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Parliamentarians adopt Bern Declaration on Promoting SMEs in the OSCE area



The Bern Conference, Chaired by OSCE PA Vice-President Barbara Haering (left), hears opening remarks by PA President Bruce George.

After discussions from 14-15 May in the Swiss Parliament in Bern, more than 80 parliamentarians from 30 OSCE participating States adopted the Bern Declaration on Promoting Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the OSCE area. The Declaration calls upon OSCE participating States to create legal and regulatory environments favourable to the development of SMEs along with attractive taxation systems and guaranteed access to various infrastructures.

The Bern Conference, chaired by OSCE PA Vice-President Barbara Haering and organized at the invitation of the Swiss Parliament and the Swiss Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, was addressed by prominent

officials including Bruce George, President of the OSCE PA; Yves Christen, President of the Swiss National Council; Micheline Calmy-Rey, Foreign Minister of Switzerland; Samuel Schmid, Defence Minister of Switzerland; Gian-Reto Plattner, President of the Swiss Council of States and Marcin Swiecicki, OSCE Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities.

In his address, President George emphasized the increasing contribution of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in economic matters. "As parliamentarians we are aware of the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises in our economies" said President George, who continued by stating that "our common focus is to urge policymakers to assess and co-ordinate their actions at local, national, and

international level, in ensuring an environment that is conducive to entrepreneurship, as well as to develop policies that facilitate the start-up and growth of SMEs in the OSCE area". Vice-President Barbara Haering stressed in her concluding remarks that the Bern Conference is not an end to the parliamentary promotion of SMEs in the OSCE area. On the contrary, the recommendations of the Bern Conference will be followed up by the Second Committee of the OSCE PA.

The Conference in Bern was the third conference organized by the OSCE PA in the field of sub-regional economic co-operation following those held in Monaco (1997) and Nantes (1999). The next conference will be held in Norway in 2005.



Keynote speakers (from left to right) Yves Christen, President of the Swiss National Council; Gian-Reto Plattner, President of the Swiss Council of States; Micheline Calmy-Rey, Swiss Foreign Minister; Samuel Schmid, Swiss Defence Minister; and Marcin Swiecicki, OSCE Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities.