

**REPORT OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON SOUTH EAST EUROPE
ROBERTO BATTELLI FOR THE OSCE PA STANDING COMMITTEE**

Minsk, 5 July 2017

During the 2006 Winter Meeting in Vienna, President Alcee Hastings appointed me Special Representative on South East Europe. This appointment was renewed by President Lennmarker in 2006, President Soares in 2008, President Efthymiou in 2010, as well as by President Migliori in 2012, President Krivokapic in 2013 and President Kanerva in 2014. In renewing my mandate, the Presidents have ensured the continuity of observing developments in South East Europe. A main objective of my functions as Special Representative is the facilitation of parliamentary dialogue in the region.

My mandate also includes:

- Promoting dialogue in all segments of society, in particular at the parliamentary level, so as to encourage reconciliation and rehabilitation in the region, most especially in the Western Balkans, and to contribute to the transformation and construction of democratic institutions.
- Maintaining close contact with, and serving as a focal point for, the Assembly's work in the region in general and with the Regional Cooperation Council.
- Advising and reporting back to the President on the situation in the region, with a focus on developments pertaining to Kosovo.
- Communicating with relevant actors within the OSCE that work on South East Europe regional issues.

Since my last report to the Standing Committee at the Winter Meeting, and my report to the Bureau in Copenhagen, I have continued to follow regional developments closely. Unfortunately, there continues to be a predominantly negative trend in the region, at least partly resulting from a de facto pause in the European integration process. Apart from long-standing problems, including political crisis situations marked by boycott of elections and democratic institutions, and fading interest by big political players, in particular the European Union, the region has become an object of geopolitical engineering which is triggering disruptive waves across the region.

In order to have a closer look at the situation, show a sign of support to the OSCE field presences, call for finding solutions to political controversies inside democratic institutions I paid a week-long visit to Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina from 14 to 19 of May, accompanied by Amb. Andreas Nothelle. Other objectives of the visit were to do a pre-assessment of the elections in Albania, address an OSCE Conference on the Implementation of the OSCE Code of Contact on Politico-Military Affairs, and to get a detailed picture of the OSCE's efforts in the field in addressing issues of radicalization and violent extremism. In all meetings, we expressed the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's continued commitment to the region and highlighted the unique work and challenging environments of the OSCE field operations in Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The support provided by the OSCE presences in all three countries, which is a continuation of the good cooperation extended to us, contributed to a very successful visit.

Beginning our visit to the region in Tirana, Albania, we held a series of meetings with heads of political parties and national leaders, including Prime Minister Edi Rama, Speaker of the Assembly Ilir Meta and Head of the OSCE PA's Albanian Delegation Arta Dade and opposition leader Lulzim Basha and Denar Biba, then Chair of Albania's Central Election Commission. In addition, we met with representatives of the International Community in the country, including the Head of the OSCE presence, Ambassador Borchardt, as well as Ambassador Tejler and parts of his ODIHR Election Observation team. Finally, we held talks with religious leaders.

In Montenegro, in addition to participating in the OSCE Code of Conduct conference on a panel entitled Panel entitled 'Democratic Control and the Role of Parliament', we continued our series of political meetings, including with Ivan Brajovic, Speaker of Parliament of Montenegro, and the national and a regional election commission. We met with Amb. Maryse Daviet, Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, as well as several representatives of the International Community in the country, and we also had a look at an NGO project targeting Roma and Sinti.

Conducting the visit by car, we were able, together with Amb. Jonathan Moore, Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, to examine a number of regional initiatives and OSCE projects between Trebinje, Stolac, Mostar, Sarajevo and Banja Luka, which also included holding talks with high level religious leaders from different religious communities and with representatives of a "Coalition against Hate". Of course, with also met with representatives of the international community and parliamentary leaders (including Bosnia and Herzegovina House of Peoples Deputy Speaker, Safet Softic and House of Representatives Deputy Speaker, Mladen Bosic) and discussed with BiH Minister of Security Dragan Mektic and his Republika Srpska counterpart, Dragan Lukac. We took note of a general plea to boost national confidence in the rule of law and witnessed first-hand the crucially important assistance provided by the OSCE Mission in this area.

My conclusions from the visit led me to the following recommendations: Increased attention to the situation in Western Balkans is needed in order to assist the region in any possible way to reverse current negative trends. In order to support the development, the OSCE, including its Executive Structures, Institutions and Field Operations, should maintain welcoming and strong engagement in the region of the Western Balkans. On the issue of refugees and displaced persons, I encourage participating States and International Organizations to pay special attention to unsatisfactory implementation of international obligations and commitments regarding the return of refugees and displaced persons, for instance in Annex Seven of the Dayton Peace Accords, by countries in the region, and related unfulfilled promises by the international community. There is still an urgent need to overcome existing ethnic divisions and religious hatred. But there is more: Some countries have demonstrated or are demonstrating that they could be a model of European-style religious communities that live together in harmony. Support to these countries could help export the model to others, which would also be a valuable contribution to the fight against religious extremism, but to take all possible efforts to create ethnic and religious harmony. Muslim Communities in South East Europe should assume a leading role in developing and strengthening modern Islam as an integral part of human rights based democracies.

But, of course, the countries need to further intensify, with the assistance of the International Community, their fight against corruption and for an independent professional judiciary. They also have to urgently address the deficiency of quality media sources that are free of political dependence. Most

of all, they have to stop political maneuvers that damage faith of citizens in the reliability of electoral processes and the functioning of democratic institutions. I and the OSCE PA is ready to offer its continued assistance in addressing challenges that exist in the region.

I am grateful to my colleague Lord Bowness for having helped me put some of these recommendations forward in the form of amendments to the report of the PA's First Committee, and would, of course, be happy to have your support for my amendments.

I also participated in President Muttonen's Villach retreat on national minorities, reporting about my experience as member of the Italian minority in former Yugoslavia and present Slovenia

A week ago, I observed the parliamentary elections in Albania as OSCE Special Coordinator and leader of the short term OSCE observer mission. Since the deadline for handing in this report expired before election day, I refer to the report of the International Election Observation Mission.