

News from Copenhagen

Migration, Mediterranean focus of Winter Meeting



Hedy Fry lays out her vision for gender equality



President Efthymiou addresses the Standing Committee



Kathleen Ferrier opens the debate on immigration

The tenth Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly concluded 25 February in Vienna with the 228 parliamentarians from 53 countries issuing a joint statement on the situation in North Africa.

The PA “expresses its deepest concern for the conflicts and violence in the countries of North Africa and for the unacceptable repression carried out in Libya by Gaddafi’s regime,” read the statement, issued by OSCE PA President Petros Efthymiou. The statement called on international organizations to co-operate “so that effective and proactive measures are adopted in order to stop violence” and support the refugees and victims of this crisis.

The debate on the situation in the Mediterranean region was introduced by Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs Alcee Hastings (United States).

Parliamentarians also debated immigration, integration and multi-ethnic dialogue in a session opened by OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities Knut Vollebaek and the OSCE PA Special Representative on Migration Kathleen Ferrier (Netherlands).

Amb. Vollebaek pointed out that when it comes to integration, OSCE parliamentarians have a special role to play. “You represent a wide range of constituencies,” he said. “You are their voice and their means to participate and to have a say.”

Ms. Ferrier stressed the increased urgency to focus on migration policies as unrest in the Arab world has led to massive numbers of people seeking refuge in OSCE countries.

Other speakers at the 2011 meeting included Federal President of Austria Heinz Fischer, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Azubalis, and Speaker Barbara Prammer of the Austrian Parliament.

The OSCE PA’s Special Representative on Gender Issues, Dr. Hedy Fry (Canada), also addressed the Winter Meeting, calling for the PA to set the example of gender equality by electing more women to leadership posts.

The three General Committees met on 24-25 February to discuss follow-up on the OSCE PA’s Oslo Declaration and to hear proposals for reports and draft resolutions for the

upcoming Annual Session in Belgrade. Rapporteurs Tonino Picula (Croatia), Serhiy Shevchuk (Ukraine) and Matteo Mecacci (Italy) presented their plans to the First, Second and Third Committees, respectively.

Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues Chris Smith (United States) led a discussion in the Second Committee on the role of the OSCE in combatting trafficking in human beings. In the Third Committee, parliamentarians heard a presentation from Uta Zapf, Chair of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Working Group on Belarus, as well as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic, regarding the situation in Belarus following the December 2010 election.

The Standing Committee heard reports from Special Representatives and Special Co-ordinators of recent election observation missions, including Tony Lloyd on Belarus. The Standing Committee also debated proposed changes to the Assembly’s Rules of Procedure. Of eight proposed amendments, six were adopted by the principle of consensus-minus-one. The new rules, which go into effect 25 March, will be distributed to all delegations as soon as possible.

SG Selection Process Confirmed

After numerous questions from parliamentarians about how the OSCE would select a new Secretary General, Minister Azubalis confirmed at a meeting with President Efthymiou that the process would be held at the foreign ministers’ level.

Mr. Efthymiou, with the permission of CiO Azubalis, reported what the Chair-in-Office said. “His position,” Mr. Efthymiou said, “is that the decision and the selection of the new Secretary General will be among the Ministers.”

“Here in Vienna in the Permanent Council will be no ranking and no vote about who is going to be the next Secretary General,” Mr. Efthymiou said. “The candidates will appear to the Permanent Council in order to present themselves, but the CiO, Minister Azubalis, will convey the names of the candidates without ranking, without vote by the Permanent Council to the Ministers in order to decide.”