

President Hastings holds high-level meetings in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia



President Hastings meets with the Speaker of Lithuanian Seimas, Artūras Paulauskas



President Hastings meets with the President of Latvia, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga



President Hastings meets with the President of Estonia, Arnold Rüütel

From 28 August to September 1 2005, Assembly President Alcee L. Hastings paid official visits to Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia

In Lithuania, President Hastings met with the Speaker of Parliament, the Foreign Minister as well as with Members of the Lithuanian Delegation to the OSCE PA. The President and his interlocutors discussed the progress that has been made in Lithuania with the country's membership in NATO and the EU as well as new challenges facing the Baltic region. President Hastings stressed the importance of having parliamentary representatives of the Baltic States involved in OSCE PA activities as they, with their unique experience and knowledge, are well-placed to assist the OSCE in promoting its principles and values in other countries, particularly in election observation. President Hastings also focused on the need for reform of the OSCE in the meetings, and the Assembly's calls for the OSCE to implement the recommendations proposed by the OSCE Eminent Persons and the OSCE PA Colloquium was supported by his interlocutors. During his visit to Lithuania, President Hastings also participated in and addressed the 14th Session of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference where he stressed the special attention that the OSCE PA has paid to the protection of national minorities, and discussed the important role played by parliamentarians in the protection of minorities.

In Latvia, President Hastings met the President of the country, the Speaker of Parliament, the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as Members of the OSCE PA Delegations and participants in the Latvian-American Inter-parliamentary Co-operation Group. President Hastings discussed the important development that Latvia has gone through since becoming a Member of the EU and NATO and the country's priorities for the future. The President discussed the situation of the Russian minority and other population groups and in particular focused on the need for education. In addition, reform of the OSCE was high on the agenda of the visit and the interlocutors, particularly the Minister of Foreign Affairs, supported the need to further activate the OSCE in order to implement the commitments that participating States have agreed upon. Several members of the Latvian Parliament, including the Speaker, stressed the important role of parliamentary diplomacy and the very important work that the OSCE and the OSCE PA carry out in election observation.

During the visit to Estonia, President Hastings met with the country's President, the Speaker of Parliament, Members of the OSCE PA Delegation, Members of the Foreign Relations Committee, the Foreign Minister, the

Minister for Population Affairs, the Chairperson of the Jewish Community in Estonia as well as the OSCE Representative to the Commission on Military Pensioners. Also in Estonia, President Hastings discussed the positive development that has been taking place with the accession to the EU and NATO and the challenges that Estonia faces in the future. The situation of minorities, particularly the Russian community, was widely discussed and problems related to language and education in this regard were stressed. In addition, the future of the OSCE was widely discussed, and the President and Foreign Minister were both very supportive of President Hastings' calls for prompt implementation of recommendations on OSCE reform, and President Rüütel particularly expressed his support of OSCE reform plans aimed at making the Organization more transparent and effective. In addition, several of the interlocutors stressed the important role that the OSCE PA plays in OSCE election observation missions.

From the OSCE PA International Secretariat, Secretary General Spencer Oliver and Deputy Secretary General Tina Schön accompanied the President on the visit, as did Vanessa Griddine from President Hastings' Office in Washington.