

News from Copenhagen

Harstedt in Minsk for presentation of ODIHR's final report on Belarus elections



Kent Harstedt with CEC Chair L.M. Ermoshina, 20 December



With President Alexander Lukashenko, 20 Dec. (Presidential Administration, Belarus)



With the Interagency Working Group for electoral issues, 20 December

OSCE PA Vice-President Kent Harstedt (MP, Sweden) is in Belarus this week following up on the parliamentary elections that were held in September. Harstedt, who served as Special Co-ordinator of the short-term OSCE observers to the elections, is presenting the Election Observation Mission Final Report published earlier this month by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Harstedt also serves as Chair of the OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Working Group on Belarus, which was established in 1998 to assist in the development of democracy in Belarus.

In meetings with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, officials from the Central Election Commission, political parties, and international community and civil society representatives, Harstedt has highlighted some of the report's key findings, noting that although the 11 September elections were efficiently organized and steps were taken by the authorities to address earlier OSCE recommendations, a number of long-standing systemic shortcomings remain. The legal framework, for example, restricts political rights and fundamental freedoms and was interpreted in an overly

restrictive manner, Harstedt pointed out. He also noted that media coverage of the campaign did not enable voters to make an informed choice.

He expressed appreciation, however, for the openness of the authorities to engage in dialogue on these matters and welcomed further discussions. "We appreciate the fact that the authorities at the highest level take seriously the issues raised in the report," he said, noting his hope that this would contribute to progress for the Belarusian people. He also reiterated the PA's gratitude to Belarus for agreeing to host the Assembly's Annual Session in July 2017.

This week's visit was organized by the OSCE/ODIHR. In addition to Harstedt, participants include Tana de Zulueta, who served as Head of the OSCE/ODIHR's long-term observation mission, Jean-Pierre Froehly, Senior Political Adviser and Head of the ODIHR Director's Office, Marc Carillet, Deputy Director of the OSCE PA's Vienna Liaison Office, and staff of the ODIHR's elections department. Meetings continue Thursday with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and members of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly.

Season's Greetings from OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella



Copenhagen's Nyhavn neighborhood lit up at night.

"As 2016 draws to a close, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all members and staff of OSCE PA delegations who have made this such a productive year of Assembly activities.

"From providing leadership on the refugee and migrant crisis to responding to the attempted coup in Turkey to facilitating conflict mediation, I believe we have made a real difference this year, and to this I owe thanks to everyone who has made it possible. This includes not only the staff of the

International Secretariat, but also colleagues in other OSCE Institutions and executive structures. It was also a particularly active year for OSCE PA election observation activities, with 334 parliamentarians participating in ten missions across the OSCE area, working closely with colleagues from ODIHR and other international parliamentary organizations.

"Special thanks also go out to the PA's national delegations that have hosted meetings of the Assembly this year, including Georgia, which hosted the Annual Session, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which hosted the Autumn Meeting. And on behalf of the PA, I would also like to thank the Danish Parliament and Austrian Government for hosting our offices in Copenhagen and Vienna.

"As we prepare for a busy 2017, I wish all delegations a very happy holiday season, and all the best for the new year."

– OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella