

News from Copenhagen

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Parliamentarians Monitor Presidential Elections in Belarus

"These presidential elections fell short of meeting international standards for democratic elections" said Vice-President Kimmo Kiljunen, MP (Finland) who acted as Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and presented the Preliminary Statement of the International Limited Election Observation Mission on the presidential elections held in Belarus on 9 September 2001. The Statement at the same time acknowledges the emergence of a pluralist civil society and stresses that the isolation of Belarus is not in the best interest of the Belarussian people. Mr. Kiljunen led more than 200 international observers including more than 50 OSCE parliamentarians, who were deployed across Belarus on election day and delivered the Preliminary Post-election Statement at a press conference on 10 September in conjunction with the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, which together with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly form a "Parliamentary Troika". The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) provided logistical and technical support for the Mission. The European Parliament delegation was led by Mr. Jan Wiersma, MEP and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was led by Stef Goris, MP (Belgium).



The Election Observation Mission undertook its monitoring mission on the basis of international standards for conduct of democratic elections as formulated by the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The Election Observation Mission confirmed the importance of the four criteria formulated by the Parliamentary Troika as the benchmarks for

democratic elections and the main conditions for the ongoing democratization process in Belarus: transparency in the election process; access of opponents to the state-run mass media; non-discrimination of political opponents, and meaningful functions for the parliamentary body.

President Severin Addresses the Permanent Council

On 30 August, Mr. Severin delivered his second address to the OSCE Permanent Council in the capacity of President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. The President highlighted the importance of the Parliamentary Assembly in bringing public support to the OSCE and thus mobilizing political, legislative, human, financial and budgetary resources for the OSCE as well as acting as a link between the Organization and national parliaments and governments. President Severin also drew attention to the unanimous adoption of a Resolution on transparency and accountability by the Assembly during its Annual Session in Paris last July. *"Parliamentarians demand from the OSCE the same democratic principles that we advocate at national level...it will be impossible for us to reach the goals of our Organization as long as our own internal structures do not live up to the democratic standards we apply elsewhere. The outcome of the last OSCE Ministerial Meeting held here in Vienna last December clearly shows the existence of a democratic deficit in the OSCE."* said Mr. Severin. In this regard the President informed the Permanent Council that the OSCE PA Standing Committee has established an ad hoc committee to monitor and promote the implementation of the Parliamentary Assembly's policies. Another area highlighted by Mr. Severin as in need of reform are the OSCE's decision-making procedures. *"The consensus rule, combined with the lack of transparency, has led to a situation where one country can block any important proposal and do so secretly avoiding responsibility."* said Mr. Severin *"The approximate consensus system, proposed by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, would not remove the general principle of the consensus, but it would eliminate the single country veto which prevents the Organization from acting in a timely and effective manner."*

President Severin visits the headquarters of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture in Copenhagen

On 6 September 2001, in connection with his visit to the International Secretariat in Copenhagen, OSCE PA President Severin paid a visit to the headquarters of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture (IRCT). Accompanied by two staff members of the OSCE PA's International Secretariat Mr. Severin was briefed by the Secretary General of the IRCT, Mr. Jens Modvig, on the activities, objectives and future plans of the Council. The briefing was followed by a debate including other senior members of the Council. The IRCT is an international, independent health professional organization which promotes and supports the rehabilitation of torture victims and works for the prevention of torture worldwide.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly adopted at its Paris Annual Session a Resolution on the Prevention of Torture that was welcomed by the IRCT. During the meeting in Copenhagen possible ways of furthering co-operation between the IRCT and the Parliamentary Assembly were discussed, including possible visits by ad hoc committees of the Assembly to local centres of the IRCT.

OSCE PA Gender Unit Re-organized

Following the Annual Session and the proposal presented by the Norwegian and Danish Delegations to appoint a gender adviser at the International Secretariat, the Gender Unit in the Secretariat has been adjusted. Mr. Pentti Väänänen, Deputy Secretary General, heads the Gender Unit of the OSCE PA; Tina Schøn has been named Gender Adviser by the Secretary General and, in addition, the Gender Unit is assisted by Research Fellows on a regular basis. During the Annual Session, several Delegations also supported the informal Norwegian-Danish proposal for the nomination of an OSCE Parliamentarian with responsibility for gender issues. President Severin has expressed his intention to appoint a Special Rapporteur on this issue in the autumn of 2001.

President Severin expresses condolences to the American people.

The President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. Adrian Severin welcomes the support shown by the international community in condemning the terrorist attacks in the United States on Tuesday. In a letter to the Head of the United States' Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Mr. Severin expressed his deepest condolences for the tragic loss of innocent lives, on behalf of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. *"In this time of great sadness, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly wants to unite its voice with all those around the world condemning these inhuman, cowardly, and unjustifiable attacks on the American people. We believe that this has been an attack on all of us, as the human and political principles we advocate have been severely threatened."* Said President Severin.