

News from Copenhagen

OSCE PA participates in Ukrainian Chairmanship opening

Representatives of the PA are participating this week in the opening of the Ukrainian Chairmanship in Vienna, including the opening address by the new Chairman-in-Office, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Leonid Kozhara. The PA will also take part in the Annual Meeting of the Chairmanship and the Secretariat with the Heads of Field Operations and Institutions.

On 18 January, PA representatives will join the annual Regional Heads of Field Operations and Institutions Working Group sessions. Deputy Secretary General Tina Schoen will cover the session on the South Caucasus, with Special Representative Ambassador Andreas Nothelle covering South Eastern Europe, Programme Director Anna Chernova covering Central Asia and Deputy Director of Administration Marc Carillet covering Eastern Europe. Secretary General

Spencer Oliver and Director of Presidential Administration Roberto Montella will participate in the restricted session with the Chairman-in-Office and OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier.

Following these meetings, the OSCE PA will hold a reception, hosted by Secretary General Oliver and Ambassador Nothelle, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the OSCE PA Vienna Liaison Office. The Austrian Delegation to the OSCE PA, the Chairperson-in-Office, the 57 members of the Permanent Council (plus the EU ambassador), the Partners for Co-operation, all Heads of OSCE Field Operations and Institutions, and Secretary General Zannier and his senior staff have all been invited.

Please note: the visits to the Caucasus mentioned in last week's newsletter have been postponed.

Meeting Pope Benedict XVI, Migliori discusses religious freedom

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Riccardo Migliori (Italy) met last week with Pope Benedict XVI at the Holy See.

"Thanks to its tireless efforts, the Holy See plays a major role within the OSCE," Migliori said following the visit. "In particular, religious freedom is a litmus test to gauge respect of human rights by a given people, culture or nation. Against this backdrop we set ourselves the goal of adopting all possible instruments to ensure its protection."

The OSCE PA has addressed religious freedom in numerous resolutions and declarations in recent years. At the Annual Session in Belgrade in 2011, the Assembly urged the Mediterranean Partners "to ensure the protection of minority rights, particularly those of religious minorities."

Another resolution that year recommended "that a public



debate on intolerance and discrimination against Christians be initiated and that the right of Christians to participate fully in public life be ensured."

President Migliori's visit to the Holy See last week marked the first time that he had met Pope Benedict XVI.

Mecacci represents OSCE PA at Belarus event in Vilnius

Matteo Mecacci (Italy), Chair of the OSCE PA's General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, participated last week in a working dinner hosted by the Eastern Europe Studies Centre in Vilnius entitled "Making the Mission Possible: How to Break the Belarus Deadlock."

Experts and policymakers from a wide range of institutions participated in the event, including members of parliament from Lithuania and representatives of the European Union, the United Nations and civil society.

The discussion, moderated by EESC Director Kristina Vaiciunaite, included an introduction to the current geopolitical context, a review of existing Western policies towards Belarus, possible impacts of the emerging Eurasian

Union, and political approaches and strategies to address the situation in Belarus.

Mecacci discussed the situation of political prisoners in Belarus, which he pointed out has been an ongoing concern of the OSCE PA. He reiterated the PA's call for the release and exoneration of all those detained following the December 2010 presidential election.

Mecacci also called for "uncompromising dialogue with the authorities" to reverse major democratic setbacks suffered in recent years in Belarus, and to reopen the OSCE Office in Minsk, which has remained closed since March 2011.

The OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Working Group on Belarus is expected to meet on the margins of the 2013 Winter Meeting to be held in Vienna on 21-22 February.