

OSCE PA's 24th Annual Session set to begin in Helsinki

Final preparations are being made for the OSCE PA's 24th Annual Session set to begin in Helsinki on 5 July under the theme "Recalling the Spirit of Helsinki," a reference to the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. The Session will include presentation of final results of the PA's Helsinki +40 Project, which has marked the milestone anniversary with seminars throughout 2014 and 2015.

Draft resolutions from each of the Assembly's three general committees will be debated, amended, and approved through majority voting before they are included in the Declaration, which will then be sent to the foreign ministers of OSCE participating States and presented in national parliaments. More than 140 amendments have been submitted to the three principal resolutions, which include recommendations on the crisis in and around Ukraine, the plight of migrants and refugees, arms control, climate change and minority rights.

In addition to the three main resolutions of the Assembly's general committees, 15 supplementary items are scheduled to be considered at the Session, including the resolution "Helsinki +40: Building the OSCE of the Future." One of the products of the Assembly's Helsinki +40 Project, the item offers concrete reform proposals for the OSCE on the occasion of Organization's 40th anniversary. The item will be considered during a special event commemorating the anniversary, to be held on 6 July in Finlandia Hall, the site of the signing of the Final Act in 1975.

Keynote speakers scheduled to address the Assembly include Finnish President Sauli Niinisto, Finnish Foreign Minister Timo Soini, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic, OSCE PA President

Ilkka Kanerva, and several speakers of national parliaments.

On Tuesday, the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs announced that it would not grant visas to Head of the OSCE PA's Russian Delegation and Chair of the State Duma Sergey Naryshkin, as well as several other members of the Russian Delegation who fall under the European Union's travel ban.

In a letter to the Standing Committee on Wednesday, President Kanerva explained the decision: "In short, after consulting with all EU member states the MFA of Finland announced late on Tuesday, 30 June, that Finland is not in a position to grant an exception to EU entry ban to the individuals concerned from the Russian Delegation."

The Assembly will hold elections during the Helsinki meeting for the

posts of President, several Vice-Presidents, Treasurer and Committee Officers. The Standing Committee will vote on the Bureau's recommended candidate for the post of Secretary General, with a term beginning in 2016.

Culminating two years of advance work in making the Annual Session a reality, including several preparatory visits, members of the PA's conference organizing team have arrived in Helsinki and are holding meetings this week with staff of the Finnish Parliament and Finlandia Hall, where the meeting will take place.

Meetings of the Annual Session will be streaming on the Parliamentary Assembly's website at www.oscepa.org and selected photos will be posted on the PA's Flickr page at www.flickr.com/oscepa. Additional photos will be available on the Finnish Parliament's Flickr page at www.flickr.com/finnishparliament. The International Secretariat will be tweeting using the hashtag #PAHelsinki15 and encourages others to join the conversation by also using this hashtag.

PA President expresses condolences over the death of Petur Blondal

OSCE PA President Ilkka Kanerva (MP, Finland) issued the following statement on the passing of Petur Blondal of Iceland, the PA's Special Representative on the OSCE Budget:

"The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly mourns the loss of our longtime colleague and friend, Petur Blondal. Serving for more than a decade as the PA's Special Representative on the OSCE Budget, Petur will be remembered as a determined advocate for increased transparency and oversight in the Organization's finances. He was also a strong supporter of the OSCE's field presences, visiting many of them since his first

joined the Parliamentary Assembly in 1995.

"We will also remember Petur as a steadfast supporter of the Parliamentary Assembly and a believer in the important role that parliamentarians can play not only in their home countries, but also at the international level. Many of the ideas that the Assembly is proposing for OSCE reform in this, the 40th anniversary year of the Helsinki Final Act, are in line with what Petur had been calling for all along. I extend my deepest condolences to Petur Blondal's family, friends and colleagues."