

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Fall Meetings in Rome

More than 160 parliamentarians from 49 participating States took part in the 2003 OSCE PA Fall Meetings, which were held in Rome from 9-11 October. The two-day Conference on Religious Freedom (9-10 October) consisted of a series of presentations and discussions focusing on the law and politics of religious freedom, religious tolerance in pluralistic societies and religious freedom and democracy.



The Conference, organized following the invitation of the Italian Parliament, was addressed by prominent officials including Bruce George, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly; Pier Ferdinando Casini, Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies; Antonio d'Ali, Deputy Minister of Interior; and Marcello Pacini, Head of the Italian Delegation to the OSCE PA.

The conference was also addressed by expert speakers including Abdelfattah Amor, Special UN Rapporteur for Religious Freedom, as well as Silvio Ferrari and Brigitte Basdevant-Gaudemet, Members of the European Consortium for Church and State.

The second OSCE PA Fall Meeting in Rome was the

Parliamentary Forum on the Mediterranean (11 October), which focused on strengthening security in the Mediterranean and developing the OSCE Mediterranean Dimension.

Prominent speakers included President Bruce George; Cesare Salvi, Deputy President of the Italian Senate; Franco Frattini, Italian Minister for Foreign

Affairs; Jan Kubis, OSCE Secretary General; and Christian Juret, Diplomatic Advisor of the EU Representative for the Middle East.

In his contribution, President George expressed his belief that there is a growing awareness in the OSCE that only a free, democratic, prosperous and undivided Europe will be able to promote security, stability and prosperity in the adjacent area and also that European security will benefit from positive developments in other regions, including the Mediterranean. The Parliamentary Forum followed up on the outcomes of last year's OSCE PA Fall Conference in Madrid on ensuring peace, democracy and prosperity in the Mediterranean.

The International Secretariat is preparing a summary report on the Rome Fall Meetings, which will be available shortly.

Parliamentary Comments on OSCE Budget 2004

In conjunction with the Fall Meetings in Rome, the Assembly's Standing



Committee of Heads of Parliamentary Delegations discussed, on 10 October, the general activities of the Assembly and followed up on the Assembly's Rotterdam Declaration on the role of the OSCE in the new architecture of Europe.

The Standing Committee was also briefed by OSCE Secretary General Jan Kubis on the proposed OSCE Budget 2004, after which the Members of the Standing Commit-

tee discussed the draft and put questions to the Secretary General.

After the debate it was agreed that the OSCE PA

would present its comments and recommendations to the OSCE budget for 2004. The President of the Assembly will forward them to the OSCE Chairmanship and Secretary General in November. The Heads of National Delegations have been invited by OSCE PA Secretary General Spencer Oliver to forward their comments on the OSCE Budget to the International Secretariat no later than 29 October.

Giovanni Kessler Leads OSCE Election Monitors in Azerbaijan

An OSCE PA delegation of seventeen parliamentarians from twelve different countries observed the presidential elections in Azerbaijan on 15 October 2003.

The Mission was headed by OSCE PA Vice President Giovanni Kessler, who acted as Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, and worked in close co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

In delivering the joint post-election statement, Mr. Kessler stated that, although voting in the 15 October election was generally well administered in most polling stations, the overall election process still fell short of international standards in several respects.

Mr. Kessler also expressed his worries about tensions arising from the low level of mutual trust within Azeri society and urged all parties to exercise restraint.