

## President Soares addresses OSCE Ministerial Council

OSCE PA President Joao Soares addressed the OSCE Ministerial Council, which brings together foreign ministers of OSCE participating States, on 4 December.

Touching on vital issues of the day, including the recent hostilities between Georgia and the Russian Federation, Mr. Soares highlighted the ongoing relevance of the OSCE and the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. He urged however that to “maintain and increase its relevance, the OSCE needs to improve its decision-making mechanisms.”

“The Helsinki Final Act was a milestone,” the President said, that took “courage and perseverance.” To meet new challenges 30 years later, “we need to have the same strategic vision to strengthen the OSCE,” he said.

In particular, Mr. Soares pointed to the “bureaucratic and unproductive debate” that too often tangles up the Organization and prevents it from reaching a common position at each Ministerial Council.

Mr. Soares noted that the Parliamentary Assembly has long urged reforms in the OSCE, specifically in relation to its decision-making mechanisms. “The consensus rule in Vienna should be adjusted,” the President said. “The meetings of the Permanent Council should be open just like this Ministerial Council,” he said, noting that the principle of transparency has a direct bearing on the international legitimacy of the OSCE and that “critical audits should be made public, not covered up.”

The President praised the work of OSCE field missions, which he called “the heart of the Organization.” The Parliamentary Assembly, he noted, has often reiterated that the OSCE must make full use of its field presence and provide all necessary means and greater resources to increase their effectiveness.

In particular, he highlighted their importance for maintaining regional stability. With the volatile security



situation in Afghanistan, the experience of the OSCE field missions in Central Asia should be utilized as a “soft power” mechanism in the region.

Speaking on the subject of the recent conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation, the President lamented that the OSCE was not able to do more to prevent the hostilities. “Although the OSCE remains the most flexible and responsive Euro-Atlantic security instrument,” it was unable in this case to resolve the situation. “Our Organization should have been able to act more effectively on the information” at our disposal, he said.

President Soares also spoke on the issue of election observation in the OSCE area, noting that the Parliamentary Assembly has since 1993 taken the lead in OSCE election observation. “I am sure you’ll agree,” he said, “that there is no doubt that parliamentarians provide unmatched credibility to OSCE’s efforts in election observation.”

The President concluded by pledging to “continue to work to encourage debate on the most difficult security topics facing us all.”

## Assembly leadership meets in Helsinki

On the eve of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Helsinki, the OSCE PA Bureau met to discuss Assembly priorities and work. The Bureau was welcomed by the Head of the Finnish Delegation, Ilkka Kanerva, who referred to the historic role that Finland, and Helsinki, had played in the OSCE process.

Bureau Members discussed the ongoing work of the OSCE Ministerial Council, including considerations of a possible OSCE summit in the near future. Together with representatives of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship, Members held an extensive discussion of OSCE election

observation activities, and stressed the necessity of leadership by elected Members of Parliament from the OSCE PA.

Members also discussed forthcoming meetings of the Assembly, including a 2010 Fall Meeting in Palermo, and considered priority issues that should be addressed by the OSCE PA. Treasurer Hans Raidel presented the recent audit of the International Secretariat, highlighting that the Assembly’s finances were again deemed to be in good order. Bureau Members also participated in the OSCE PA delegation to the OSCE Ministerial.