

President Soares in Vilnius to prepare future meetings

OSCE PA President Joao Soares held meetings in Vilnius on 29-30 January in preparation for the Assembly's upcoming Annual Session in Lithuania. In a ceremony at the Lithuanian Parliament, President Soares and Parliament Speaker Arunas Valinskas signed the official agreement regarding the Session to be held in June-July 2009.

President Soares met with Foreign Minister Vygaudas Usackas, Speaker Valinskas and the Head of Lithuania's OSCE PA Delegation, Vilija Aleknaite Abramikiene, to discuss current issues and the Assembly's agenda for the coming months. Secretary General Spencer Oliver also took part in the visit.

The President discussed the upcoming Winter Meeting and the expected Special Debate on new proposals for future European security arrangements as well as issues related to the world financial crisis, which will be the focus of discussions during the PA's Economic Conference in Dublin in May. He stressed that the OSCE -- particularly the Parliamentary Assembly -- is the most appropriate place to have open and frank debates about these major issues on the international agenda.



President Joao Soares and Speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament, Arunas Valinskas

The President was impressed by the preparations being made by the Lithuanian Parliament for the Annual Session, and expressed his confidence that Vilnius would prove to be an excellent venue for the OSCE PA meeting.

The delegation also met with the Mayor of Vilnius, Juozas Imbrasas, who informed of the many events taking place in Vilnius which is the European Capital of Culture for 2009. The President and the Secretary General were accompanied by Presidential Advisors Andreas Baker from Copenhagen and Nuno Paixao from the Portuguese Parliament.

Winter Meeting to include Special Debate on new European security proposals

On 19-20 February, more than 270 parliamentarians from OSCE participating States will meet in Vienna for the eighth OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Winter Meeting.

The President of the Austrian Nationalrat, Ms. Barbara Prammer, will address the Delegates during the joint meeting of the three General Committees on 19 February. The opening session will also be addressed by the Greek Foreign Minister and OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Dora Bakoyannis, as well as the President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly John Tanner and the OSCE PA's President, Joao Soares.

Friday's Special Debate, traditionally held each February, will focus on the new Initiatives on European security architecture put forward by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, as well as French President Nicolas Sarkozy. The main speakers will be Alexander Groushko, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Veronique Bujon-Barre, Deputy Director for Political and Security Affairs of the French Foreign Ministry, and President Joao Soares.

During the closing session on 20 February, Delegates will hear a presentation by the OSCE PA's Special Representative on Gender Issues, OSCE PA Vice-President Tone Tingsgaard, followed by concluding remarks by the Chairs of the Committees and by President Soares.

The OSCE PA Winter Meeting, addressed by the top officials of the OSCE, including the Secretary General and Heads of Institutions, is the second largest event in the OSCE PA calendar, topped only by the Annual Session.

President Soares to Moldova, Goran Lennmarker to the Caucasus

The President and the President Emeritus of the OSCE PA, Joao Soares and Goran Lennmarker, will set out on important visits next week in four OSCE participating States.

Mr. Soares will pay an official visit Moldova, including Transnistria, from 9 to 12 February. The visit will also serve as preparation for the OSCE PA observation mission to the Moldovan parliamentary elections on 5 April.

The OSCE PA President will meet with the Chairman of the Parliament, the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as with the Chairman of the Transnistrian Supreme Soviet and the Transnistrian leader. During the visit, Mr. Soares will be joined by OSCE PA parliamentarians from Greece, Turkey, and Italy, and the OSCE PA Secretary General Spencer Oliver. The visit, which is supported by the OSCE Mission to Moldova, also provides an opportunity for MPs to get acquainted with OSCE work in the field.

President Emeritus Goran Lennmarker, who is also the OSCE PA's Special Representative on Nagorno-Karabakh and Special Envoy to Georgia, will be visiting all three countries in the South Caucasus next week, starting in Armenia and ending in Azerbaijan. His visit will include talks with the governmental and parliamentary leadership in all three countries, as well as missions in the region.

Mr. Lennmarker will report on his trip at the OSCE PA Winter Meeting in Vienna 19-20 February. He will be accompanied by Deputy Secretary General Tina Schøn.