

OSCE PA Annual Session well under way in Vilnius

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is half-way through its 18th Annual Session, which opened in Lithuania's capital Vilnius on 29 June.

Over 500 participants from 50 OSCE countries are participating in the Session, the main theme of which is "The OSCE: Addressing New Security Challenges." The Session runs to 3 July.

In the *March 11 Hall* in the Seimas, Lithuania's Parliament, OSCE PA President Joao Soares bid all participants welcome to the first Annual Session ever held in a Baltic country, as last year's Session in Kazakhstan was the first time an Annual Session was held in Central Asia.

Lithuania's President Valdas Adamkus and his Lithuanian colleagues Arunas Valinskas, Speaker of Parliament; Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius; and Vytautas Landsbergis, Chairman of the Reconstituent Seimas and former Speaker of the Parliament, all welcomed the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to Vilnius.

The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Greek Foreign

Minister Dora Bakoyannis addressed the parliamentarians on Tuesday, followed by a lengthy question and answer period.

OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut addressed the Standing Committee, which met on 29 June.

The Committee approved for general debate 24

Supplementary Items on issues such as strengthening the OSCE, human rights and civil liberties, energy and food security, climate change, freedom of expression, and arms control. The proposed resolutions have generated 123 proposals for amendments.

The Standing Committee approved several changes to the Rules of Procedure, including an amendment providing for greater gender balance in the Parliamentary Assembly.

Treasurer Hans Raidel reported

on the excellent financial health of the Assembly, and the 2009-2010 budget was approved unanimously.

The Annual Session will adopt a final document, called the Vilnius Declaration, which will include recommendations on all considered issues.



The OSCE PA's General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment meeting in the Seimas

Albanian elections: improvements but violations persist



Special Co-ordinator Wolfgang Grossruck presents the Statement

The International Election Observation Mission concluded in its preliminary post-election statement on Monday, 29 June, that Albania's parliamentary elections demonstrated improvements, but that violations persist.

"The country has matured, it has made progress, and many of the fears we had only some months ago have not materialized. I'm certainly happy about the progress we saw, but there is also a considerable number of issues that need to be tackled, in particular the polarized political climate," said Wolfgang Grossruck, Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE short-term observer mission.

The observers from the OSCE PA, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and the OSCE/ODIHR said the elections marked tangible progress with regard to the introduction of new voter registration and identification procedures, and the adoption of an improved legal framework. But the observers also noted that these improvements were overshadowed by the politicization of technical aspects of the process and violations observed during the campaign which undermined public confidence in the electoral process.

Election day was overall calm and peaceful, observers said, and the atmosphere was improved. Observers assessed the voting process slightly more positively than in previous elections, but noted procedural violations related in particular to inking procedures and widespread family voting.

In addition to the 26 long-term observers from OSCE/ODIHR, some 395 short-term observers from 38 countries were deployed on election day, including a 36-member delegation from the OSCE PA, 22 members from PACE, and five members from the NATO PA. The mission observed voting in over 1,375 polling stations out of a total of 4,753, and the vote count in all 66 counting centers. The OSCE PA observers were accompanied by Logistics Officer Petra Jezkova, Programme Officer Roberto Montella and Special Representative Andreas Nothelle from the International Secretariat.