

Hastings, Fischer, De Gucht open fifth annual OSCE PA Winter Meeting



Accompanied by the President of Austria and the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Assembly President Alcee L. Hastings welcomed parliamentarians to the OSCE PA's fifth annual Winter Meeting in Vienna on February 23. In his opening address, Hastings particularly stressed the importance of facing new security threats and global challenges through increased multilateral co-operation. He also addressed the ongoing world crisis regarding freedom of speech and respect for religious beliefs, underlining the crucial role played by the media in creating social perceptions and calling for the right to freedom of expression to be exercised in a dignified manner. President Hastings also referred to recent transnational energy crises, Iran's nuclear activities, and combating poverty as a way of enhancing security and stability.

Welcoming parliamentarians to Vienna, the President of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer, stressed the important role the Parliamentary Assembly has in furthering the knowledge of the work and objectives of the OSCE.

Finally, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, addressed the Assembly and spoke about the reform process and the importance of the OSCE's activities in conflict resolution and election observation. He stressed that the OSCE needs to become a dynamic organization of the future, requiring a strong sense of common purpose among States. Minister de Gucht also spoke about the Assembly's vital role in guaranteeing the democratic nature of the OSCE. Following the presentations, the C-i-O answered questions from parliamentarians on a range of OSCE-related issues.

Hastings signs host agreement for Brussels Session

Invited by the Presidents of the Belgian Federal Parliament, Ms. Anne-Marie Lizin (President of the Senate) and Mr. Herman De Croo (President of the Chamber of Deputies) President Hastings visited Brussels from 19 to 22 February. The main purpose of the visit was to sign the Agreement between the Assembly and the Belgian Parliament for the Assembly's 15th Annual Session to be held in Brussels from 3 to 7 July 2006.

During his visit to Brussels, President Hastings also met with the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to discuss matters regarding the OSCE and the PA, including preparations for the Assembly's Winter Meeting in Vienna and election monitoring activities. Minister de Gucht has appointed President Hastings as his Special Co-ordinator for the upcoming Presidential elections in Belarus and the Parliamentary elections in Ukraine.

While in Brussels President Hastings also met with the European Parliament's Election Co-ordination Group to discuss co-operation in future election observation missions and with Mr. Edward McMillan Scott, Vice-President of the EP.



President Hastings was accompanied in Brussels by Secretary General Spencer Oliver, Deputy Secretary General Vitaly Evseyev, Adviser Gustavo Pallarés and by his Chief of Staff Fred Turner. Members of the International Secretariat held meetings with the organizing team for the Annual Session and visited the premises for the Session, to be held in the European Parliament.