

OSCE PA delegation visits Belgrade and Skopje

OSCE PA President Joao Soares, visiting Belgrade and Skopje 11 and 12 May as part of his on-going visit to South East Europe, expressed his appreciation for the work of the Serbian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly and urged its continued active participation, stressing particularly the importance of the Parliamentary Assembly as a forum for dialogue.

In Belgrade, the delegation, including Roberto Battelli, the Assembly's Special Representative for South East Europe, met with Serbian officials, among them the Speaker of Parliament Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic, the Serbian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, headed by Suzana Grubjesic, and Deputy Prime Minister Bozidar Djelic. The Serbian officials expressed appreciation for the work and contribution of OSCE in Serbia.

The delegation also met with the OSCE Head of Mission, Hans Ola Urstad, and his senior staff, who briefed the delegation's members on the Mission's work regarding judicial reform, police education reform, and anti-trafficking. Staffing and financing of the mission was also discussed.

President Soares underlined the Parliamentary Assembly's strong support for the work of the OSCE field missions. He stressed the effectiveness of the OSCE relative to other organizations but expressed concern that more resources are being devoted to

diplomats in Vienna, rather than to work in the field, where the most important work is done. The delegation also met with representatives of civil society and the media.

In Skopje, the OSCE PA delegation met with the President of the Parliament of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Trajko Veljenovski, and with FYROM's delegation to the OSCE PA. They also had discussions with representatives of the political parties and visited to the city of Tetovo and its mayor Sadi Bexheti.

A central topic of the discussions was inter-ethnic relations, which continue to be a major issue and it was a central topic of the discussions. Mr. Soares stressed the importance of dialogue and encouraged patience and a co-operative approach. He also encouraged the use of the Parliamentary Assembly as a forum for such dialogue.

In the meeting and briefing with the OSCE Head of Mission, Jose Luis Herrero, and his senior staff, judicial reform and the need for transparency and de-politicization of the judiciary, police development, and decentralization were issues of discussion.

The visit to the Balkans continues to the end of the week with visits to Kosovo and Albania.

Mr. Soares and Mr. Battelli are accompanied by Ambassador Andreas Nothelle from the Vienna liaison office, Andreas Baker, Presidential Advisor at the International Secretariat, and Nuno Paixao from the Portuguese Parliament.



President Soares with Serbian Head of Delegation Suzana Grubjesic

Greek parliamentarians visit ODIHR

Panayotis Skandalakis, Head of the Greek Delegation to the OSCE PA and Special Envoy of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Election-related Issues, and Petros Efthymiou, Chairman of the OSCE PA Second General Committee, visited the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Warsaw on 12 May.

The two Greek parliamentarians were briefed by the leadership of the Departments for Tolerance and Non-Discrimination and Democratization and Human Rights as well as by the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. They discussed how to improve the implementation of human rights in OSCE participating States,

issues related to minorities, and further challenges in the fields of democratization.

Mr. Skandalakis and Mr. Efthymiou also discussed upcoming election observation missions and co-operation between the OSCE PA and OSCE ODIHR with the deputy head of the Election Department, who is expected to succeed the present Head in June. All agreed to continue co-operation on the basis of the 1997 Co-operation Agreement.

The parliamentarians were accompanied by Deputy Secretary General Tina Schøn from the International Secretariat.