

PA Working Group holds joint Seminar in Minsk

The OSCE PA Working Group on Belarus and the OSCE PA Belarusian Delegation jointly organized on 15 March in Minsk a Seminar focused on *Exploring the Opportunities for Belarus within the European Neighbourhood Policy*.

The Seminar, intended to be the first in a series, was organized in close consultation with the OSCE Office in Minsk. It provided an opportunity for Members of Parliament, government and civil society representatives to discuss the European Neighbourhood Policy with a particular focus on how Belarus can benefit from this policy. The Seminar drew attention to views from within the European Union, including new EU members and neighbouring countries, as well from within Belarus.

“The topic of our joint Seminar represents an issue of vital interest to Belarus and all its citizens. We hope this to be the first of a series of steps to be taken by Belarus to review its relationship to European standards and its own OSCE commitments,” commented Uta Zapf, Chair of the OSCE PA Working Group on Belarus.

While the Seminar was open to media accredited to the Belarusian National Assembly, the Working Group was made aware of access difficulties for some media outlets.

“It is regrettable that some civil society representatives, invited by the Working Group, chose not to participate today

and share their point of view,” commented Mrs. Zapf.

Kristian Pihl Lorentzen, Rapporteur of the OSCE PA’s First General Committee and Member of the Working Group on Belarus, also participated in the Seminar.

The Working Group and the Belarusian Delegation each invited participants to the seminar, including parliamentarians, European Commission representatives, members of civil society and government officials from Belarus. During the visit to Minsk, the members of the OSCE PA Working Group also met with representatives from political parties, media and civil society as well as with families of prosecuted politicians, including some who have disappeared.

The framework for this and future seminars was established at the 2004 OSCE PA Annual Session in Edinburgh, where the Belarusian Delegation to the OSCE PA and the Working Group agreed on a Joint Declaration. The Working Group is looking forward to organizing the next event within this framework in the coming months in Minsk.

President Lennmarker Addresses PACE Standing Committee

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Göran Lennmarker addressed the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on 16 March in Paris.

Lennmarker praised the development of PACE and stressed the important role that parliamentarians from both organizations play in election observation, democratic development, conflict resolution such as in Nagorno Karabakh, and the parliamentary dimension of the Stability Pact for South East Europe.

PACE, the European Parliament and the OSCE PA must continue their joint efforts to provide political leadership in the field of election observation, Lennmarker said.

Today, more than ever, we need strong international organizations to tackle the new challenges in Europe and to ensure respect for common values, he stressed. The address was followed by questions and answers.

President Lennmarker and Secretary General Spencer Oliver also met and discussed future co-operation at a working dinner with their counterparts from PACE, President René van der Linden and Secretary General Mateo Sorinas.



Uta Zapf with Kristian Pihl Lorentzen (left), and Sergei Zabolotets, Head of the Belarusian Delegation to the OSCE PA

OSCE PA Delegation in Kazakhstan

A delegation from the OSCE PA, comprising Morten Høglund, Head of the Norwegian Delegation, Jesús López-Medel, Rapporteur of the Assembly’s Third General Committee, and Vitaly Evseyev, Deputy Secretary General, attended a conference on *International Co-operation of the Republic of Kazakhstan: Reality, Tasks and Prospects*, held in Astana on 14 March. Under the Chairmanship of Kazakh Senate Speaker Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the conference was addressed by representatives from parliaments, including Mr. Høglund and Mr. Lopez-Medel, as well as from international organizations, the diplomatic corps and other experts.

Kazakhstan will host the OSCE PA’s 2008 Annual Session in Almaty.