

News from Copenhagen

Efthymiou urges peace, regional co-operation in Mediterranean visit



Efthymiou with Speaker Rivlin and Head of the Israeli Delegation to the OSCE PA Shai Hermesh in Jerusalem.



Efthymiou meeting with Prime Minister Salam Fayyad.

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Petros Efthymiou pushed for greater OSCE activity from Israeli parliamentarians and aimed to encourage peaceful dialogue between Palestinian and Israeli leaders during two days of meetings in Jerusalem and Ramallah this week.

Hosted by the Israeli Knesset and Speaker Reuven Rivlin, Efthymiou met with Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, the Head of Israel's OSCE PA delegation Shai Hermesh, alternate chair of the Knesset Foreign Affairs Committee Meir Sheerit, and other members of parliament and diplomats in Jerusalem.

In Ramallah, Efthymiou met with Palestinian National Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki for a full exchange of views on the peace process. Efthymiou, accompanied by Greek Consular General Sotirios Athanassiou, urged for a resumption of direct negotiations between the sides.

Efthymiou sought input from Israeli leaders regarding topics the OSCE should focus on to improve engagement with Mediterranean Partner countries. Ideas ranged from

water management, desalination and solar energy to telecom infrastructure, a topic which has already shown to be a source of economic co-operation in the region.

"Parliamentary diplomacy is key to developing lasting relationships and new bonds of trust needed to build a more free and secure Mediterranean region," Efthymiou said.

The President also met with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theofolis III, and visited holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem.

President Efthymiou was accompanied by Hara Papazoudi from the Hellenic Parliament and Communications Director Neil Simon from the OSCE PA International Secretariat.

Today, Efthymiou continues to Cyprus, where he has three days of high-level meetings with a range of governmental representatives. He is meeting today with the Minister of Education and Culture, George Demosthenous, the Deputy Mayor of Nicosia, Nicos Nouris, and the Chairman of the House Standing Committee on Foreign and European Affairs, Averof Neofytou.

PA participates in Serbia NAM

The OSCE PA was represented by Deputy Director for Field Operations Roberto Montella on an election Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) to Serbia on 8-10 February, organized by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Parliamentary elections are expected to be held in Serbia this spring.

NAM participants met with all the major players to discuss the political situation in Serbia and the usefulness of carrying out an election observation of the upcoming elections. The participants were informed that while Serbians have a high degree of trust in their elections, an election observation mission would be welcome.

The NAM met with election officials, party leaders, members of the media, and representatives of the international community in Serbia.

A decision as to whether the OSCE PA will observe these elections will be announced in due time.

CiO addresses Helsinki Commission

In a U.S. Helsinki Commission hearing last week featuring the OSCE Chair-in-Office, Irish Deputy Prime Minister Eamon Gilmore, the Head of the OSCE PA's U.S. Delegation Chris Smith welcomed the Irish Chairmanship's security agenda and highlighted the work of the Parliamentary Assembly on child safety.

Gilmore noted that the Chairmanship's priorities this year include protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as making progress on resolving protracted conflicts. "The continuing threat to fundamental freedoms and human rights in a number of OSCE participating States is a cause of real concern," he said.

"Last year, the Parliamentary Assembly passed a resolution urging the OSCE to take up the issue of international parental child abduction and urging a ministerial decision on that issue," said Congressman Smith, Chair of the Helsinki Commission and OSCE PA Special Representative on Human Trafficking.