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Informal Talks at OSCE Retreat

On 23-24 February, a retreat was held at the Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg for Members of the Committee on Transparency and Accountability, representatives of the OSCE PA Bureau - including the President and the Treasurer, representatives of the OSCE Permanent Council, and the Secretariats of the OSCE and the OSCE PA. Although neither side had authority to make a formal agreement, the purpose of the retreat was to have an informal exchange of views on how to strengthen co-operation and co-ordination between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the governmental institutions and structures in Vienna.

There was a common view among participants that the Parliamentary Assembly is an important integral part of the OSCE and that increased interaction between representatives of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and officials of the governmental side would strengthen the Organization and help promote the implementation of OSCE commitments. Several participants emphasized the role that OSCE Parliamentarians can play in raising public awareness and political support in the participating States for the OSCE and its activities. Members of the OSCE PA stressed that, in order to be able to support the OSCE at the national level, they need more information and in a timely way.

One of the key issues raised by Members of the Ad Hoc Committee was how to ensure a better follow-up to Resolutions and recommendations made by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to the governmental structures. In this regard, it was suggested that the President of the PA be invited to address the Permanent Council after each of the Assembly's Annual Sessions. The main purpose of this would be for Members of the Permanent Council to react to PA resolutions and recommendations.

There was also unanimous support for the OSCE PA to be consulted on



R to L Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency, Congressman Hoyer (United States), Ambassador Bota (Romania), Chairman of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Pimentel (Portugal), OSCE Secretary General Kubis and OSCE PA Deputy Secretary General Väänänen

budgetary issues. A proposal for the OSCE PA to comment on the Organization's draft budget early in the process was positively received. To enable the views of the Assembly to be taken into account, the Secretary General of the OSCE would send the draft budget to the Assembly at the same time as he sends it to participating States and would brief the Parliamentary Assembly on the draft budget at the Assembly's autumn meeting. The Chairmanship would inform the PA of the timetable for discussions in the Permanent Council in order for the Assembly's views to be taken into account.

Participants supported the idea of regular meetings between the OSCE PA President and the OSCE Chairman-in-Office - including the two Secretaries General - to discuss policy and to co-ordinate concrete efforts. An informal retreat every year to discuss political issues and the priorities of the Organization was also suggested. Participants agreed that direct contact between the governmental side and the OSCE PA is essential to avoid misunderstandings and to build a greater degree of trust between the two dimensions of the OSCE. In addition, the participants from the governmental side welcomed the initiative to set up a liaison office of the Parliamentary Assembly in Vienna.

Parliamentarians stressed the need for more openness and transparency in the OSCE and emphasized that they would like to know when a proposal is blocked in the Permanent Council and by whom. Members of the Permanent Council argued that there is a need for discrete diplomacy and that the process of consultation will be undermined if such information is distributed. Members of the PA insisted that the Assembly is an integral part of the Organization and should be given such information in order to put questions to their Ministries of Foreign Affairs and to better support the Organization. Members of the OSCE PA also criticized the OSCE website which lists the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at the bottom of the list of OSCE Institutions. Parliamentarians stressed that the OSCE PA is a political body different from the other OSCE Institutions and is composed of elected officials who function at the political level. It was pointed out that Chairman-in-Office Jaime Gama has asserted that the leaders of the Parliamentary Assembly are on the equivalent level of the OSCE Ministerial Troika and the Ministerial Council. Members of the OSCE PA indicated that the general level of trust and respect between the two branches of the OSCE needs to be raised in order to improve co-operation.