

## Winter Meeting opens in Vienna

The seventh Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly opened on Thursday 21 February in Vienna before almost 240 parliamentarians from 48 of the 56 OSCE participating States.

During the opening session, the Meeting was addressed by OSCE PA President Goran Lennmarker, the President of Austria's National Council, Barbara Prammer, and State Secretary Teija Tiilikainen, the special representative of the Finnish OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva.

"The parliamentary dimension is vital for the good health of the OSCE," said Tiilikainen in her speech.

The opening session was preceded by the Assembly's Standing Committee, during which the OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut addressed the Committee. It was followed by sessions of its three General Committees.

The two-day Winter Meeting is the second largest conference on the Assembly's conference calendar after the Annual Session, which this year will be held in Kazakhstan's capital Astana.



Teija Tiilikainen addresses the Assembly, with Barbara Prammer and Goran Lennmarker

On Friday, the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and Kosovo will be among the topics of discussion during the Assembly's special debate on topical issues.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, created by the CSCE Summit in Paris in 1990, is the parliamentary dimension of the OSCE. The primary task of the 320-member Assembly is to facilitate inter-parliamentary dialogue.

## Armenian presidential election mostly in line with OSCE commitments

OSCE PA Vice-President Anne-Marie Lizin announced on Wednesday that the 19 February presidential election in Armenia mostly met OSCE commitments. "In an active and competitive election, Armenians turned out in strength to choose between genuine political alternatives. The problems we observed, particularly during the counting, must be addressed to increase overall confidence in the electoral process", said Anne-Marie Lizin, OSCE PA Vice President and Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE short-term observers.

Ms. Lizin, appointed by the Chairman-in-Office as the Special Co-ordinator for the OSCE short-term observers, was speaking at a press conference in Yerevan. Vice-President

Lizin also led the OSCE delegation of 41 parliamentarians.

The OSCE observers found that the Armenian authorities made genuine efforts to address shortcomings noted in previous elections. But there is a need for further improvements and political will to tackle concerns such as the lack of public confidence in the electoral process and the absence of a clear separation between State and party functions. The conduct of the count did not contribute to reduce suspicions among stakeholders.

The CEC ensured a high level of transparency, except in the consideration of complaints that were for the most part dealt with in informal sessions. Although consistent with the election code, this process did not allow the presence of candidate proxies, observers and media, thus undermining trust.

The field of nine candidates offered voters a genuine choice. Many candidates campaigned actively and were able to discuss their programmes with voters. The authorities made efforts to provide a permissive campaign environment. The freedoms of assembly, association and expression were generally respected but on several occasions citizens were obstructed in exercising their right to attend campaign events.

The observation mission was a joint undertaking with the OSCE/ODIHR, as well as with the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament. From the International Secretariat, the delegation was supported by Deputy Secretary General Tina Schoen, Programme/Press Officer Andreas Baker and Logistics Officer Petra Jezkova.



Anne-Marie Lizin speaks with journalists in Yerevan