

OSCE PA Secretary General speaks at Vienna election seminar

At a two-day seminar in Vienna on election-related issues, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Secretary General, R. Spencer Oliver, was one of the main speakers. The special seminar on 21 and 22 July was organized by the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office after several participating States expressed their wish to discuss election-related issues. The aim was to discuss implementation of OSCE commitments, election observation and best practice in follow-up and technical assistance.

Speaking on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly, Secretary General Oliver stressed the “leading role” that parliamentarians have played in election observation for the past 15 years.

“There are no better judges of elections than those who actually seek and win public office through the electoral process,” he said. “They provide unequalled credibility and visibility to election observation because of who they are and what they do” and also “provide an element of transparency and accountability that should be required of each international election observer.”

Mr. Oliver noted that the OSCE PA has frequently called for more transparency and accountability in the OSCE as well as in OSCE election observation missions. He also noted that a country whose elections are being observed “should be entitled to know who the observers are and what qualifies them to do such a job.” Most importantly, he said, “the sources of their funding should be open and transparent to all.”

He also pointed out that the Assembly has previously criticized the use of double standards in election observation, saying “there are no two systems that are identical” among the 55 OSCE participating States that hold elections. Election observation missions “must therefore be very careful not to criticize provisions of election laws in one participating State, when the same provisions are accepted in the election laws of other participating States.”

“In addition,” he said, “the election observation methodology of any organization or institution must have the flexibility to be applied equally...but if it limits or restricts their ability, or



resources available to observe elections in some States but not in others, then that methodology should either be changed or abandoned.”

Other speakers at the seminar included Finland’s OSCE Ambassador Antti Turunen, Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council, Ambassador Janez Lenarcic, Director of OSCE/ODIHR, Kimmo Kiljunen, Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Special Envoy of the OSCE CiO on election observation, and Ambassador Tom Groenberg, Representative of the CiO for election observation.

Ambassador Andreas Nothelle, Special Representative of the OSCE PA in Vienna, also participated in the seminar, giving a keynote presentation on election observation and the role that parliamentarians play in OSCE missions. He also discussed election observation methodology and the challenges that remain to be addressed.

Besides representatives of the 56 participating States, a large number of NGOs were present along with representatives of the Council of Europe, European Parliament, the European Commission, Commonwealth of Independent States and some OSCE field missions.

The International Secretariat was also represented by Deputy Secretary General Tina Schoen and Liaison Officer Marc Carillet.

Belarus Election Observation Reminder

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has received an invitation to observe the parliamentary elections in Belarus which are scheduled for 28 September 2008. President Joao Soares has decided that the OSCE PA will deploy an Election Observation Mission and has appointed Vice-President Anne-Marie Lizin from Belgium to head this Mission.

Those interested in the Election Observation Mission are kindly asked to contact the International Secretariat. The deadline for registering to observe the election is 11 September.

Fall Meetings Reminder

The deadline for registering for the OSCE PA Fall Meetings is 15 August. Registration forms are available on the OSCE PA website, www.oscepa.org, as is the draft agenda for the meetings. Parliamentarians participating in the Toronto meetings have also been invited to a two-day US Election Observation seminar in Washington, DC on 22 and 23 September.

Further information on the Fall Meetings, to be held in Toronto, Canada from 18-21 September, is available at the Canadian Parliament’s website, www.oscepa-aposce.ca.