

## PA leadership meets in Copenhagen, prepares for Berlin Session

On Monday 16 April the Bureau of the OSCE PA met in Copenhagen, with preparations for the upcoming Annual Session in Berlin in focus. The meeting served as an opportunity for the Rapporteurs of the three General Committees to describe their plans for their draft reports and resolutions and to receive input and feedback from their colleagues. In the coming weeks, Kristian Vigenin (MP, Bulgaria), Sofio Katsarava (MP, Georgia) and Kyriakos Hadjiyanni (MP, Cyprus) are expected to finalize their work for the First, Second and Third Committees, which will then be circulated to all delegations in advance of further consideration at the 7-11 July Session in Berlin.

President George Tsereteli (MP, Georgia) thanked the Danish parliament for continuing to support the OSCE PA through hosting meetings and the International Secretariat, and reported to the Bureau on his major activities since the Winter Meeting, including visits to Baku, Berlin, and Warsaw. Bureau Members also received reports on the activities of Ad Hoc Committees and Special Representatives, as well as on preparations for upcoming meetings, including the Autumn Meeting in Bishkek.

Following a busy election calendar in recent months, the Bureau heard reports on recent observation activities in Italy,



Russia and Azerbaijan. Members subsequently engaged in a discussion related to the appropriate division of responsibility in OSCE election observation work, the expansion of the number of international observers noted on recent missions, and interactions with host countries.

The report of the Treasurer was also presented, including a draft budget for the coming fiscal year, which was endorsed by the Bureau, and will be circulated in advance of the July Annual Session in accordance with the Assembly's Rules of Procedure.

Secretary General Roberto Montella reported on the work of the International Secretariat and recent Assembly activities. He encouraged continued support to reform efforts being undertaken by the OSCE governmental side and executive structures, noting that many are aligned with previous OSCE PA recommendations.

## Azerbaijan election: genuine competition lacking in an environment of curtailed rights and freedoms

In a press conference in Baku on 12 April, observers announced that the presidential election in Azerbaijan took place within a restrictive political environment and under laws that curtail fundamental rights and freedoms, which are prerequisites for genuine democratic elections. Against this backdrop and in the absence of pluralism, including in the media, the election lacked genuine competition, they said.

Announcing the conclusions, Nilza de Sena (MP, Portugal) said that "We have noted the positive attitude displayed by the national authorities of Azerbaijan towards international election observation, as well as the professional work of the Central Election Commission in the pre-election period. We stand ready to continue our co-operation and turn it into a joint effort to tackle the fundamental problems that a restrictive political and legal environment, which does not allow for genuine competition, poses for free elections." De Sena, who had been appointed Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, stressed the OSCE's willingness to support future development in the country.

The preliminary statement, which was a joint endeavour of the OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe PA notes that other candidates refrained from directly challenging or criticizing the incumbent, and that distinction was not made between his campaign and his official activities. At the

same time, observers noted that the authorities were co-operative and international observers were able to operate freely in the pre-election period, and the election administration was well resourced and prepared the election efficiently.

On election day 350 international observers were deployed across the country. Observers reported widespread disregard for mandatory procedures, a lack of transparency, and numerous serious irregularities, including ballot box stuffing. More than half of the vote counts were assessed negatively, largely due to deliberate falsifications and an obvious disregard for procedures.

"A few weeks of campaigning during which candidates could present their views on television cannot make up for years during which restrictions on freedom of expression have stifled political debate," said Margareta Kiener Nellen, Head of the Swiss delegation to the OSCE PA who served as leader of the 48-member OSCE PA delegation. "The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will certainly continue to support all steps by the authorities that will bring the country forward on a path towards creating the open political environment necessary for truly free and fair elections."

From the International Secretariat the observation mission was supported by Secretary General Roberto Montella, Ambassador Andreas Nothelle, Francesco Pagani, Andreas Baker and Tim Knoblaue.