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Winter Meeting Debates Iraq Crisis



A special debate on the situation in Iraq was one of the main highlights of the Winter Meeting in Vienna last week. The extraordinary debate was placed on the schedule by the Standing Committee and demonstrated the importance of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly as a forum for interparliamentary dialogue. Twenty-five parliamentarians spoke during the debate, offering a full spectrum of national and personal views on the present crisis. Before an audience of more than four hundred people, including two hundred and fifty parliamentarians, as well as many OSCE diplomats and officials, politicians from Europe, North America and Central Asia, as well as observers from North Africa and Asia, spoke directly and passionately about the possibilities and probabilities of war and the hopes and desires for a peaceful solution. The unique debate was the first of its kind on a specific subject related to a current international crisis.



The Winter Meeting also served as an opportunity for parliamentarians to hear presentations by the three General Committee Rapporteurs, Mr Clifford Lincoln, Mr. Leonid Ivachenko and Ms. Nebahat Albayrak and to discuss their draft reports on “The Role of the OSCE in the New Architecture of Europe”, which is the theme of the upcoming OSCE PA Annual Session in July in Rotterdam. On the first day of the two-day Winter Meeting the parliamentarians heard welcoming remarks by the President of the Austrian Republic, Dr. Thomas Klestil, followed by an address of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Netherlands Foreign Minister Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. In his address the C-I-O urged parliamentarians to use their influence to help reinforce democratic structures and institutions throughout the OSCE region. “Your wisdom and insights are needed on many levels. If there is nothing that can replace expe-

rience, there is certainly nothing that can replace parliamentary experience. In many OSCE regions a reinforcement of democratic structures and institutions is urgently needed. That is something that cannot be achieved through government alone. It requires parliamentary action as well”, said the C-I-O, who also expressed the hope of the Dutch Chairmanship to involve the Parliamentary Assembly in positioning the 55-nation security Organization in a constantly changing security landscape. According to the C-I-O the PA contributes to preventing the OSCE from existing in a void and floating freely with no connection to the peoples of its fifty-five participating States: “Their voices can and should be heard through you”. Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer concluded by emphasizing that “the parliamentary dimension is essential to the OSCE and to the overall effectiveness of its role”. Delegates also heard presentations by

OSCE Secretary General Jan Kubis and other Senior OSCE Officials in the fields of Politico-Military Affairs, Economic Development and Human Rights. All presentations were followed by question/answer sessions.

During the Winter Meeting the eighth OSCE Prize for Journalism and Democracy was presented to Anna Politkovskaya, a journalist with the independent Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta who gained international recognition for her extensive and balanced reporting in Chechnya, drawing attention to human rights abuses in the region.

The Winter Meeting was preceded by a meeting of the Standing Committee which heard welcoming remarks by the President of the Austrian Nationalrat, Dr. Andreas Khol. One of the outcomes of the Meeting of the Standing Committee was the re-seating of the Belarusian Delegation.