

Winter Meeting set to begin in Vienna

More than 240 parliamentarians from 53 countries will gather in Vienna this week for what is expected to be the largest Winter Meeting of the OSCE PA in the event's ten-year history.

Federal President of Austria Heinz Fischer and the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Azubalis, will address the Assembly Thursday. Other speakers include:

- Speaker of the Austrian Parliament Barbara Prammer
- OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Maria Grazia Giammarinaro

- OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic

- OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut

- OSCE/ODIHR Director Janez Lenarcic

OSCE PA Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs Alcee Hastings (United States) is expected to open the special debate on the situation in the Mediterranean region on Friday. PA Special Representative on Migration Kathleen Ferrier (Netherlands) and OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Knut Vollebaek will open the debate "Immigration, Integration and Multi-Ethnic Dialogue in the OSCE."

The Austrian Parliament will offer a reception for the members of the Parliamentary Assembly on Thursday.

Battelli meets with Albanian MPs

PA Special Representative on South East Europe Roberto Battelli (Slovenia) visited Tirana, Albania 14-16 February, meeting with President of Parliament Jozefina Topalli and other leading parliamentarians, the Chairman of the Central Election Commission and representatives of civil society.

Mr. Battelli reconfirmed the 2009 post-election statement delivered by Special Co-ordinator PA Vice-President Grossruck (Austria) and hailed parliament and constitutional structures as the places to resolve the current political impasse in Tirana. In his talks, Mr. Battelli urged the political parties to co-operate in implementing the recommendations from the Final Report.

"Disagreements with the government and even deep distrust in elections do not justify blocking the work of the constitutional institutions, and the death of four Albanians should make everybody reconsider their actions," Mr. Battelli said. Urging mutual restraint in the political rhetoric, he stressed that the government has a responsibility to de-escalate existing conflicts. He called on political parties to fulfill their obligations in order to prepare for the May 8 local elections.

Accompanied by PA Special Representative in Vienna Amb. Andreas Nothelle, Mr. Battelli also received a thorough briefing by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Tirana, Amb. Eugen Wollfarth.

PA delegation urges strong parliament in Kyrgyzstan



President Eftymiou is greeted by Speaker Akhmatbek Keldibekov in Bishkek

The new parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic needs clear government oversight powers to be an effective model in the region, OSCE PA President Petros Eftymiou said last week after concluding a two-day visit to Bishkek.

"All of our governments should be subject to effective oversight by parliament," President Eftymiou said. "Such oversight helps ensure efficiency and accountability, it helps fight corruption, and most importantly, it helps earn the trust of our populations in their government."

The delegation met with President Roza Otunbaeva, Speaker Akhmatbek Keldibekov of the Kyrgyz Parliament, Foreign Minister Ruslan Kazakbaev and held a roundtable discussion with Members of Parliament, including Kanatbek Isaev, Head of the Kyrgyz Delegation to the OSCE PA, government officials and civil society to focus on ways the OSCE PA can help strengthen the parliament.

An open and transparent approach with effective checks and balances is crucial to the success of the parliamentary system in Kyrgyzstan, the delegation noted. They called upon parliamentarians to further increase their outreach to constituents and civil society, to ensure that the parliament remains an effective representative body.

Ambassador Andrew Tesoriere, Head of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek supported the delegation.

"The issues discussed during Mr. Eftymiou's visit resulted in identifying practical ways in which the OSCE PA can support the strengthening of parliamentary oversight of public services, internal parliamentary procedures and public outreach."

The delegation also included Vice-President Pia Christmas-Moeller (Denmark), Serghiy Shevchuk (Ukraine), Rapporteur of the OSCE PA's Second General Committee; Tonino Picula (Croatia), Rapporteur of the OSCE PA's First General Committee; and Viola von Cramon (Germany).

Presidential Advisor Andreas Baker and Programme Officer Anna Chernova supported the visit.