

News from Copenhagen

Number 64

Current Information from the OSCE PA International Secretariat

9 December 2002

Bruce George Proposes OSCE Information Offices

"I would propose the idea of establishing OSCE information offices in all participating States of the OSCE", said the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Bruce George in his address to the OSCE Ministerial Council on 6 December 2002 in Porto. According to the President these information offices, similar to those the EU has established in its member and applicant countries, would have the double objective of increasing the visibility of the OSCE and reducing the apparent 'stigma' of some member States that host OSCE offices or missions. The Assembly President noted that very few people in OSCE countries know what the OSCE is or what the OSCE stands for and what it is doing. *"And not only at the level of our common citizens, but at a higher political level in our capitals, the OSCE does not seem to be given very much attention - if at all,"* he said.

In his address President George also examined the role of the OSCE in view of NATO and European Union enlargement. According to the President the enlargement of both organizations will extend even further the already large common space of democratic stability on the European continent. *"The OSCE, as the only pan-European security Organization, has a crucial and unique role to play in enhancing overall security within and among states",* said Bruce George. He also announced that the upcoming Annual Session of the Assembly in July 2003 in Rotterdam will deal with this theme. Concerning the role of the OSCE in the new European security architecture President Bruce George emphasized that the OSCE must continue to reform and adapt its mechanisms and procedures with a view to upholding its efficiency and credibility. *"Other institutions are adapting to the changing circumstances and we, in the OSCE, are engaged in that same process. It appears to me it is a question of adapting or progressively fading away. This adaptation process requires imagination, resolve, and recognition of the difficulties of securing consensus. It requires difficult decisions to be made. We must not confuse activity with achievement",* Bruce George said. In this respect the Assembly President also emphasized that the OSCE's internal working processes demand patience. *"The requirement for consensus, paradoxically is both a strength and a weakness in the OSCE. The search for a common denominator can reinforce at times the sense of an OSCE community and improve prospects for implementation. However, I am more than conscious of the difficulties of securing agreement on key or even less crucial issues. Consensus has its price. If that price is the absence of taking the right and necessary decisions or to postpone the right decisions, or to dilute the right decisions, one may wonder if the price to be paid is too high".*

On the co-operation with the governmental side of the OSCE President George emphasized the constant readiness of the Parliamentary Assembly to be supportive. *"In recent years our level of activity has dramatically increased in support of the OSCE. What you are doing, we are here to assist. We look to you for your support in helping us to do more. We are on the same side and we can do more operating together than being mistrustful towards each other".*



Bilateral meetings

Following his address to the Ministerial Council, President George held bilateral talks which included meetings with the incoming OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Dutch Foreign Minister, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Norwegian Foreign Minister Jan Petersen, and with the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Mr. Dulat Kuanyshev. In addition, given the President's specific interest in the relations between the OSCE and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, President George held meetings with the Foreign Minister of Jordan, Mr. Shaher Bak, the Secretary of State of Tunisia, Mrs. Saïda Chtioui, and the Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs of Egypt, Mr. Muhammad Shabaan.

Bureau meets in Porto

In conjunction with the Tenth OSCE Ministerial Council in Porto, a meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Bureau was held on 5 December 2002. The meeting, chaired by President Bruce George, was addressed by the Head of the Portuguese Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mrs. Maria Eduarda Azevedo. The OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Portuguese Foreign Minister Mr. Antonio Martins da Cruz, also addressed the parliamentarians and took questions from the floor. The Chairman-in-Office noted that the OSCE PA plays an irreplaceable and central role in the promotion of the common values, principles and commitments of the OSCE. *"Let me therefore conclude by reiterating our appreciation for all the support of the Parliamentary Assembly to the Portuguese Chairmanship bearing in mind our shared goal of bringing the OSCE closer to our citizens and constituencies",* said the C-I-O. The Bureau heard reports from Secretary General Spencer Oliver, Treasurer Jerry Grafstein and Ambassador Andreas Nothelle, who informed the Bureau on his activities as head of the OSCE PA office in Vienna, which formally will be opened on 13 January 2003. The Bureau furthermore discussed the theme for the 2003 Annual Session in Rotterdam, which resulted in the proposal to focus on recasting OSCE priorities in view of NATO and EU enlargement.