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PA President calls for OSCE reforms, supports Summit

Speaking at the 17th OSCE Ministerial Council in Athens on 1 December, OSCE PA President Joao Soares called for organizational reforms to overcome inefficiency and the cumbersome decision-making processes in Vienna. These reforms, he said, would lead to a revival of the OSCE.

"The decision-making structures in Vienna are virtually unable to reach agreement, particularly on key political issues," Mr. Soares said, and "for many years now the Permanent Council has proved unable to come to a single decision that in any substantive way improves upon the existing commitments that we already have."

President Soares also pleaded for a greater effort on the part of the OSCE to seriously review implementation of the OSCE's commitments, but, unfortunately, he said, our willingness and ability for serious reviews have slowly eroded in recent years.

The President highlighted the OSCE field missions as institutions that "represent the core of the OSCE's current work." They are vital in ensuring the implementation of OSCE commitments and therefore "must be maintained and indeed strengthened." However, he said, "their ability to help participating States implement their OSCE commitments is being hampered by the unworkable processes in Vienna and constant cuts to the OSCE budget."



President Joao Soares addresses the 17th OSCE Ministerial Council

"I believe that it is time to once again focus on whether we -- all of us -- are keeping our promises," Mr. Soares said, adding that he hoped that the OSCE can be reinvigorated through a genuine review process at the highest political level.

Part of the revival would be, according to Mr. Soares, to hold an OSCE Summit next year, as proposed by Kazakhstan -- next year's OSCE Chair-in-Office. Such a Summit would be a reminder to our citizens of the "important contribution of the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris," he stated.

The full text of President Soares's speech is available at www.oscepa.org.

OSCE PA Bureau meets in Athens to prepare for next year

The Bureau of the OSCE PA met in connection with the 17th Ministerial Council, with PA Vice-President Petros Efthymiou welcoming the participants to Athens.

In the meeting of the Assembly's leadership on 30 November, members dealt with a series of issues. President Joao Soares, Secretary General Spencer Oliver and Treasurer Roberto Battelli all reported on their activities since the last ordinary Bureau meeting in April in Lisbon, and on the Assembly's budget for next year.

The Bureau also discussed preparations for meetings in 2010, including the Winter Meeting in February in Vienna, the next Bureau meeting in Copenhagen in April, the Trans-Asian Parliamentary Forum proposed by Kazakhstan for Almaty in May, and the 19th Annual Session in Oslo in July.

Also addressing the Bureau were the Alternate Foreign Minister of Greece, Dimitris Droutsas, and Kazakh Foreign Minister, incoming Chairman-in-Office, Kanat Saudabayev.

In his address, Mr. Saudabayev pledged that Kazakhstan will continue the efforts of the Greek Chairmanship in initiating discussions about all aspects of OSCE commitments. In addition, he announced his decision to extend the mandate of PA Vice-President Kimmo Kiljunen as Special Representative of the Kazakh Chairmanship on Election Monitoring.

The Foreign Minister also stated that Kazakhstan greatly values the PA's contribution to election observation. "We highly appreciate the work of members of parliament in the course of monitoring elections," he said, "and we act in favor of the maximum use of their valuable experience in this area."



Left to right: Joao Soares, George Papandreou, Spencer Oliver and Petros Efthymiou