

News from Copenhagen

Washington hosts second of OSCE PA's Helsinki +40 seminars



L-R: U.S. Congressman Alcee Hastings, Helsinki +40 Project Chair Joao Soares, Russian International Affairs Council expert Andrei Zagorsky, Ambassador Javier Ruperez, and Wilson Center expert Dr. Martin Sletzinger

Current and former OSCE PA presidents, members of the United States Congress and OSCE experts participated in the second seminar of the OSCE PA's Helsinki +40 Project in Washington on 18 November. In his opening remarks, OSCE PA President Ilkka Kanerva noted that the seminar would explore what has been accomplished over the years and identify where changes are needed in order to stay relevant and effective.

GMF President Karen Donfried said that the international community's reliance on the OSCE to respond to the crisis in Ukraine had proven the Organization's continued value, but that reform is needed to maximize its potential.

Martin Sletzinger, a Senior Scholar at the Wilson Center, and Klas Bergman, a journalist and former spokesperson for the OSCE PA, presented policy briefs for the seminar, tracing the lasting impact of the Helsinki Final Act and emphasizing the importance of a public dimension to the OSCE's work, in particular through its Parliamentary Assembly.

Ambassador Javier Ruperez, a former PA President and participant in the drafting of the Helsinki Final Act, also presented a paper at the seminar and argued that accountability for violations of the Act's principles would be key for the Organization to weather the Ukraine crisis.

Helsinki +40 Project Chair Joao Soares (MP, Portugal) recommended an expanded role for the PA within the OSCE as

a means to increase accountability and make the Organization more credible. He also emphasized that all OSCE participating States – not just Russia in light of the Ukraine crisis – must be held to the standards they have vowed to uphold.

U.S. Senator Benjamin Cardin suggested that the OSCE should actively encourage and even institutionalize a self-evaluation procedure, whereby participating States assess their own actions against commitments undertaken in the OSCE, strengthening the Organization's spirit of mutual responsibility. U.S. Congressman Christopher Smith, who serves as Head of the U.S. Delegation to the OSCE PA, called for the OSCE to make increased investments in training for its personnel and devote more resources to initiatives that combat anti-Semitism and human-trafficking, among others.

Former OSCE PA President and U.S. Congressman Alcee Hastings and several other participants argued that empowering the Organization to better respond to crises such as the one in Ukraine requires reconsideration the consensus-based decision-making that governs much of what the OSCE can do. Other suggestions offered during the seminar included strengthening the Organization's accountability and transparency by opening Permanent Council meetings to the press and providing for a parliamentary role in approving the OSCE budget and appointments of senior officials.

The Washington seminar, "Helsinki +40: Implications for the Transatlantic Relationship," was hosted by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF). Following the seminar, Kanerva, Soares and Ivan Vejvoda, Senior Vice President for Programs at GMF, led a town-hall event on the OSCE with students at Washington's Georgetown University on 19 November.

The Helsinki +40 Project is co-ordinated by OSCE PA Secretary General R. Spencer Oliver and Programme Officer Maria Chepurina.

Kanerva discusses Ukraine and OSCE reform at Permanent Council



Ilkka Kanerva addresses the Permanent Council, 13 Nov. (Photo: Micky Kröll/OSCE)

President Ilkka Kanerva (MP, Finland) addressed the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna last week, highlighting "unacceptable restrictions" that have been placed on OSCE observers on the Ukrainian-Russian border and calling for reform of the OSCE. Kanerva noted that the border-monitoring mission is restricted to report only on what it

sees pass through the official crossings along a small strip of border. "If we are not permitted to do it right, the question is, is it worth doing at all?" he asked. Kanerva underscored

that a "proper border-monitoring mission is of the utmost importance and urgency," and emphasized that all monitors deployed to Ukraine must be "able to provide us with objective information about what is happening on the ground."

In the address, delivered at the OSCE headquarters on 13 November, Kanerva also reiterated the PA's calls at the Annual Session in Baku for wide-ranging organizational reform. He underlined the PA's strong support for robust OSCE field operations and decried the "unacceptable" downgrading or elimination of some of them. The president also repeated the PA's calls for increased transparency and accountability in the OSCE's finances, as well as the need to enable the PA to approve the budget and annual accounts and hire auditors.