

News from Copenhagen

OSCE PA Number 101

Current Information from the OSCE PA International Secretariat

23 February 2004

Chairman-in-Office at PA Winter Meeting

Survival of the OSCE Requires Change in Consensus Rule

“If I have to define one single most important issue to address in the reform of the OSCE, it is the consensus principle. The consensus principle is blocking the work of the Organization. I know very well how important it is to have the agreement of 55 sovereign states, 55 sovereign governments, because their agreement makes it politically binding for their future behaviour.

But nevertheless, the world is changing. We witness the changes in the European Union. We witness the changes in NATO. We know the new Constitution of the European Union according to which, the matters to which consensus is required have been significantly reduced.

Therefore, I would say that if there is one single thing that we all have to address, this is the reform of the consensus principle. And it is a very good question on how the Parliamentary Assembly can

help. You may be very helpful if each of you parliamentarians try to urge your governments to agree. It is, I have to tell, not a popular proposal and I'm not the first to suggest it.

It was suggested, if I'm not mistaken, ten years ago by Germany, then it was supported by my predecessor, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. I know that I will support it and I know that my Slovenian successor will support it but we have to work to change this principle in order for the OSCE to survive in the future.”

“... I would like to be absolutely blunt. I didn't speak about consensus minus one. I just spoke about abolishing the consensus and personally speaking, I would be very happy with simple majority.”

OSCE Chairman-in-Office Solomon Passy during a Q&A session at the OSCE PA Winter Meeting in Vienna.



From Left: Andreas Khol, President of the Austrian Nationalrat; Bruce George, President of the OSCE PA; Solomon Passy, Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE; Ivo Petrov, Chairman of the OSCE Permanent Council; Jan Kubis, Secretary General of the OSCE; Vitaly Evseyev, Deputy Secretary General of the OSCE PA; Christian Strohal, Director of the OSCE/ODIHR; and Rolf Ekeus, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Third Annual Winter Meeting in Vienna

250 parliamentarians from 50 OSCE participating States met from 19-20 February 2004 in the OSCE premises in Vienna for the third Annual OSCE PA Winter Meeting.

On the first day, the parliamentarians heard welcoming remarks by the President of the Austrian Nationalrat, Dr. Andreas Khol, who emphasized that the Winter Meeting is an instrument for intensified dialogue and co-operation between the governmental and parliamentary dimensions of the OSCE. The Delegates were briefed by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy, who gave an overview of the main priorities of the Bulgarian Chairmanship for 2004, focusing on implementation and continuity. Mr. Passy underlined that “the Bulgarian Chairmanship intends to further promote the mutual political support between the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly, which considerably strengthened its role as an important OSCE institution under the able leadership of its President, my friend over ten years, the Honourable Bruce George.” The parliamentarians 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.

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The Winter Meeting also served as an opportunity for parliamentarians to hear presentations by the three General Committee Rapporteurs – Clifford Lincoln, Leonid Ivanchenko and Nebahat Albayrak – and to discuss their draft reports on “Co-operation and Partnership: Coping with New Security Threats”, which is the theme of the upcoming OSCE PA Annual Session in July in Edinburgh.

During the Winter Meeting the ninth OSCE Prize for Journalism and Democracy was presented to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), represented at the Winter Meeting by its Executive Director, Ann Cooper. In her acceptance speech she said that by honouring the work of an international press freedom organization, the OSCE PA has sent “each of the journalists we defend a powerful message: that they are not alone in their dedication to a free press.”

The Winter Meeting was preceded by a meeting of the Standing Committee which reviewed the results of the November 2003 OSCE Ministerial Council in Maastricht and heard reports on preparations for upcoming PA activities.