

News from Copenhagen

Mediterranean Forum focuses on integration and co-operation

With the goal of developing stronger ties with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, the Assembly's annual Mediterranean Forum was held at the Fall Meetings of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Toronto, Canada, on 18 September.

Chaired by Canadian Senator Jerry Grafstein, Vice-President of the Assembly, this year's Forum focused on multilateral initiatives to promote integration and co-operation in the Mediterranean, including the Union for the Mediterranean and the OSCE Mediterranean Dimension.

It was the best attended Forum since its establishment in Rome in 2003. High level parliamentary representatives from Algeria, Israel, Jordan, and Morocco actively contributed to the debate.

In his opening statements Senator Grafstein underlined the importance of economic co-operation and free trade in promoting stability and co-operation and highlighted the potential of the OSCE model for the Mediterranean as an inclusive security organization.

Assembly President Joao Soares remarked that the annual Forum "underlines the fact that Mediterranean issues are closely linked with OSCE issues, as has been recognized since

the beginning of the Helsinki process."

U.S. Congressman Alcee L. Hastings, who serves as Special Representative on Mediterranean issues, underlined the value of promoting the OSCE Mediterranean dimension at the parliamentary level, stressing that European security is directly linked to security and stability in the Mediterranean.

Gilles Mentré, Representative of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, introduced a French proposal intended to further develop the EU's Euromediterranean Partnership. Entitled the Union for the Mediterranean, the initiative unites all EU members with several non-EU countries that border the Mediterranean Sea, promoting co-operation on energy issues, security, immigration and trade, as well as fighting corruption, terrorism, organized crime and human trafficking.

Ambassador Mara Marinaki, Permanent Representative of Greece to the OSCE and Chair of the OSCE Contact Group with the Mediterranean Partners, underlined the importance that Greece - OSCE Chair in 2009 - attaches to the strengthening of OSCE Mediterranean dimension.

She invited the Assembly to the next Conference to be held in Amman later this month on the topic: "The OSCE approach to regional security - a model for the Mediterranean."

Russia and Georgia debate the situation in the South Caucasus



Eka Tkeshelashvili

For the first time since violence erupted in the South Caucasus last August, Georgia and Russia debated the issue face to face in a special session at the recent Fall Meetings in Toronto.

The debate was led by the two especially invited guests, Georgia's Foreign Minister, Eka Tkeshelashvili, and Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin. In addition, OSCE PA President Emeritus and Special Envoy for Georgia, Goran Lennmarker, reported on his recent visit to the region.

Over 40 parliamentarians of the 180 parliamentarians who attended the conference participated in the debate.

Mr. Lennmarker said that refugees will define this conflict and suggested the creation of a "Catastrophe Commission" to try to reach the truth about what has happened during the hostilities, and particularly to answer the question whether or



Vitaly Churkin

not ethnic cleansing has occurred. He said that the whole lesson of Europe is that there can be no ethnic cleansing, and we must see to it that this not take place in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

"Recent weeks have been a very difficult time for many people in the OSCE region," said OSCE PA President Joao Soares in his introductory remarks. "Most importantly, my sincere sympathy goes to those hurt and killed during the conflict in Georgia. I am pleased that we could bring representatives from Georgia, Russia and the OSCE together here in Toronto to discuss this issue."

Other speakers in the debate included Ambassador Aleksii Harkonen, head of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, who informed the parliamentarians about the activities of the Finnish Chairman-in-Office in the Georgia crisis, and the Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.