as to OSCE governments, field missions, diplomatic establishments, academia and interested media outlets. As you know, we have expanded our public outreach with a growing presence on Twitter and Facebook, and our web page continues to be a useful outlet for all PA news and an easy place for you to find documents, schedules and reports.

During the Parliamentary Assembly's first year, we had just one Standing Committee Meeting, one Bureau Meeting, one Annual Session and a single election observation mission.

Now we have all of that plus a Winter Meeting, an Autumn Meeting, a Mediterranean Forum, an additional Standing Committee Meeting, a Bureau Meeting in conjunction with the OSCE Ministerial Councils and various other conferences and meetings – as well as numerous election observation missions. We now have twelve active Special Representatives, three ad hoc committees and an effective Liaison Office here in Vienna.

Our staff and Parliamentarians make periodic field mission visits and our Research Fellowship Programme has proven itself to be a key part of our Secretariat's work. We also now have active participation in most aspects of the work of the governmental side of the OSCE.

I am proud to say that we have done all of these things while observing our approved budget every year and with favourable audits of our books by outside independent professional auditors every single year. You have already heard the report of our Treasurer, Roberto Battelli, who is a careful overseer of our expenditures and a strong supporter of our work. Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares, who is responsible for financial management in our Secretariat, assisted by our Administrative Director, Kurt Lerras, continues to do a superb job to ensure that our finances are in good order.

We also have assembled a superb multi-national, multi-lingual staff in our Secretariat, several of whom have been with us for many years, and all of whom work very well together as a team to support the work of OSCE Parliamentarians.

I'd like to offer a few more words on our very successful Research Fellowship Programme. This programme was established in 1995, and since that time, over 200 highly competent graduate students from 35 OSCE countries have worked in Copenhagen and Vienna for six months or a year, providing us with excellent research capabilities, language capacity in all six official OSCE languages, and energetic support for the parliamentary staff as they carry out their work.

Our research assistants from our Copenhagen and Vienna offices are here today. Many of our former research assistants have gone on to work elsewhere in the OSCE, in the governments or parliaments of their own countries, or in other international organizations. These young women and men, as they succeed in public service throughout the OSCE area, are a great legacy of our Assembly.

As you have heard from our President and our Treasurer and as you have read in “*News from Copenhagen*,” we have done a lot in these past several months. But we also have a very full programme in the months ahead.

The staff of the International Secretariat and I have been pleased to support the work of our Members during the past year, and we will continue to do our best to serve you and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE in the months ahead.

Thank you once again for your support. I will be happy to answer any questions.