

Refugee crisis debate concludes OSCE PA Autumn Meeting



OSCE parliamentarians debated the ongoing refugee crisis and the potential of the OSCE to help mitigate the situation during the concluding session of the OSCE PA's 14th Autumn Meeting in Ulaanbaatar on 17 September.

Dozens of parliamentarians took the floor to exchange ideas on short-term and long-term responses and underscored the role of parliamentarians in generating the needed political will. Several noted that their connection with constituents would be crucial in generating public support for burden-sharing policies, guarding against xenophobia and educating people on the driving factors behind the refugee crisis.

"We are now witnessing things that we never thought we would witness," said Second Committee Rapporteur Marietta Tidei (MP, Italy). "People who are fleeing war are being fired on with tear gas... But it is not enough to express anger. We need a common political vision," she said.

Tidei and other parliamentarians argued that the OSCE is ideally placed to chart commonly agreed policies and to inspire action. Metin Baydar (MP, Turkey) said that the refugee crisis must not be considered only a European problem. "This should be seen as a joint responsibility of humanity," he said. "It is the international community working as a whole that will solve this problem."

OSCE PA Special Representative on OSCE Border Issues Ignacio Sanchez Amor (MP, Spain) stressed that one way for the OSCE to help is to increase its assistance in border management training.

The final session of the Autumn Meeting also featured a

presentation by Bold Luvsanvandan (MP, Mongolia) on his country's human rights record. United Nations Development Programme Representative Beate Trankmann also addressed the Assembly, focusing on the role of parliaments in promoting the UN's new Sustainable Development Goals.

Meeting earlier in the day, the Assembly's Standing Committee discussed the issue of European Union sanctions on members of the Russian Delegation and how this is affecting the work of the Assembly. The Standing Committee also heard a report from recently elected Treasurer Doris Barnett (MP, Germany) and approved the budget for fiscal year 2015/2016 unanimously. PA President Ilkka Kanerva announced during the Standing Committee meeting that no OSCE PA delegation will deploy to observe the 1 November parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, in line with an earlier decision made by the OSCE/ODIHR not to observe.

In his final address to a Standing Committee meeting as Secretary General, Spencer Oliver reviewed the PA's accomplishments during his stewardship, including setting up offices in Copenhagen and Vienna, its highly regarded research fellowship programme, the flagship publication *News from Copenhagen*, its leadership of election observation, full adherence to approved budgets, and clean audits every year by outside, independent, professional auditors. He thanked the parliamentarians and secretaries of delegations for their support and co-operation for more than 20 years.

Santos calls for greater refugee assistance

On 21 September, OSCE PA Third Committee Chair Isabel Santos (MP, Portugal) issued a letter to Standing Committee members reminding them of commitments agreed to regarding the refugee crisis during the PA's Annual Session in Helsinki, noting that the crisis has only mounted since that time. In particular, she recalled that the PA called on participating States "to increase their efforts to care for people fleeing their homes out of fear of persecution and personal safety."

OSCE Special Co-ordinator Harstedt on pre-election visit to Belarus

OSCE PA Vice-President Kent Harstedt (MP, Sweden), who has been appointed Special Co-ordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission for the 11 October presidential election in Belarus, is on a pre-election visit to Minsk and Homel this week. Supported in his visit by OSCE PA Programme Officer Loic Poulain, on Tuesday Harstedt met with the OSCE PA Belarusian Delegation, led by Viktor Guminsky, Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei, and the Chairwoman of the Central Election Commission, Lidia Yermoshina.

Kirichenko, representatives of civil society and election administrators from the Regional Election Commission.



On Wednesday, he met in Homel with Mayor Petr