

## Efthymiou calls for increased protection of journalists



Petros Efthymiou with Darius Semaska from the Office of the President of Lithuania; Dunja Mijatovic, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media; and Chairman-in-Office Audronius Azubalis

“No society is totally free without the unburdened exchange of news, views and ideas,” said OSCE PA President Petros Efthymiou to the opening session of a conference on safety of journalists in the OSCE area. “At the same time, no society is secure in the absence of a free press.”

Reminding participants of Assembly recommendations on protecting journalists, the President stressed the value of legislation designed to protect the free flow of information, particularly highlighting the PA’s recommendation against enacting or keeping laws which contain vague wording that can be abused.

President Efthymiou referred to the case of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who covered the war in Chechnya and was assassinated in 2006. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly presented her with the OSCE Prize for Journalism and Democracy in 2003, and upon accepting the award, Ms. Politkovskaya said, “My job is simple: to look around and to write about what I see.”

The President urged the OSCE to continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to preventing violence against journalists.

The 7-8 June conference in Vilnius was hosted by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Azubalis, and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic, and organized jointly by the OSCE Troika and Ukraine. The event brought together representatives of governments, law enforcement authorities, media, legislators and NGOs from across the OSCE to examine the current situation on the safety of journalists.

The President was accompanied by Presidential Advisor Andreas Baker and Director of Communications Neil Simon from the International Secretariat, and Secretary of Delegation Hara Papazoudi from the Hellenic Parliament.

## Elections were competitive, transparent and well-administered, say international observers in Skopje

At a press conference in Skopje on Monday, OSCE PA Treasurer and Special Representative on South East Europe Roberto Battelli said that the 5 June early parliamentary elections were competitive, transparent and well-administered, but certain aspects such as the blurring of the line between state and party require further attention.

“These elections have laid a cornerstone for a stable, democratic future,” said Roberto Battelli, appointed by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office as Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term observer mission and deliver the post-election statement on behalf of the OSCE. “The reality of election day has proven many of the pre-election allegations wrong and put the country on track to have a climate free of paranoia that undermines voters’ faith in the electoral process.”

Jean-Charles Gardetto, Head of the Delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), said that “while welcoming the diversity of opinions and media freedom, the delegation believes the media environment should be more dispassionate, tolerant and neutral and that the media should avoid becoming a propaganda tool serving the interests of the business world, the political parties or the government.”

On election day, voters were able to freely express their choice in a peaceful atmosphere, despite some irresponsible claims of irregularities by political parties, observers concluded. The voting and counting processes were also assessed as overwhelmingly positive, with no significant differences between Macedonian and ethnic Albanian areas.

The observers noted that fundamental freedoms were respected and candidates were able to campaign freely. The general tenor of the campaign was peaceful throughout the country. Allegations of voter intimidation lacked sufficient substantiation, but get-out-the-vote campaigns, in particular those of the governing party, often did not adequately separate party from state activities. The observers also noted instances of misuse of administrative resources.

Working with parliamentary colleagues from Council of Europe, as well as with the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE PA delegation consisted of around 60 observers.

From the International Secretariat, Ambassador Andreas Nothelle, Presidential Advisor Andreas Baker, Communications Director Neil Simon, Deputy Director of Administration Marc Carillet and Logistics Officer Iryna Sabashuk provided support for the observation mission.