

News from Copenhagen

OSCE PA

Special Edition

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OSCE Parliamentary Assembly turns 25



On 3 April 1991 – exactly 25 years ago this Sunday – the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly was born. On that historic day in Madrid, on the initiative of the Spanish Parliament, our predecessors answered the call of the Charter of Paris, which underscored the necessity of greater parliamentary involvement in the then-CSCE. But today, as we reflect on our founding vision and the many chapters of OSCE PA history, the number 25 isn't the first that comes to mind. In a sense, all anniversaries are somewhat artificial, but the number 1 billion is not. It's very real. One billion represents the number of citizens of the OSCE area whose voices we work to amplify – and whose security, human rights and welfare we strive to ensure.

Twenty-five simply doesn't capture the sizes and scopes, big and small, that our work had taken on so far. When our parliamentarians stepped onto Maidan in 2014 and led the historic election observation mission in Ukraine, our experience and leadership was at the very center of world politics. In 2015, when President Kanerva visited a refugee camp on Turkey's border with Syria, he entered the much smaller world of a young boy, one of the many lives affected by the current crisis of migrants and refugees.

Looking back, I think of thousands of colored cards that our MPs have held aloft during voting at our Annual Sessions, bringing real democratic decision-making to the OSCE and shaping the policies of our governments. More than 5,000 of our parliamentarians and staff have observed votes in more than 30 countries – from post-Communism Russia to post-Arab-Spring Tunisia – and the number 25 pales in comparison again. I also think of all of the visits, to prisoners of conscience and presidents, alike. I couldn't begin

to count how many new contacts have been forged between parliamentarians over the course of the brainstorming, debate and dialogue that is our Assembly's lifeblood. And how many times have our parliamentarians spoken out, in words or in actions, for the people they'll probably never meet, but who deserve societies shaped by OSCE principles?

We also express our special thanks at this time to all of our Presidents and Bureau members, past and present, for their tremendous leadership. The Assembly will always be indebted to our first Secretary General, Spencer Oliver of the United States, whose fervent belief in parliamentary diplomacy ensured our success. We remain grateful to the Danish Parliament, the host of the PA headquarters in Copenhagen since 1993, and to the Austrian Government, the host of our Vienna Liaison Office.

The Parliamentary Assembly shows no signs of slowing down. We recently concluded our Helsinki +40 Project, continuing the tradition of all democratic parliaments in pushing for progress and reform. The year ahead promises major election observation missions, high-stakes diplomatic visits, special seminars and continuing focus on the crises in and around Ukraine and of migration. I am honored to have assumed the role of Secretary General at this busy and exciting time for us. I think we'll all agree that 25 years is far more than just the sum of its parts. In the years to come, let's see just how far the collective power of our parliamentarians can take us toward that elusive and noblest of goals, human security.

- Secretary General Roberto Montella