

News from Copenhagen

OSCE PA

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OSCE PA's Winter Meeting concludes with lively security debate

The Eighth Winter Meeting on 19-20 February concluded with a lively debate on European security architecture, involving prominent speakers from Russia and France and almost 50 of the 250 parliamentarians participating in the Vienna meeting.

The security debate took place as a follow-up on recent initiatives by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and French President Nicolas Sarkozy for new European security arrangements.

"We need a fresh approach," stated Alexander Groushko, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, one of the two main speakers, while the other, Veronique Bujon-Barre, Deputy Director for Political and Security Affairs in the French Foreign Ministry, talked about a new "crisis of trust in Europe" after the war last year in Georgia and the "need to re-establish that lost trust."

During the opening session, OSCE PA President Joao Soares welcomed the 250 parliamentarians and underlined the importance of the OSCE being willing to engage and meet new challenges.

"The OSCE is an extraordinary organization and its greatest strength has been its flexibility, allowing it to adapt to new realities," Mr. Soares said. "However, I fear that this flexibility is being lost here in Vienna. We parliamentarians must do what we can to keep the OSCE an effective forum for dialogue."

He regretted the fact that the OSCE still lacks transparency. Its meetings should be open, he said, and the consensus rule should be adjusted.

"We still have a lot of work to do to open up our organization and I pledge here to continue my efforts to do that," he said.

President Soares also underlined that election observation will continue to be a centerpiece of the Assembly's activities. "As parliamentarians, we have experience and knowledge that bureaucrats simply cannot have, and we will continue our important work in this critical area, alone if necessary," he stated.

The two-day meeting -- the second largest event in the OSCE PA calendar after the Annual Session, which this year



Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Groushko and French Deputy Director for Political and Security Affairs Veronique Bujon-Barre

takes place in Vilnius, Lithuania from 29 June to 3 July -- was addressed by a number of top officials, including the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Greece's Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis; the President of the Austrian Nationalrat, Barbara Prammer; the President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, U.S. Congressman, John Tanner; OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut and several heads of OSCE institutions.

During the closing session, the delegates heard from OSCE PA's Special Representative on Gender Issues, OSCE PA Vice-President Tone Tingsgaard, and Panos Kammenos, Greek Vice Minister of Mercantile Marine, Aegean & Island Policy, on "Piracy As a New Security Threat."

The Winter Meeting's agenda also included a special presentation on Kazakhstan's preparations for its OSCE Chairmanship in 2010 by the Kazakh Delegation, led by its Head of Delegation and OSCE PA Vice-President, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

In the presentation, "Path to Europe," Mr. Tokayev outlined in detail Kazakhstan's priorities for political and economic reforms. He stated that "our priorities are clear and irreversible."

For full coverage of the Winter Meeting, please visit www.oscepa.org.



Chairperson-in-Office, Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis

"In many ways the Parliamentary Assembly is the flagship of the OSCE. It represents our mutual commitment to contribute to the security and stability of our continent and the prosperity of our peoples.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly helps to drive forward the political dialogue among participating States, and it allows parliamentarians and, by implication, their constituents, to participate in that dialogue. Since its creation in the Charter of Paris of 1990, the Parliamentary Assembly has become vital for the good health of the OSCE.

When times are as challenging as they are now, the support of the Parliamentary Assembly becomes all the more important."

-- Chairperson-in-Office Dora Bakoyannis,
speaking at the OSCE PA's Eighth Winter Meeting