

Migration in focus as PA delegation visits Czech Republic and Serbia



OSCE PA delegation visits a children's activity room at the residential center for asylum seekers in Kostelec nad Orlici, 2 Feb. 2016.

An OSCE PA delegation visited the Czech Republic this week and is currently in Serbia to see first-hand the countries' efforts in responding to the migration crisis impacting the OSCE area. Beginning the visit on 1-2 February in the Czech Republic, the delegation, which is led by the Chair of the OSCE PA's Third Committee Isabel Santos (MP, Portugal), visited a residential center for asylum seekers in Kostelec nad Orlici, some 150 kilometers east of Prague.

It also met with officials from the Interior Ministry's Department of Asylum and Migration Policy, parliamentarians from the Committee on European Affairs and the Sub-Committee on Migration and Asylum Policy, representatives of Prague 13 municipal district, the leadership of the Prague Integration Center, representatives of NGOs, and journalists from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Third Committee Vice-Chair Ivana Dobesova (MP, Czech Republic) hosted the delegation, which included Committee Rapporteur Gordana Comic (MP, Serbia) and the Parliamentary Assembly's Special Representative on OSCE Border Issues,

Ignacio Sanchez Amor (MP, Spain). Santos noted that the Czech Republic's commitment to EU resettlement policy is an important signal, but that it is vital for public discourse to respect the human dignity of asylum seekers.

The delegation continued to Serbia for meetings in Belgrade, and to visit refugee facilities in the south of the country. On Wednesday, the parliamentarians met with Head of the OSCE Mission Peter Burkhard for discussions that focused on possible options for furthering the OSCE's work on the migration issue.

The delegation met with Serbian Members of the OSCE PA at the Serbian National Assembly, where meetings also took place with the Chairperson and members of the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality. Additional meetings were held with the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, and with Hans Friedrich Schodder, UNHCR Representative in Serbia.

Topics of discussion have included the state of data sharing on migration flows, the need for more uniform procedures across the OSCE area, the situation along Serbia's borders, and migrant rights. The sides discussed the need for a greater focus on root causes, as well as clarifying the OSCE's role.

The delegation, which is supported by Maria Chepurina and Richard Solash of the International Secretariat, continues Thursday to southern Serbia, where it will be joined by Secretary General Roberto Montella to observe the situation on the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Preparations for 2016 Annual Session in progress with staff visit to Tbilisi

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella and Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia David Usupashvili last week signed an official agreement on Georgia's hosting of the Assembly's 2016 Annual Session, to be held in Tbilisi this summer. The meeting will feature debates on critical security topics, culminating in the adoption by majority vote of the 2016 Tbilisi Declaration. The Annual Session will be held on 1-5 July in the Expo Georgia Convention Centre in Tbilisi.

"Our upcoming Annual Session will have special resonance, as it will also mark the 25th anniversary of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly," said Secretary General Montella, who signed the agreement on behalf of PA President Ilkka Kanerva (MP, Finland). Speaker Usupashvili noted that 2016 also marks the 25th anniversary of Georgian independence.

Following the official signing last week, representatives from the OSCE PA's International Secretariat travelled to Tbilisi on Monday to continue preparations for the Session. Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares, Conference Co-ordinator Odile Lelarge and IT Co-ordinator Stephen Paul held an extensive programme this week to continue facilitating all logistical and practical issues with the Georgian Parliament.



Roberto Montella (right) and David Usupashvili sign the Annual Session agreement in Tbilisi, 27 January 2016.

In meetings with Speaker Usupashvili and senior staff, the PA team has been working to develop the programme; prepare spaces in the venue with Convention Centre staff; address IT issues; facilitate lodging, transport, protocol and security; handle side events, as well as other practical matters. Pallares and Usupashvili also agreed on the work programme in the months ahead to continue the close co-operation between the Georgian Parliament and the International Secretariat.

Pallares reported on Wednesday that preparations are proceeding well in the Georgian capital and noted that a detailed report on the progress of preparations for the Session will be presented at the Standing Committee meeting in Vienna on 25 February.