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Message from the President

As we all take a pause for the holiday season, I want to give a brief report on the first half year of my mandate as President of the Assembly. I also want to thank all of the members of the Assembly and the staff of the International Secretariat for their support since my election in Berlin. This has been a very busy time and a time in which I believe we have made positive improvements in the role of the Parliamentary Assembly within the OSCE.

In August I spent several days in Copenhagen with the Secretary General and the staff of the International Secretariat, working together to plan and establish my priorities and activities for the year. In September I addressed the Permanent Council and reviewed the Declaration and Resolutions from the Berlin Session and was pleased to have an extensive dialogue with the members of the Council. I also met with the Secretary General of the OSCE and most of his senior staff and Heads of OSCE Departments. I was very impressed with the quality of the work being done in the OSCE Secretariat and would encourage national delegations to visit the OSCE Headquarters in Vienna and to see for themselves what a fine job they are doing.

Secretary General Spencer Oliver has finalised all of the arrangements for the establishment of our liaison office in Vienna, including the appointment of Ambassador Andreas Nothelle as our Special Representative. The office is now functional and I will host a reception for the members of the Permanent Council and the leadership of the OSCE on the occasion of the first meeting of the Permanent Council and of the OSCE Heads of Missions in Vienna on 13 January. This new office will not only enhance and improve our working relations with the OSCE, but will also be able to arrange meetings and briefings for parliamentarians when they visit Vienna.

I think that the Fall Conference in Madrid was an outstanding success. One of the positive results of the meeting, which focused on Mediterranean issues, was the agreement to arrange a regular Mediterranean Forum in conjunction with future Fall Conferences to ensure that the Assembly continues to pay substantial attention to this important area. I have long had an interest in this area and will continue to be actively involved in this subject during my Presidency. I have recently met with senior government officials from several of the Mediterranean Partner countries and intend to visit the area in the months ahead.

In early November I addressed a Seminar in Belgrade on civilian control of the armed forces, co-sponsored by the Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. I have also participated in a meeting of the Ministerial Troika in Vienna in early November and look forward to reviewing our plans for the coming year at the next Ministerial Troika next month. As you know, I addressed the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Porto earlier this month. The full text of my remarks is being forwarded by the Secretariat and is available on our website. I had a number of useful bilateral meetings on the margins of the Ministerial Council, including with the incoming Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer of the Netherlands. The outgoing Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Antonio Martins da Cruz of Portugal, spoke at the Bureau meeting and praised the contribution of the Parliamentary Assembly to the work of the OSCE. As I have earlier reported, my visit to Lisbon in October was productive and laid the groundwork for the excellent cooperation which we now have with the governmental side of the OSCE. I am very pleased with the good working relationship that now exists between the Parliamentary Assembly and the governmental structures at all levels, including between our International Secretariat and the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna.

I want to thank all of the members of the Assembly who have been active during these past months and who have participated in our ad hoc committees, mission visits and election monitoring projects, as well as the parliaments of Germany, Denmark, Portugal, Spain and Austria each of which have generously hosted the Assembly for meetings and other activities.

Finally I want to thank the Secretary General and his excellent staff at the International Secretariat in Copenhagen who continue to do such an outstanding job for the Assembly. Having been a member of this Assembly for over ten years and having served on the Standing Committee and on the Bureau, as a Committee Officer and as a member of various ad hoc committees, I have worked with our Secretariat at almost all levels of the Assembly's activities and I can attest that we have a great team in Copenhagen whose experience, productivity and expertise is widely praised

and admired by members and staff from nearly every country. The Clerks of the British House of Commons, who serve our Assembly so faithfully and well, as well as other Assemblies, including the NATO Assembly in which I have been quite active, give fulsome praise and credit to our Secretariat for the tremendous job that they do, particularly with such a small staff and limited budget. As our Treasurer recently reported to the Bureau, we have a very efficient Secretariat, which organises and manages our activities very effectively and always within the budgetary allocations.

Let me conclude by saying that I believe that the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE is doing very well and that we will continue to make a positive contribution to the important work of the OSCE in the coming year. I am particularly grateful to have the opportunity to serve as the President of this very worthwhile parliamentary institution. May I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and I look forward to the challenges ahead.

Yours sincerely,



President