

Special Representative Soares and President Grossruck visit Caucasus



Joao Soares and the Head of the OSCE Office in Baku, Ambassador Koray Targay.



Joao Soares and Wolfgang Grossruck with George Tsereteli and Giorgi Kandelaki in Tbilisi.

OSCE PA Special Representative on South Caucasus Joao Soares started a week-long visit to the Caucasus Sunday meeting with President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan.

Soares and Aliyev discussed issues related to the 2014 Annual Session of the OSCE PA, which is slated to be held in Baku. The two men, joined by Antonio Fernando Couto dos Santos of Portugal, discussed regional and economic developments, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh as well as bilateral relations between Portugal and Azerbaijan.

In Azerbaijan, Soares also met with the Speaker of Parliament, the OSCE PA Delegation headed by Bahar Muradova, and other officials. In addition, Soares met the Head of the OSCE Office in Baku, Ambassador Koray

Targay, and chaired a roundtable with representatives of civil society. With the support of the OSCE Office, he also held a meeting with high-level representatives of political parties in Azerbaijan.

Soares traveled to Georgia Tuesday, where PA President Wolfgang Grossruck joined him. In Tbilisi, the PA delegation met with President Mikheil Saakashvili and Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, and Members of Parliament, including

former Speaker of Parliament David Bakradze, OSCE PA Vice-President George Tsereteli and other Georgian OSCE PA members. Members discussed the political and economic situation in Georgia, the 2013 presidential election, protracted conflicts in the region, and Russian relations.

Deputy Secretary General Tina Schoen and Secretary of the Portuguese Delegation Nuno Paixao are traveling with Soares to all the three countries. Secretary of the Austrian Delegation Lukas Mussi is travelling in Georgia with President Grossruck.

Soares will travel to Armenia Thursday to continue discussions about developments in the region, particularly focusing on democratic reforms and unresolved conflicts.

OSCE PA team in place in Bulgaria for parliamentary elections

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's election observation team is in place in Sofia for Sunday's parliamentary elections in Bulgaria.

Treasurer Roberto Battelli (Slovenia), the leader of the OSCE PA delegation, which comprises 28 observers, will arrive in Sofia Thursday with Amb. Andreas Nothelle, who heads the experienced team of PA election experts. Nothelle and Roberto Montella, Andreas Baker, Semyon Dzakhaev, Iryna Sabashuk and Christian Pauzenberger, bring to Sofia experience from more than a hundred election observation missions.

On the recommendation of OSCE PA President Wolfgang Grossruck, the OSCE Chair-in-Office appointed Eoghan Murphy (Ireland) as Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission and deliver the preliminary post-election statement the day after the elections. Murphy arrived in Sofia Tuesday.

After the mission, Murphy will report to the Chair-in-Office and the PA President. Nothelle will report to the Permanent Council in Vienna on behalf of the PA, and Battelli will report to the Standing Committee at the Annual Session in Istanbul.

This is the first election observation mission since the OSCE PA Bureau decided in April to revive the 1997 Co-operation Agreement that guides OSCE election observation activities.

The Bureau's decision viewed the missions to Bulgaria and Albania as test cases to see whether ODIHR offered "positive signals" towards improving strict compliance with the Agreement.

So far, OSCE PA experts on the ground in Sofia report there have been no positive signals from the ODIHR in this regard. Specifically, the ODIHR continues violating the Co-operation Agreement by:

- not forwarding long-term observation reports to PA staff as required in the Agreement, instead allowing PA staff to only view the reports in-person in the ODIHR office;
- not collaborating with the PA in the initial drafting of the post-election statement, saying the Special Co-ordinator will receive a draft on Friday;
- barring PA experts from approaching ODIHR analysts directly to discuss election-related facts; PA staff are told any such discussions must be formally arranged through a liaison officer.

The OSCE PA made a pre-visit to Sofia in April when Senior Advisor Andreas Baker established the team's office.

The mission will join with observers from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.