

**STANDING
COMMITTEE**

105 SC 06 E
Original: English



NATO Parliamentary Assembly

SUMMARY

of the meeting of the Standing Committee
Naval Academy, Gdynia, Poland

Saturday 25 March 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | Page |
|-----|--|-------------|
| | <i>Table of Contents</i> | i |
| | <i>Attendance list</i> | iii |
| 1. | Opening of the meeting | 1 |
| 2. | Adoption of the draft Agenda [040 SC 06 E Rev. 2] | 1 |
| 3. | Adoption of the Summary of the meeting of the Standing Committee held in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Monday, 14 November 2005 [239 SC 05 E Rev. 1] | 1 |
| 4. | Report of the Working Group on Assembly Reform [041 SC 06 E] | 2 |
| 5. | The Assembly's 2006 Calendar of Activities [022 GEN 06 E Rev. 1] | 19 |
| 6. | The Assembly's website [045 SC 06 E] | 20 |
| 7. | Relations with the Palestine Legislative Council [038 SC 06 E] | 20 |
| 8. | The number of delegates for Algeria and Morocco [042 SC 06 E] | 27 |
| 9. | Relations with China [043 SC 06 E] | 27 |
| 10. | Relations with Belarus [044 SC 06 E] | 29 |
| 11. | Georgia: Working Group on the Monitoring of the Withdrawal of Russian Forces from Georgia and proposal for a Declaration on Georgia for consideration during the Paris spring session [046 SC 06 E] | 31 |
| 12. | Relations with the European Parliament [047 SC 06 E] | 34 |
| 13. | Comments of the Secretary General of NATO, Chairman of the North Atlantic Council on the Policy Recommendations adopted in 2005 by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly [017 SESP 06 E] and [238 SESA 05 E] | 35 |
| 14. | Declaration on Belarus [113 SC 06 E Rev. 2] | 36 |
| 15. | Finances | 36 |
| 16. | Future sessions and meetings | 37 |
| 17. | Miscellaneous | 38 |

ATTENDANCE LIST

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| President | Pierre Lellouche (France) |
| Vice-Presidents | Pierre Claude Nolin (Canada) Jozef Banáš (Slovakia) Vahit Erdem (Turkey) Bert Koenders (Netherlands) José Lello (Portugal) |
| Treasurer | Lothar Ibrügger (Germany) |
| Secretary General | Simon Lunn |
| Former Vice-President | Giovanni Lorenzo Forcieri (Italy) |

MEMBERS AND ALTERNATE MEMBERS

| | |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Belgium | <i>Not represented</i> |
| Bulgaria | Nikolai Kamov |
| Canada | Jane Cordy |
| Czech Republic | Vlasta Parkanova |
| Denmark | <i>Not represented</i> |
| Estonia | <i>Not represented</i> |
| France | Loïc Bouvard |
| Germany | Markus Meckel Karl A. Lamers |
| Greece | <i>Not represented</i> |
| Hungary | <i>Not represented</i> |
| Iceland | Ossur Skarphedinsson |
| Italy | Giovanni Lorenzo Forcieri |
| Latvia | Guntis Berzins |
| Lithuania | Juozas Olekas |
| Luxembourg | Marc Spautz |
| Netherlands | Bert Koenders |
| Norway | <i>Not represented</i> |
| Poland | Marian Pilka |
| Portugal | Rui Gomes da Silva |
| Romania | Mihail Lupoi |
| Slovakia | Jozef Banáš |
| Slovenia | Milan Petek |
| Spain | Rafael Estrella |
| Turkey | Vahit Erdem |
| United Kingdom | Bruce George Peter Viggers |
| United States | <i>Not represented</i> |

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Civil Dimension of Security | Michael Clapham (United Kingdom) |
| Political | Markus Meckel (Germany) |
| Science and Technology | Michael Mates (United Kingdom) |

SECRETARIES OF DELEGATION***Member Delegations***

| | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| Belgium | Frans Van Melkebeke |
| Bulgaria | Borislav Penchev |
| Canada | Denis Robert |
| Czech Republic | Olga Bendíková |
| Denmark | Morten Hansen |
| Estonia | Tanja Espe |
| France | Frédéric Taillet |
| Germany | Annemarie Bürsch |
| Greece | <i>Not represented</i> |
| Hungary | Károly Tüzes |
| Iceland | Stígur Stefánsson |
| Italy | Alessandra Lai |
| | Mario di Napoli |
| | Sandra Paura |
| Latvia | Snieguole Ziukaite |
| Lithuania | <i>Not represented</i> |
| Luxembourg | Leo van Waasbergen |
| Netherlands | Marit Gjeltén |
| Norway | Natalia Jaskiewicz |
| Poland | Luisa Pinto Basto |
| Portugal | Irina Bojin |
| Romania | Ioan Ilie |
| | Jarmila Novakova |
| Slovakia | Tamara Gruden-Pecan |
| Slovenia | Mercedes Araujo |
| Spain | Yesim Uslu |
| Turkey | Libby Davidson |
| United Kingdom | <i>Not represented</i> |
| United States | |

Accompanying staff

| | |
|---------|------------------------|
| Italy | Claudio Olmeda |
| | Paola Talevi |
| Germany | Johannes von Ahlefeldt |
| Poland | Andrzej Januszewski |
| | Mikolaj Karlowski |
| | Dobromir Dziewulak |
| | Michal Makówka |
| | Karolina Glowacka |
| Spain | Araceli Quintano |

International Secretariat

Helen Cadwallender
 Andrea Cellino
 Christine Heffinck
 Helena Hradilova
 David Hobbs
 Susan Millar
 Gill Rawling

Minute Writers

Mick Hillyard
 Nerys Welfoot

The meeting opened on Saturday 25 March 2006 at 08.52 with Mr Pierre Lellouche (France), President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, in the Chair.

1. Opening of the meeting

The President declared the meeting open and welcomed delegates to Poland. He thanked Mr Pilka and the staff of the Polish Parliament for their hard work in organising the meeting. The President reported that apologies had been received from Mr. Daniel Bacquelaine, Head of the Belgian Delegation. Belgium would not be represented at the meeting; Mr. Pavel Severa, Head of the Czech delegation, would be replaced at the meeting by Mrs. Vlasta Parkanova; Mr. Helge Adam Moller, Head of the Danish delegation, would not be represented at the meeting; Mr. Sven Mikser, Head of the Estonian delegation would not be represented at the meeting; Mr. Vassilios Maghinis of Greece would not be represented at the meeting; Mr. Gyula Vari, Head of the Hungarian delegation, which had no representative at the meeting; Mr. Jos Van Gennip, Head of the Netherlands' delegation, would be represented at the meeting by Bert Koenders, who was also an Assembly Vice-President; Mr. Per Ove Width, of the Norwegian delegation would not be represented at the meeting; Mr. Branko Grims, Head of the Slovenian delegation was replaced by Mr. Milan Petek; and Hon. Joel Hefley and Senator Gordon Smith of the United States delegation also gave their apologies.

He said that no new Heads of Delegation had been appointed since the last meeting in Copenhagen.

The President expressed regret that the USA was not represented at the important meeting.

Mr Pilka (PL) welcomed delegates to Gdansk and Gdynia and reminded delegates that it was where the Second World War started. He also mentioned that the strike in the Gdansk shipyards represented a turning point in history and commented that the Standing Committee of NATO PA was meeting in an important place. He hoped that the delegates would have a pleasant visit.

2. Adoption of the draft Agenda [040 SC 06 E Rev. 2]

The President said that the draft agenda was very full with relatively little time. He therefore asked colleagues to accept his proposal that speaking times, including interventions, should be limited to three minutes. He noted that the Agenda had been revised and stressed that decisions would be necessary for the later items relating to finances, the future sessions and meetings. He also said that he would be proposing a statement on Belarus.

The draft Agenda [040 SC 06 E Rev. 2] was adopted.

The limit of three minutes for speeches was agreed to.

3. Adoption of the Summary of the meeting of the Standing Committee held in Copenhagen, Denmark on Monday 14 November 2005 [239 SC 05 E Rev. 1]

The President reported that the Danish delegation was unable to be present at the meeting, but wished to formally record the Standing Committee's appreciation to all the Danish delegation for making the session in Copenhagen such a pleasant experience.

The Summary [239 SC 05 E Rev. 1] was adopted.

4. Report of the Working Group on Assembly Reform [041 SC 06 E]

- **Co-ordination and priorities**
- **Committees, Sub-Committees and other groups**
- **Session Structure**
- **Mandates**
- **Relations with NATO**
- **The Assembly's Profile**

The President reminded delegates that during the meeting in Copenhagen it had been agreed that a Working Group on Assembly Reform would be created and that all Standing Committee members would be encouraged to submit their thoughts and ideas on all aspects of the Assembly's work. He said that appointments to the Working Group had been intended to ensure that each of the three political groups had representatives from both sides of the Atlantic. He said that the members appointed were Senator Pierre Claude Nolin (Canada), Senator Giovanni Lorenzo Forcieri (Italy), Mr Vahit Erdem (Turkey), and Mr Daniel Bacquelaine (Belgium). Senator Nolin had been asked to chair the Working Group. The President said that in the event, Mr Bacquelaine had been unable to participate in the Working Group, so Senator Mihail Lupoi, the leader of the Romanian delegation, had represented the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats.

The President invited Senator Nolin to introduce the Working Group's report including each of the Working Group's proposals for the Standing Committee's consideration.

Senator Nolin (CA) thanked the President and said that he would limit his remarks. He thanked his colleagues on the Working Group and thought that the report had managed to harmonise most of the wishes of the delegates. The Working Group had received many ideas from other Standing Committee members. Its proposals had been unanimously agreed. He said that the Working Group had not concluded that the Assembly was in crisis. However, the Working Group had concluded that with over 40 activities and limited members' time and resources available, the organisation was overloaded. He suggested the list of proposals in the report could best be considered as packages. He therefore invited comment on coordination and priorities (proposals A1-A7), which dealt with the Standing Committee having an overarching approval of the work of the Committees.

He proposed dealing with the proposals in thematic "packages", starting with proposals A1 to A3.¹

The goal of these three proposals was to enable the Standing Committee to retain its authority for approving all activities while making it harder for our Committees and Sub-Committees to depart from what the Standing Committee has agreed. They would also introduce a mechanism – a meeting of the Bureau with Chairmen of Committees and Sub-Committees - to co-ordinate their plans in a meeting with members of the Bureau at the beginning of each session. Any departure

¹ A1. The Standing Committee should retain its authority for approving all Assembly activities. However, effective procedures should be developed for the authorization of deviations from or additions to approved activities which might occur between Standing Committee meetings.

A2. A Co-ordination Meeting should be held at the beginning of each Session, involving the Bureau and all Committee and Sub-Committee Chairmen. This meeting's recommendations would be referred to the Committees and to the Standing Committee.

A3. Departures from agreed activities would have to be approved by the Standing Committee or - if no meeting is planned before the activity in question – by the Bureau.

from agreed activities would have to be authorized by the Standing Committee or – if that was not practical – by the Bureau.

The President said he wished to make a few introductory comments before opening the discussion. He wanted to emphasise that as President he had not interfered with the Working Group. He wished to emphasise two important principles: coherence and reactivity. On coherence, the Assembly had tended to do too many things, ranging from the devaluation of China's currency to Avian flu and the crisis in Darfur. In the interests of greater coherence, the Assembly needed to become more focussed. The meeting of the Bureau and the Committee Chairman during the Copenhagen Session had been helpful but more needed to be done so he urged the Standing Committee to consider the Working Group's proposals favourably. On reactivity – the ability to react to events as they unfolded – he said that there should be greater scope for such flexibility. If coherence and reactivity could be achieved, the working of the Assembly would be improved.

Focussing on A1-A3 (the role of the Standing Committee), he said that at present the Standing Committee did not have the authority to enforce the choice of subjects on Committees, and that this was a key deficiency in co-ordinating the Assembly's work. He asked the Secretary General to confirm that under the current Rules, the final choice of subjects lay with the Committees rather than with the Standing Committee, and that the Standing Committee only played an advisory role in that respect. [*The Secretary General nodded his agreement.*]

Mr Lello (PT) said that these issues would need to be considered again at the next session because seven delegations were absent. He added that, unlike national Governments, the Assembly was unconstrained in creating lines of political intervention that NATO itself could not make. For example, the Assembly had been able to enlarge itself years before NATO had been able to do so. The Assembly should not be too rigid, and the Standing Committee should be at the core of decisions on the Assembly's priorities and activities.

Mr Estrella (ES) commended the report of the Working Group which, if implemented, would improve the work of the Assembly, which would then better inform national Parliaments. He noted that the analogue of the "Conference des Présidents" for the Assembly would be the Standing Committee. The general goal of the Assembly should be to co-ordinate its work and provide a mechanism for coherence. Each Committee should establish its own role.

The President said that Mr Estrella had raised an important point to which the Standing Committee would return to later when it considered the question of mandates for each of the Committees.

Senator Nolin (CA) explained that it was intended that the "Conference of Presidents" involving Committee and Sub-Committee chairmen would take place before every session in order to develop a coherent and co-ordinated programme of Assembly activities. He gave the example of the June 2005 visits to the USA and asked whether it had been really necessary for three Sub-Committees to separately visit the United States or could those visits have been coordinated? However, he stressed that the ultimate decisions on activities would be made by the Standing Committee, as was clearly specified in a subsequent proposal.

In response to Mr Lello, he agreed that it was important that the Assembly remained flexible and efficient, and that the seriousness of its work should not be diminished. It could do things that national governments could not and it had a workload that was undertaken with great diligence. The proposals would not detract from that, but would ensure that the programme was better co-ordinated.

The President said that the Standing Committee appeared to have a consensus on the first three proposals.

Proposals A1 to A3 of the Report were agreed to.

Senator Nolin (CA) said that Proposal A4² needed to be considered separately.

He said that at present the Standing Committee could only suggest subjects and give guidance to Committees, which could be ignored. The proposals would enable the Standing Committee to give direction to the Rapporteurs.

The President said that it was essential to end the sovereignty of the Committee Chairmen in order to achieve coordinated, coherent work programmes.

Mr Estrella (ES) asked whether the concept of Sub-Committees as well as their activities was being changed.

The President said that the structure of Sub-Committees would be returned to later in the debate. The proposal A4 related to the principle governing the relationship between the Standing Committee and the Committees, and whether the work of Committees should be decided in the Standing Committee.

Proposal A4 was agreed to.

Senator Nolin (CA) said that A5³ proposed that the Assembly should not be bound by the tradition of holding an annual study visit. Instead, it should review the visit every year and reflect upon whether it fitted in with the current activities and whether the visit would be cost-effective.

The President asked the Secretary General to give an indication of the attendance levels of the study visits over the years.

The Secretary General said that the study visits had been a hangover from the Cold War period and had less significance since 1990. Originally called 'Annual Tours' the study visits had focussed more on the new member countries or partner countries of NATO PA and were well attended. The recent visit to Turkey had been a good example of a successful visit and Romania would be visited in 2006. The visits should not be dispensed with but should instead respond to the activities and demands of the Standing Committee. Proposal A5 would also relieve the pressure on countries to host visits.

The President said that the visits would not be cancelled or continued on the same basis but instead would be coordinated with activities. This would reduce the need to "chase" member states to host visits.

Proposal A5 was agreed to.

Senator Nolin (CA) said that proposal A6⁴ would ensure that, rather than trying to be the best at everything, the Assembly would recognize the division of labour among interparliamentary assemblies which exists. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had election monitoring as one of their primary missions and were equipped

² A4. The Standing Committee should also have the power to approve the subjects to be addressed by Committees and Sub-Committees in the same way that it already has the power to approve activities.

³ A5. The Standing Committee should review the Annual Study Visit to determine whether this type of meeting should take place less frequently, and under what circumstances.

⁴ A6. The Assembly should only participate in election monitoring missions under exceptional circumstances

and funded for that task. The Working Group therefore proposed that the NATO Parliamentary Assembly would only participate in election monitoring in exceptional circumstances.

The President said that whilst the OSCE and the Council of Europe had a mandate to participate in election monitoring, he had reservations that the word 'exceptional' was too restrictive. Although election monitoring was not the NATO PA's primary purpose, it could be an important political vehicle for the Assembly to make its views and its presence known. For example, the Assembly had chosen to write to President Lukashenko of Belarus offering its services at election monitors, but only the OSCE had received official approval. This had enabled the NATO PA to make a clear statement of its concerns about the situation in Belarus. He therefore felt that the wording of the proposal was too restrictive.

Mr Estrella (ES) said that he agreed with the President that there was a clear argument for NATO PA to be able to participate if it thought it proper to do so.

Mr. Lello (PT) agreed with the wording of the proposal and noted that the presence of the NATO PA on election monitoring had to be carefully weighed because in some cases a "NATO" presence could be seen as controversial.

Mr George (UK) said that he had been very pleased to have NATO PA members alongside him on a number of occasions when monitoring elections because of their ability and "level-headedness" which was not always so evident in some other delegations. He agreed with Mr Lello, however, that it was important to be sure that the NATO PA's presence would not be used to call into question the objectivity of the monitoring effort which could happen in some places due to the false assumption that the Assembly was an extension of NATO. The NATO PA should also undertake election monitoring in conjunction with bodies such as the OSCE PA and PACE, and not conduct election monitoring in isolation.

The President asked if there was a consensus on the proposal.

Senator Nolin (CA) said that the wording could be amended.

Mr Lello (PT) proposed that the word 'exceptional' be replaced by the word 'appropriate'.

Mr Koenders (NL) agreed with Mr Lello's proposal.

The President asked if Mr Lello's proposal was agreed to.

Proposal A6, as amended, was agreed to.

Senator Nolin (CA) speaking to Proposal A7⁵, said unforeseen activities such as seminars on Kosovo and Belarus and monitoring elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council illustrated the case for budgeting for unforeseen events.

Mr Lello (PT) said the choice was to spend or prioritise.

The President thanked Mr Lello for the clarification and commented that election monitoring was not done on a routine basis. He called for advice from the Treasurer, Mr Ibrügger.

Mr Ibrügger (DE) said that he would be happy to have approval for an increase in funds, but thought it important to have such provision for unforeseen events in the budget.

⁵ A7. Funds should be set aside to cover meetings which arise at too short notice to have been foreseen when the annual budget was being formulated.

The President asked if there were any objections to the proposal.

There were no objections and proposal A7 was agreed to.

The President invited Mr Nolin to introduce the next package of proposals.

Senator Nolin (CA) said that one proposal – B1⁶ - the Working Group had been asked to evaluate was the idea of making the Mediterranean Special Group into a Committee. The Group looked at two options: one was to make the Mediterranean Special Group into a sixth Committee, and the other was to change the Committee structure so that the Mediterranean Special Group became one of the five Committees.

The first would raise political and organizational problems, while the second would mean entirely re-thinking the current Committee structure.

The Working Group believed that the Mediterranean Special Group should remain as a special group but that more should be done to link its work to the rest of the Assembly. We felt that the Chairman of the Mediterranean Special Group should systematically report on the Group's work to the plenary, and perhaps also to one or more of the Committees

The President suggested that before discussing this proposal, it would be useful to discuss B2⁷ concerning the mandates of all Committees and Sub-Committees and then return to the Assembly's special groups, including the Mediterranean Special Group.

Senator Nolin (CA) then introduced proposal B2 by saying that the Working Group recommended that all Committees and Sub-Committees should have clear terms of reference. This would help to produce divisions of labour, coherence, and prioritization of the Assembly's work.

The President said that was an important step and asked the delegates to consider whether it was a good idea.

Mr Mates (UK) said that the cases for particular Committees and Sub-Committees were very different: some might require frequent changes in their terms of reference while others might be more enduring. For the Committees with only one Sub-Committee, he thought that it might not be helpful to devise terms of reference each year.

Senator Nolin (CA) said that this was an important point. He said that the Working Group's concept was that the Committees terms of reference would be defined and would be long-lasting, while those of the Sub-Committees would be defined on an *ad hoc* basis each year by the Committees.

Mr Lello (PT) said that with regards to proposals B2 (and B3, concerning the number of Sub-Committees), the Sub-Committees should have defined terms of reference to avoid overlap and duplication. On the other hand, he felt that cutting the number of Sub-Committees down to five was going too far. This could lead to very large Sub-Committee meetings, especially if joint meetings were held. He also felt that a proposal to handle more subjects by using special rapporteurs instead of Sub-Committees could pose problems: if academics wrote all the reports, politicians would not be needed, and they would not be so involved with the subjects. Nor would so many

⁶ B1. The Mediterranean Special Group should remain as a special group and not become a fifth or sixth Committee

⁷ B2. All the Committees, Sub-Committees and other groups should have specific terms of reference.

members have the opportunities to develop the contacts which were a valuable part of Sub-Committee activities. Furthermore, Sub-Committee activities enabled members to “show the Assembly’s flag”.

The President said that that was not the idea behind the proposal and some of these concerns would be met by allowing Special Rapporteurs to travel.

Senator Nolin (CA) said that the underlying idea was not to have activities determined by the Assembly’s structures, but rather to have goals which the Assembly’s structure would have to fulfil. The Standing Committee had to face some difficult choices, but greater focus, flexibility and efficiency should be the goal. Looking at attendance figures, it seemed that the Assembly had too many Sub-Committees, each with the right to hold a certain number of activities. Attendance on these compared unfavourably with that of outreach seminars. The Assembly should look at its priorities and then decide which meetings to hold, rather than having the number of activities being set by the number of Sub-Committees.

Mr Meckel (DE) said that regarding the specifying of issues for each Committee, this might be easier for the smaller Committees – Economic and Security, Science and Technology, and Civil Dimension of Security – but for the Political Committee and the Defence and Security Committee, experience over the last ten years showed that it would be very difficult to make a clear differentiation between them: their reports often addressed very similar subjects. It would be equally difficult in the future to determine which subjects should be dealt with in the Political Committee and which should be dealt with in the Defence and Security Committee. For instance, proliferation could be addressed in either Committee.

On the Sub-Committees, he had proposed limiting their travel and increasing the number of seminars. He also believed there was more scope for joint Sub-Committee activities.

Mr Koenders (NL) said that clarification was needed. He agreed that activities should be driven by demand, that the number of activities was too high, and there should be a sharper focus on priorities. He questioned whether increasing the work allocated to Rapporteurs might lower the engagement of members in the work of the Committees, however, he would support a reduction in the number of Sub-Committees and an increase in the number of Rapporteurs.

The President said that the contributions made by members had gone to the heart of the proposal, which had two objectives: coherence and reactivity.

Mr Olekas (LT) thought that the Committees should decide how to allocate the work – whether to a Rapporteur or to a Sub-Committee.

Mr Forcieri (IT) said that he would support a proposal which met the aims of the Assembly and the concerns of Mr Koenders. There was a need to rationalise the work undertaken by the Committees, not least in terms of the human and financial resources available. The Standing Committee and the Conference of Presidents would provide the coordination of activities that was needed. He agreed that the number of Sub-Committees needed to be reduced. They should not be static, everlasting Sub-Committees but should instead be set up by the Standing Committee (advised by the “Conference of Presidents”) as and when they were needed for a subject. A Committee should aim to set up only one Sub-Committee a year and, unless there were special circumstances, the Committees should instead make more use of Special Rapporteurs. That would ensure that Committees met the aim of rationalising the Assembly’s activities to achieve greater coherence and efficiency.

Mrs Cordy (CA) thanked the Working Group for dealing with all the issues that had been raised at the Denmark meeting of the Standing Committee. Each Committee should prioritise its work in the

short and long term. At the moment there were too many subjects being investigated by too many bodies. She therefore fully supported the proposal that the Committee and Sub-Committees should have terms of reference, and that these should be re-evaluated each year rather than remain static. She also felt that drawing up these terms of reference annually within the Committee would engage members more in the consideration of priorities and would in itself help to enhance coherence in the Assembly's work. She also asked for more clarification on the role of Special Rapporteurs.

The President said that he fully agreed with Mrs Cordy, and in particular her point about the impact of members being involved in the drawing up of terms of reference.

Mr Erdem (TR) said that there were a number of Sub-Committees that could be removed from the structure as they in effect duplicative. He cited the example of three Sub-Committees dealing with transatlantic relations.

Mr Estrella (ES) agreed with Mr Erdem that some of the existing Sub-Committees could be removed. He was not convinced that terms of reference would necessarily be a great help in limiting activities; these might be drawn up in order to facilitate the same types of visits taking place without those terms of reference being in place. He agreed on the need for more focus, and if Special Rapporteurs were going to replace any Sub-Committees, it might be necessary to allow them to travel, either on their own or with a member of the secretariat. He also believed that the cost of seminars was much higher than that of Sub-Committees, so shifting activities away from Sub-Committee and towards seminars would not be a means of saving resources.

The President said that point was well taken.

Mr George (UK) said that departmentalism, or a 'stove-pipe' attitude, had often been a criticism levelled at national governments. He believed that the work of Committees often involved an element of "cross-cutting", and greater attention should be paid to dealing with certain "multidisciplinary" subjects. The current discussion was looking at the Assembly's "tools" for addressing subjects. Some of these were tried and tested, while others were being developed. It was useful to have a full array of tools available, but he urged the Standing Committee to bear in mind that some subjects such as international terrorism might require a combination of Committees. The traditional approach of a single department or a single Committee looking at one subject could be unrealistic in some areas. There would be issues of paramount importance where it would be necessary to bring together different members from different Committees to deal with issues, rather than different Committees looking at the same subject from different angles. They should aim for a broad-based Assembly perspective rather than a narrow Committee-based perspective.

The President commented that the Mediterranean Special Group operated in that way. He agreed that more clarity was needed on the role that might be played by Special Rapporteurs who might indeed be able to address the type of topics mentioned by Mr George. He agreed that the goal of today's discussion was to try to offer the Assembly a collection of new tools to use rather than using only tools that had been invented 50 years ago. Flexible terms of reference were needed to allow this and to allow the Assembly to look at topical issues as they arose.

Mr Lamers (DE) said that he had excellent experiences working on a Sub-Committee. He thought there was potential for improving the coordination between Committees and Sub-Committees, and the planning meeting and drawing up of terms of reference would certainly help in that regard. However, he did not agree with the proposal to have only one Sub-Committee for each Committee. More flexibility was required: it might be the case that some Committees would need only one Sub-Committee, but others might need two or even more.

Mr Ibrügger (DE) (**Treasurer**) said that the costs of the Sub-Committees were covered in the relevant Committee budgets. He recalled that the Rules stated that the Standing Committee had to approve the composition, mandate and duration of Sub-Committees. In his experience, Sub-Committees were the driving force behind the Assembly's political activities. They played an important role in improving participation and socialisation of new members and were a distinctive advantage of the Assembly compared with other international organisations. The number of Sub-Committees should not be seen only in terms of a financial burden. He was reluctant to accept the formula of only allowing one Sub-Committee per Committee. This might be insufficient to react to all the issues the Assembly chose to address. He reiterated that each Sub-Committee had to be approved by the Standing Committee every year.

Mr Bouvard (FR) said that he fully agreed with Mr Lamers and Mr Ibrügger. He did not see why the number of Sub-Committees should be limited. Sub-Committees had an important role in getting new members involved and he did not agree that they should be limited to one per main Committee.

Mr Berzins (LV) said that he had been listening closely to the debate and also agreed with Mr. Lamers and others speakers in support of him. He preferred the flexible approach. The topics should be agreed by the Standing Committee which should also look at the mechanism which should be used to address each subject. This might be a Sub-Committee, a Working Group or Special Rapporteur, depending on the nature of the subject.

The President, summarizing the debate, said there seemed to be agreement on the need for co-ordination, and on the need to avoid duplication: to avoid, for example, three Committees visiting the same place in the same month. The Assembly should use new tools if necessary. However, he sensed a division on members' willingness to use an axe on the number of Sub-Committees. He referred delegates to Article 35 of the Assembly's Rules. The philosophy of Article 35, paragraph one, was that each Committee be entitled to set up a Sub-Committee. Paragraph two stated that the Standing Committee should fix the maximum number of Sub-Committees and paragraph three stated that should be done each year. He added that it was common practice not to carry out those provisions. He invited delegates to consider paragraphs two and three, and perhaps modify paragraph one, and to implement the approval process properly.

Senator Nolin (CA) said that it was a difficult decision, but the Working Group's concern was to address the problem whereby the number of activities was dictated by the Assembly's current structures.

The President said that with the Standing Committee's approval, Senator Nolin could be invited to come up with terms of reference for the Committees by the May meeting in Paris so as to give the Standing Committee the authority to identify the topics for the course of the year. The Working Group should also look at the Articles in the Rules which he had referred to earlier concerning the approval of Sub-Committees. The President asked if there was a consensus for inviting Senator Nolin to undertake these tasks.

There were no objections and the Chairman's proposal was agreed to.

The President invited the Standing Committee to consider proposal B1⁸ on the Special Mediterranean Group and reminded delegates that Senator Nolin's group had recommended keeping it as a separate group. The President asked if there was a consensus for keeping it outside the main Committee structure.

⁸ B1. The Mediterranean Special Group should remain as a special group and not become a fifth or sixth Committee

Proposal B1 was agreed to.

Mr Forcieri (IT) asked for clarification of what was decided on the previous item, specifically had Senator Nolin been given the power to delete paragraph one of Article 35.

The President said that Mr Nolin had been authorised to look at paragraph one of Article 35 and to consider reviewing the Rules relating to the approval of Sub-Committees.

The President then turned to proposals B6 and B7⁹ and invited delegates to consider the Working Group's proposals concerning the Assembly's meetings with the Russian delegation.

Senator Nolin (CA) said that with respect to proposals B6 and B7, the Working Group was convinced of the need to strengthen relations with the Russian delegation. The Working Group felt that the twice yearly meetings with the Russian delegation lasted about one and a half hours and were less productive than the meetings of the former Joint Monitoring Group which met twice a year, with meetings typically lasting one and half days. He suggested that the Standing Committee should consider an alternative approach to try to make the meetings more useful. The Working Group also proposed that the annual joint meetings in Moscow should be reinstated. There was also a specific point about the forthcoming meeting of the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee which he invited the Secretary General to address.

The Secretary General said that members of the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee needed to commit themselves to attending the meeting at the Paris session. This could only take place after the plenary sitting on the final day of the session and it was therefore important that members stayed on after the plenary sitting. If the meeting were not well attended, it would send entirely the wrong signals to the Russian delegation.

He agreed that the current formulation for the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee was not entirely satisfactory because despite everyone's best efforts to make the meeting genuinely "at 27", it tended to assume the character of "26 plus 1".

The President said that he would like the members present to commit to attending the meeting with the Russian Federation in Paris, and not leave before 7pm on the day of the closing plenary sitting. He asked that Secretaries to the Delegations ensured that members were able to stay for the meeting. He said that there would be a difficult period ahead as there appeared to be a clear pattern of regression of Russian domestic and international policy and an anti-Western attitude. However it was important to continue the dialogue between the Russian Federation and NATO PA, and this should include a meeting in Russia. However, this meeting should not be confined to meeting solely with the Russian delegation to the Assembly but should also include meetings with other sectors of Russian society and opinion. He was concerned that Russia was increasingly becoming a "negative bystander" of events and was building a "Saudi" style nation: large income based on natural resources with no structural reform.

Mr Meckel (DE) asked whether the meeting with the Russian Federation during the Paris session could be moved to the Monday, perhaps after the Standing Committee meeting, to avoid the difficulties caused by holding the meeting on Tuesday afternoon.

⁹ B6. The NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee structure should be re-examined by the Standing Committee and the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee itself to see if a new formula can be developed which would permit both deeper and broader dialogue.

B7. The practice of holding a Committee meeting (or a joint Committee meeting) in Russia each year should be reinstated.

The President said that it would not be possible to alter the programme, which was already very full.

Mr Viggers (UK) said that many frustrations had been experienced at recent meetings in the Duma, which had proved unpredictable in terms of who would participate on the Russian side, and which had sometimes been less than constructive. However, over time, there had been a thawing in the atmosphere and often this was most evident during the margins of the meetings; the coffee breaks, lunches, and during the evenings. He therefore believed that it was important to reinstate the meetings in Moscow, and he agreed that it would be very useful to add meetings outside the context of the Russian parliament.

Mr Clapham (UK) supported the proposals to look again at how to develop the relationship with the Russian Federation. Ideally, some means should be found to combine the best elements of the various meeting formats that had involved the Assembly and Russia. He noted that dialogue was important in many areas, and cited energy security as being a recent example.

Mr Koenders (NL) agreed with much had been said about the need for dialogue with Russia and the need to consider another forum for that dialogue. He felt that it would be useful to have a more specific proposal to consider for the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee format and that this should be discussed further at a subsequent meeting.

Mr Forcieri (IT) said that it was important to identify how to intensify the Assembly's relationship with the Russian parliament. He noted that whilst the Russian Federation held good military relations with NATO, the relationship between the Duma and NATO PA appeared to be deteriorating. The Assembly should redouble its efforts to revitalise the relationship, and it would send the wrong signal if members failed to turn up to the meeting in Paris. He asked whether the time of the meeting could be changed: this timing itself did not send the best signal.

The President asked the French Delegation Secretary whether it would be possible to change the time of the meeting, perhaps to the Friday morning.

Mr Taillet (Secretary to the French Delegation) said that it would not be possible.

The President said that Members should make the effort to stay on Tuesday to attend the meeting. He commented that the relationship between countries and the Russian Federation at Executive level was not perfect and more complicated than it seemed. Parliamentary dialogue was difficult because democratic parties had virtually disappeared from the Duma, but it was important to try to meet the democratic forces that still existed in Moscow.

He said that there clearly was a consensus on the reinstatement of the meetings in Moscow, and that this should include meetings with democratic forces outside the parliament. He would ask Senator Nolin and the Working Group to elaborate on alternative formats to the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee, and he said that if Mr Viggers and Mr Koenders, members with experience in relations with the Russian Federation, or indeed any other members had proposals to improve relations with Russia, these should be submitted to the Chairman of the Working Group.

The Standing Committee took a short break from 10.52 to 11.10.

The President invited comments on proposals C1 to C3¹⁰ relating to the structure of sessions.

¹⁰ C1. Retain a flexible and pragmatic approach to session structure while maintaining as a goal a half-day plenary sitting at the conclusion of spring sessions, and an opening ceremony at the beginning of annual sessions with a half-day plenary sitting at the conclusion.

Senator Nolin (CA) said that the Working Group recommended a pragmatic and flexible approach towards the structure of sessions because much depended upon the session location and facilities available. As a guideline, the Working Group felt that annual sessions should ideally open and close with a half day plenary sitting, and that spring sessions should remain as they are now: closing with a half day plenary sitting.

The Working Group considered whether excursions should continue, be scrapped or take place at the end of sessions. The benefits of excursions were that they assisted networking and allowed members to see some of the host country. On the other hand, they added to the time commitment required of members. The Working Group did not want to examine the many possible permutations involved without first receiving guidance from the Standing Committee on whether excursions should be retained, and whether efforts should be made to reduce the overall duration of sessions.

The President wished to make a few comments. The sessions needed maximum visibility. In Paris several heads of State and Government had been invited, which would attract media attention to the plenary sessions. The second objective – if the host nation so chose – was to “display” itself through Committee visits. In his view, excursions and the networking opportunity they provided were important. He thought it would be rather sad to cancel them as he felt they gave maximum exposure to the host country, although they gave rise to longer sessions. However, it was important to remember that the Assembly only met twice per year in plenary and therefore he was not keen to shorten sessions. He recognised that plenary sessions involved a lot of work but it was a worthwhile investment of time and effort.

Mr Lello (PT) supported the President’s position. The structure should be adapted as necessary, but it should retain the opportunity to develop personal links. In his experience as a government minister, he often found he was dealing with members of other governments whom he had previously met through their connection with the NATO PA. He found the excursions very useful and he agreed that they provided a way of seeing something of the host country, and they added to appeal of the Assembly.

Mr Koenders (NL) pointed out that some members had limited time and they felt that the meetings were too long. This was the case with his own delegation, and it could be seen by the number of early departures. He noted that the United States delegation was not present in all plenary sessions. While he too enjoyed excursions, he was not convinced of their net benefits. He thought that they were difficult and costly to arrange, and would prefer excursions to be limited to smaller events on the Committee “off” days. He agreed with proposal C1, and thought that a “split” plenary sitting would also be appropriate for spring sessions. He also felt that sessions could sometimes be built around a theme such as preparations for the next NATO summit.

The President agreed with the comment about spring sessions: he thought it strange that the opening ceremony was held on the last day. On the issue of excursions, his preference was to hold the excursion on the last day.

Mr Mates (UK) felt that the excursions provided opportunities for increasing understanding, networking, making friends and discussing topical issues. These were important parts of the work of the Assembly, and played an important part in integrating new delegations. He agreed with the President that sessions should not be made shorter and he felt that session duration had nothing to do with the reasons why United States delegates often did not attend the full plenary sittings.

C2. Seek the guidance of the Standing Committee on whether the excursion should be retained.

C3. Seek the guidance of the Standing Committee on whether efforts should be made to reduce the duration of sessions.

The President said that issue had been discussed many times.

Mr Meckel (DE) agreed that it was a good idea to have a media event at the beginning of the session as would be the case in Paris. This would raise the profile of the work of the session. He noted that this might detract media attention from normal Assembly business such as resolutions which had to take place during the second plenary sitting after the Committee meetings, but he still favoured the “split” plenary sitting concept.

He also suggested that there should be no distinction between spring and annual sessions: each should be able to adopt reports and resolutions. This would raise the Assembly’s media profile and make it more relevant. He also called for shorter reports which would include a summary and recommendations.

Mr Lamers (DE) agreed that annual sessions should begin with the opening ceremony and end with the plenary sitting. The excursion was necessary to increase members’ understanding of the host country and its culture. However, if it were at the end, members could decide to attend it or not, but would still attend the plenary session.

Mrs Cordy (CA) approved of the proposal to promote a flexible and pragmatic approach. There were logistical and financial implications in holding an opening ceremony and a closing plenary sitting, but she favoured that arrangement, acknowledging that the concerns of the host nation must be taken into account. She agreed that the excursions enabled members to see the historical and cultural facets of the host country, rather than just the four walls of a conference centre. It would be a compromise to hold the excursion on the final day, but would make it difficult for the host country to estimate numbers of participants. She also suggested that some sessions could be condensed and sometimes it would not be necessary for sessions to last for the full five days.

Mr Estrella (ES) agreed that some meetings could be shortened, but some subjects needed more consideration than one day, and the Committees were being overloaded with subjects. The current structure should be maintained. Without the excursion it was difficult to see when the Standing Committee would meet. He also noted that the time available for Standing Committee meetings had been reduced but it was increasingly being asked to deal with matters that belonged in the Committees. He wondered whether the Standing Committee could meet at the very beginning of sessions, after the Delegation Secretaries’ meeting. Overall, he favoured retaining the current structure but “splitting” the plenary sitting.

The President agreed that the workload and responsibilities of the Standing Committee had increased. The dilemma was whether to have the Standing Committee meet also at the beginning of the session thereby increasing session duration, or perhaps having the Standing Committee forgo participation in the excursion.

Mr Estrella (ES) noted that some members, due to the distance to the meeting venue from the host country, already had to leave a day earlier than others for travel purposes.

The President said that there was a consensus on having flexibility and on holding two plenary sittings, one at the beginning and one at the end of sessions. Of course, it would be necessary to take into account the views of the host nations. He also agreed with Mr Meckel’s suggestion that the sessions should be equal and this would be the case in Paris. In view of world developments, the Assembly should be able to put out resolutions if there was a need. It was also the case with this meeting where a text on Belarus was being prepared for adoption. He felt that the Working Group should consider the idea of holding two equal sessions so that it could issue resolutions and press communiqués if necessary. This would increase the Assembly’s profile and make it more reactive. He also felt the Working Group should be asked to consider the notion of holding the excursion at the end of the session as an option for host nations.

Proposal C1 was agreed to.

Mr Nolin (CA) introduced proposal D1 and D2¹¹. Regarding the Bureau, the Working Group agreed that the mandates of the Bureau should remain as they are because the existing frequency of rotation among political and geographical groupings was appropriate.

Regarding the Committees and Sub-Committees, the Working Group agreed that if the number of Sub-Committees is reduced, then the duration of mandates should also be reduced so there would be more rotation for fewer places. This arrangement could be phased in with existing officers serving the duration in place at the time of their election.

The President said that he would refrain from comment on this set of proposals.

Mr Gomes da Silva (PT) said that he supported the reduction of mandates and suggested that terms should be for two years rather than four for all Committee positions as well as the Bureau. There should also be a "break" for Committee officers to prevent them simply moving from position to position more or indefinitely. The only exception would be Committee officers becoming members of the Bureau. He also believed that all Committee officers should be changed at the same time so that regional and political balances could be well managed. Any replacements made between these normal cycles - due , for instance, to departures from the Assembly – would expire at the same time as all the others so that a co-ordinated replacement of officers could still take place.

The President commented that elections would never be conveniently placed, whatever time of year the officers were elected.

Mr Mates (UK) thought that to change all officers at the same time would lead to discontinuity and a lack of experience, and would make it difficult for Committees to complete their workloads.

Mr Koenders (NL) agreed with Mr Mates that changing officers at the same time was not the best proposal. However there was a problem with the same people being circulated from post to post. He suggested that there ought to be a break after a person had served on two different posts to allow others to take their place. Similar proposals had been made at the Council of Europe and the OSCE. He thought that the Working Group should be asked to look at this issue.

The President said that whilst he was open to the proposals, many people in the elected positions were experienced, enthusiastic, dedicated and had wanted to do the job. These might be lost if rotations were on a more frequent basis. He believed that there should be a balance between rotation and experience.

Mr Lello (PT) suggested a compromise between the two positions on the issue of rotation. He said that it was normal for a Vice-Chairman to look towards eventually becoming the Committee Chairman so he suggested that those moves should be acceptable, but not moves that allowed members to go back to start the rotation again. Perhaps members should be allowed to fulfil the three positions on a Committee but not start the cycle again.

¹¹ D1. The duration of the mandates of the Bureau should not be changed.

D2. If the number of Sub-Committees is reduced, the mandates of all Committee, Sub-Committee and other mandates should be reduced so that officers serve no more than three years in one position. This would be phased in so that officers already in post would serve for the duration specified at the time of their first election, and the new duration would apply only to those elected after the introduction of new, shorter duration mandates.

Mr Estrella (ES) agreed with the proposal (D1) not to change the mandates of the Bureau. In view of the enlargement of the Assembly, however he would support shortening the duration of Committee mandates, even to two years although three might be a more acceptable step. However, he did not feel that it would be sensible to produce a rule on rotation because circumstances differed within Committees. He felt that guidelines might be possible, but not rigid rules.

The President asked if there was a consensus on proposal D1.

Proposal D1 was agreed to.

The President asked for comments on the proposal (D2) to reduce the mandates of all Committee, Sub-Committee and other mandates so that officers serve no more than three years in one position, specifically whether officers should serve only two or three years.

Mr Viggers (UK) said he was glad that there was a consensus on D1. He agreed that shortening Committee mandates to three years would be appropriate, but he did not think that imposing a “break” on officers was a good idea, nor did he support Mr Gomez Da Silva’s proposal to have a “clean slate”. The difficulty of finding good officers for Committees should not be underestimated.

Mr Mates believed that the Working Group should examine the proposals that had been made regarding the mandates of Committee officers. It was complicated, and there was virtue in having people move up through the offices of a Committee.

The President said that there had been a consensus for D1, but the D2 proposal and the other ideas that had been put forward raised a variety of issues that needed careful consideration. He agreed that the Working Group should be asked to return to this question, taking account of the Standing Committee’s deliberations.

He asked Senator Nolin to present the next set of proposals.

Senator Nolin (CA) introducing proposals E1 and E2¹², said that the Working Group believed that the joint meetings with the North Atlantic Council were very useful and the meeting in Paris would provide an opportunity for discussing how often such meetings should be held, and how best to involve the NAC members in Assembly sessions.

The Working Group did not feel that the Assembly should pursue a formal charter to establish its status with NATO. It would be more efficient to consider an exchange of letters with NATO which would specify existing arrangements and understandings to ensure that there is no turning back.

The President invited comments on the proposal for an exchange of letters.

Mr Estrella (ES) said that the wording of proposal E1 in the document had been unclear.

Mr George (UK) said that he thought it was an excellent section of the report and had not realised how far the Assembly had come and how advanced it had become compared with other international parliamentary organisations. He suggested that the Assembly should not concentrate on natural aspirations for control, but should look instead at its role. It was important to prod, probe

¹² E1. Discuss practical arrangements for involving NAC members in sessions with NATO’s Secretary General and NAC members.

E2. Consider a letter formalizing existing arrangements between the Assembly and NATO, but do not pursue a formal charter.

and influence decisions before they were made, and increase accountability and transparency. Perhaps it would be possible to get an agreement whereby NATO would respond to written questions, and perhaps efforts should be made to restore the Political Committee's former practice of having a NATO Assistant Secretary General as a regular participant in its meetings.

The President thanked Mr George for pointing out that the Assembly was ahead of other organisations and mentioned that OSCE had called to say how glad the organisation was that NATO PA would be participating in the monitoring of the parliamentary elections in Ukraine. Regarding the relationship with NATO, the Assembly did not function as a parliament for the NATO executive, but members did have budget responsibilities in the defence area. He felt that the Working Group's approach was appropriate.

Mr Forcieri (IT) agreed with proposal E1, subject to it being reworded for greater clarity. On E2, he preferred more than an exchange of letters and suggested a joint declaration would be a further step forward.

Proposals E1 and E2 were agreed to.

Mr Kamov (BU), addressing proposals E3 and E4¹³, said that Bulgaria would shortly be hosting an informal meeting of NATO defence ministers, and the Assembly had no formal input into such gatherings. He believed that contact between the Assembly and NATO should be improved. The Assembly had an obvious interest in meetings of that kind, and there should be information exchanges and closer contacts between NATO and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

The President noted that this proposal had received some support from delegations, and he regretted that it had been rejected by the Working Group. He had thought that a 'Wise Man's Group' would raise the profile of NATO PA at a time when the future of NATO was uncertain on both sides of the Atlantic. However, he could support the Working Group's proposal that instead of producing such a report, the Assembly should prepare a declaration based on the work of the Committees for consideration by the Alliance's leaders as they prepared for the Riga summit.

The Secretary General said that the situation was similar to that before the Prague Summit. On that occasion, the Assembly had prepared a declaration at a special meeting of the Standing Committee and this had been sent to NATO during the run-up to the summit. It was felt that to have any impact, the Assembly would have to make its views known in the months before the summit which was scheduled immediately after the Assembly's annual session. The timings were similar for the Riga summit, so a draft would be prepared based largely on the work of the Committees – mainly the Defence and Security Committee and the Political Committee – and this would be circulated before the summer. This would be amended and adopted at a special Standing Committee during September, and then communicated to NATO and the member governments.

¹³ E3. The notion of preparing a "Wise-men's" study on the future of NATO would be a duplication of existing work within Committees, and the idea has been overtaken by events, in particular the decision to hold a NATO Summit in Riga in November. The Assembly should therefore consider holding a special Standing Committee meeting in September in order to prepare a declaration stating the Assembly's views on the themes to be raised during the Riga Summit.

E4. Standing Committee members should press their national authorities to ensure that the Assembly is represented at the Riga Summit, and that the Assembly's role and work are recognized in the summit declaration.

Mr Koenders (NL) suggested that this matter should put on the agendas of the Committees for the Paris session. For instance, Mr Meckel, Chairman of the Political Committee set aside time in the Committee for open debate and this could be used to address this particular matter. He also urged members to ensure that the Riga summit was debated in national parliaments beforehand. He also believed that the Assembly's President should be able to present the Assembly's views at the Riga summit.

The President asked the Secretary General to provide the background on Assembly participation in NATO summits.

The Secretary General said that there had been early reluctance to allow the Assembly to participate in NATO summits. At the 1997 Summit in Madrid, the then President of the Assembly, Senator Roth, had addressed the summit from his seat as a member of the United States delegation to the Summit, but making it clear that he was speaking as the President of the Assembly. At the Washington Summit in 1999, President Ruperez had addressed the Summit, and several other members had been associated with Summit-related events. At the Summits in Prague and Istanbul, then President Bereuter had made an address and had been accompanied in Prague by Mr Estrella whom he had just succeeded as Assembly President. The unwritten understanding was that Assembly participation was considered for "enlargement" summits, but this did not have to be the case and he thought that it ought to be technically possible for the NATO PA President to attend every summit. However, this would need changing the mindset of certain people at NATO. Members should press their national governments to accept the participation of the Assembly, and it would be particularly helpful if the host nation delegation – Latvia – could press this issue. The goal would be to make it the norm for the Assembly to be represented at all NATO summits. As the President had pointed out, the current NATO Secretary General and the NATO ambassadors were very well disposed towards the Assembly so this would be an opportune time to seek systematic participation. He also reminded members that the Assembly should press to have its work recognized in the summit declaration.

The President said that he would attempt to take his successor to the Riga meeting to establish an element of continuity.

Mr Meckel (DE) said that it was important to send a clear message to NATO and a date for the NATO PA Standing Committee meeting in September or October ought to be fixed as soon as possible.

The President answered that a date would be fixed by the end of the day.

Proposals E3 and E4 were agreed to.

Mr Nolin (CA) introduced proposals F1 and F2¹⁴ and said that the Assembly's profile was important and its work should be reported as widely as possible. More attention needed to be paid to media relations, and the Working Group therefore supported the new allocation of tasks within the International Secretariat which would facilitate that. As the policy community was the Assembly's main audience, the website ought to be developed to reach as much of that audience as possible. He noted that a document on the Assembly's website was on the agenda for consideration under a

¹⁴ F1. The new division of responsibilities within the International Secretariat to permit more attention to be devoted to external and media relations should be maintained.

F2. The International Secretariat should prepare a document for the Standing Committee concerning the use of the Assembly's website.

separate item. He concluded by saying that the Working Group believed that it was for national delegations to work on the profile of the Assembly within their own parliaments.

The President said that the NATO PA produced the best quality reports of any other international parliamentary assembly and yet they were relatively unknown and unexposed. Reports should be circulated in Parliaments and to journalists.

Mr Meckel (DE) asked that the Assembly consider changing its Reports to sharpen them and to include summaries and their recommendations at the front.

The President agreed with those suggestions.

Mr Berzins (LV) said that he wished to make an editorial comment on proposal A4. It should be made clearer that whilst it had been agreed that the Standing Committee should decide the subjects, the Committees would remain able to recommend topics.

The President responded that the proposal was that the Committees would propose the subjects but the final decision would rest with the Standing Committee. The Working Group had been asked to look at the relevant Rules of Procedure and to present amendments to the Standing Committee at its Paris meeting.

Proposals F1 and F2 were agreed to.

The President thanked Senator Nolin and all the members of the Working Group for their outstanding work.

Statement on Belarus

The President told the Standing Committee that he had prepared a statement on Belarus which he proposed should be released to the press that day, should the Committee agree to it.

Mr Pilka (PL) said that he disagreed with the fourth paragraph and suggested that the words 'from the former Soviet republic' be deleted.

The President agreed to the amendment.

Mr Viggers (UK) said that whilst they had no objections to the context of the statement, he, and other Members, had several suggestions for textual amendments. He proposed that they produce an amended text over lunch for the Standing Committee to consider afterwards.

Mr George (UK) said that, with amendment, the statement would be strengthened against any counter-attack from the Belarussian authorities.

Mr Meckel (DE) added that it was important for all NATO PA member states to promote a civil society in Belarus.

Mr Lamers (DE) agreed and said that condemnation should also apply to the Belarussian judges who had punished protestors.

Mr Olekas (LT) agreed that amendments should be made to the statement.

Mr Forcieri (IT) agreed to participate in amending the statement.

The President agreed that the revised statement would be considered again after lunch.

5. The Assembly's 2006 Calendar of Activities [022 GEN 06 E Rev. 1]

The President said that normally the Secretary General would present a report on priorities and activities, but owing to the very crowded nature of the day's agenda, he had decided simply to give an oral presentation based on the current Calendar of Assembly activities.

The Secretary General said that the calendar spoke for itself, and preparations were in progress on the meetings listed. There had been some difficulties with the forthcoming visit to Oman, but he had discussed those with the relevant Sub-Committee chairman, Mr Lamers, and these problems should be resolved shortly. He also mentioned that a high-level delegation from Afghanistan had visited NATO headquarters earlier that month. They were discussing a framework for co-operation along the lines of those that NATO had with other partner countries. NATO had invited him to attend the meetings with the Afghan delegation and present to them the work of the Assembly. This underlined what had been said earlier about greater coordination between NATO and NATO PA and that NATO clearly recognized the value of the Assembly's work with partner parliaments. He said that if the programme with Afghanistan went ahead then the NATO PA might be asked to help the parliament. Interest had been shown by the Afghan delegation in the work of the Assembly. It remained to be seen if the programme how this programme would fit in with the substantial parliamentary assistance programmes such as those being run by the United Nations, the United States and other nations, and how such a programme could be fitted in with the Assembly's schedule and whether funding was available.

Mr Skarphedinsson (IS) mentioned recent developments between Iceland and the United States; specifically the decision announced in the previous week by the United States Government that it would be withdrawing its military forces from Iceland. He said that the military withdrawal was seen in Iceland as a breach by the United States of the 1951 bilateral agreement with Iceland. He pointed out that Iceland had no armed forces of its own and had relied on this agreement. He regretted that the US delegation was not present in Gdynia to discuss this matter. He said that this could become a NATO issue because the Secretary General of NATO, on the instigation of the Icelandic government, had raised this with President Bush and the Secretary General had said that NATO might have to ensure the air defences of Iceland if there was no agreement with the United States at a later stage. He would like the matter to be discussed during the Paris session.

The President said that he and Mr Skarphedinsson had discussed the matter earlier and he had encouraged Mr Skarphedinsson to raise it in the Standing Committee. He said that the Assembly's members were there to help each other and that this matter should be discussed during the Paris session. He would write to the leader of the United States delegation who was also the chairman of the Defence and Security Committee asking that this matter be raised. He also suggested that the Icelandic delegation could ask for a special report to be prepared on this topic of special importance, especially if it appeared to be a breach in an agreement between NATO countries.

Mr Olekas (LT) wished to urge members to participate in a Special Seminar on Belarus that would be held in Lithuania in September. However, he suggested changing the date from that shown in the Calendar of Activities. He suggested that 20-21 September would be better dates.

The President said that the timing of the meetings in September would have to be reconsidered in view of the addition of the special Standing Committee meeting.

[The meeting was adjourned for lunch between 12.40 and 14.05]

6. The Assembly's website [045 SC 06 E]

The President told the Standing Committee that at the last meeting they had asked for statistics of the use of the website.

The Deputy Secretary General said that the document on the Assembly's website provided statistics for the number of links from other website into the NATO PA website. This was a good indicator of interest in the website and it could be compared with the number of links to the websites of other interparliamentary organisations. The comparison showed that the Inter-Parliamentary Union had the largest number of links, but that was to be expected as most countries in the world were involved in that organisation. However, the NATO PA website was successful and showed considerably more links than the OSCE PA, WEU Assembly or the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Mr George (UK) said that he was delighted with the figures, but as a member of the OSCE, was disappointed with the OSCE's figures.

The President said that NATO PA's goal should be to achieve the same levels of usage as the IPU, but that would be for his successor to achieve.

7. Relations with the Palestine Legislative Council [038 SC 06 E] and [077 SC 06 E]

The President turned to the matter of relations with the Palestine Legislative Council and told the Standing Committee that there were delicate questions to consider. The previous year the Assembly had granted the Palestinian Legislative Council the status of Parliamentary Observer. The elections in January had returned Hamas as the dominant party in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Hamas was due to announce its government and Israel was due to hold elections, both in the next couple of weeks. The Standing Committee was asked to consider two documents, one providing background information and the other a letter from the Chairman of the Mediterranean Special Group, making the case that the Assembly should not change the status of the PLC which was democratically elected. The Standing Committee would be asked to decide: should the PLC retain its Parliamentary Observer status; if so, should any limits be set on the composition of that delegation; and should the Assembly provide support to that delegation to facilitate its participation in Assembly activities?

The President commented that there would be difficult decisions for the European Union to make when it decided whether or not to continue the provision of direct aid, some €500m, to the Palestinian Authority. He thought that Hamas had no intention of changing its charter and noted that Israel, the European Union and the United States all designated Hamas as a terrorist organisation. He compared the situation with that of Mauritania. The Assembly had previously suspended the status of Mauritania following the coup, and had offered to reinstate it upon a guarantee that the new President of Mauritania would hold elections. However, in the case of Palestine, there was no guarantee that Hamas would amend its charter and start negotiating with Israel.

Mr Lupoi (RO) suggested that the Standing Committee wait until after the elections in Israel, and the formation of the new Palestinian government, before it made a decision on the matter.

The President agreed that there were merits in postponing the decision, but the Standing Committee needed to decide whether the PLC should be invited to the Spring Session in Paris in May. He asked the Assembly to consider an alternative option of retaining PLC's Parliamentary Observer status, but not to invite Hamas until its position on the peace process had changed.

Mr Erdem (TR) said that the Turkish authorities had met the Hamas leaders and had given advice that they should: disarm; recognise Israel; and accept the peace Road Map. It was important to recognise that the elections had been free and fair, according to official international observers. It was important not to cut ties with a democratic country in the Middle East region where it had been difficult to promote democracy, but instead they should continue dialogue to encourage Hamas towards engagement in the peace process. It was, perhaps, the price of democracy that a group considered to be terrorists had been voted in by the people of Palestine.

Mr Estrella (ES) reminded the Standing Committee that it had encouraged the democratic elections in Palestine, which had been observed by the European Union. Pressure should be placed upon Hamas to include Fatah in its government and to continue towards a peace agreement with Israel. He suggested that the Assembly should retain the Observer Status for the PLC, but should not allow the attendance of any Hamas representative who had been individually identified as connected to, or active in, terrorism. For the Spring Session in Paris, the French Government would be allowed to veto the attendance of any representatives put forward by the PLC. It would be important that the PLC come to Paris to hear what the NATO PA had to say.

The President reiterated that the Assembly should decide whether or not the PLC should be invited to Paris, and reminded the Standing Committee that PLC could also be eligible to attend the meeting of the Mediterranean Special Group at Istanbul at the beginning of May. He also noted that the decision made would be of great importance to United States of America.

Mr Koenders (NL) said that the PLC should be invited to attend, but there should be flexibility in the conditions attached to their attendance in case the political situation changed. The election result was the outcome of a democratic process. In the past even the Israeli government itself had spoken to representatives of Hamas at municipal level through necessity, sometimes secretly and sometimes more openly. The Palestinian Legislative Council should not be regarded in the same way as a state. In this case he felt that it was better to engage than to isolate which would steer the PLC more towards other players such as Iran. It was also necessary to remember that the peace process required talking between enemies. The Palestinian Legislative Council was a parliament that consisted of representatives from other parties such as Fatah, and these certainly should not be excluded. He suggested inviting them and making it clear that they should avoid sending any representative who was on international lists of terrorist suspects.

Mr Banáš (SK) said that it was important to remember that the first priority of the Palestinian electors when voting was to reject the Fatah regime. There was a danger that if Europe ignored the outcome, then it could push Hamas into the hands of Iran and Syria. He suggested making a compromise by requesting that the Palestinian Legislative Council delegation contain representatives associated with Fatah and Hamas.

Mr Clapham (UK) pointed out that paragraph nine of the report showed that Hamas had a positive track record in social policy and good governance at municipal level during 2004 and 2005. He also referred to paragraph 15 of the report which suggested that by entering the Palestinian Legislative Council elections Hamas had implicitly acknowledged the Oslo peace process. He said that under such circumstances, the Assembly could not neglect to invite a delegation from the PLC.

Mr Olekas (LT) said that the question was should the Palestinian Legislative Council retain its status as a Parliamentary Observer or not. He mentioned that some individual members of the Palestinian Legislative Council might have difficulty obtaining the necessary visas, and not all the delegation's members would represent Hamas. He therefore supported making an invitation on an individual basis.

Mr Lello (PT) said there were times when it was necessary to be cynical and other times when it paid to be rigorous. The Palestinian Legislative Council had been granted observer status, not any

specific parties within the Palestinian Legislative Council. Nor should it be forgotten that the Palestinian Liberation Organization had had a terrorist dimension. The Assembly should have the courage to play the same sort of role as it had in the past: the PLC should be allowed to participate in order to witness our democratic example, tolerance and sensitivity. This might help them become more tolerant thereby contributing to stability in the Middle East.

Mr George (UK) said that the United Kingdom delegation did not have a group position on the issue. He recalled being in the position when he had invited representatives from the then Warsaw Pact in the face of considerable opposition from within the Assembly. However, he asked what signal this would send if the Assembly invited representatives from an organization which was on international lists of terrorist organizations. It could have an impact not just on Israeli participation, but also on the participation of representatives from moderate Arab regimes. It could also affect the participation of the United States delegation which could face domestic difficulties if it were seen to be meeting such representatives. The potential consequences should therefore be carefully thought through. He therefore thought that the best approach would be to “play for time” until the situation became clearer. The Assembly could show its interest by inviting the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to the Session. The Standing Committee could consider appointing a special rapporteur to meet Hamas for discussions and determine how the organization was evolving. If it appeared there would be no changes, he himself would not want to participate in meetings with group with such a platform.

The President welcomed Mr George’s suggestion because he no longer felt so isolated in his own position on the matter. He personally felt it was difficult to explain how taxpayers’ money should be spent on a terrorist organisation. He said that other terrorist organisations such as IRA and ETA, unlike Hamas, had limited political goals and were not seeking the elimination of a country. He said that Hamas was not part of the peace process, did not recognise the road map and has refused to sign agreements. He was also doubted that the United States delegation would approve of a delegation including Hamas. It would also be difficult for him to explain to his voters in Paris why he had invited Hamas representatives, but he would accede to the majority view. He also noted that his own delegation was split on the issue. He believed that there should be a consensus, and he therefore proposed making a distinction between the Palestinian Legislative Council and Hamas. The Palestinian Legislative Council had been granted Parliamentary Observer status and this should remain. However, inviting Hamas members required a positive decision and there clearly was no consensus on that. Therefore he proposed not issuing an invitation to either the Istanbul seminar or the Paris session. However, he agreed that there should be dialogue, and he supported the idea of sending a special envoy, or one or two volunteers, to find out whether there is any movement in Hamas’ positions.

He concluded that he personally believed that it would be disastrous to invite an openly terrorist organization to participate in Assembly meetings.

Mr Estrella (ES) said that the discussion was not about whether an invitation should be issued to Hamas. The discussion did not touch directly upon Hamas, but related to the Palestinian Legislative Council which had been granted Parliamentary Observer status. The question was whether that status should be suspended, a decision which would also have to be put to the plenary sitting of the Assembly. He said that the Palestinian Legislative Council should send pluralist representation with no person linked to terrorism. He also suggested that the delegates political affiliation’s could be not shown on the participation list. The key point was that the delegation would represent a democratically elected parliament.

The President said that a vote would be needed to cancel the current Observer Status of the PLC, and he did not believe that the status should be put to the vote. Nor was he proposing to formally invite a PLC delegation to the meetings in Istanbul and Paris. He felt that it would be best to wait and see how the situation evolved, perhaps by means of an envoy, and see whether President

Abbas – who had been faithful to the peace roadmap - would be interested in attending the Paris session. He did not feel that anyone wished to cancel the PLC's Observer status, but nor was there consensus on inviting Hamas representatives to the meetings in Istanbul and Paris.

Mr Lello (PT) said that since there was no disagreement about retaining the PLC's status within the Assembly, the only point of contention was who should represent the PLC. He agreed with the proposal put forward by Mr Estrella.

Mr Lupoi (RO) said that he had good contacts with the Middle East agreed and suggested that the PLC be asked to send President Abbas as their representative to Istanbul and Paris. He agreed that Rapporteurs should also be sent to Gaza.

The President said that it would not be possible to have President Abbas – as the head of government – representing the legislative body. He would be invited as a speaker in his capacity as President, not as a substitute for the PLC delegation. He noted that the French Government was continuing to speak to President Abbas but was not speaking to Hamas.

He summarised the debate so far: none of the delegations present wanted to cancel the Parliamentary Observer Status of the PLC; but the Assembly was undecided whether to invite the PLC or to even inform them of the Paris and Istanbul meetings, and he suggested refraining from doing so. He personally did not want to write to them officially and he was sure there was not a consensus on inviting Hamas. He was convinced that if he invited Hamas, he would have a crisis with the United States delegation. If, however, the Standing Committee instructed him that he should do so, he would have to inform the United States delegation.

Mr Estrella (ES) said that no-one was asking the President to invite Hamas. The issue was whether the Assembly should inform the PLC of the Assembly's meetings. In effect, this meant hoping that the PLC would not hear of the meetings. However, if the PLC did hear of the meetings and exercised its status to participate, what would the Assembly's reaction be?

The President said that he was trying to gain some time to see what would happen during the next few weeks. He thought that an envoy should be sent, and he wished to have contact with President Abbas to get a sense of how the situation was developing. If a PLC delegation announced it would participate in the Paris session, for instance, he would feel the need to consult with his own government and the United States delegation.

Mr Lamers (DE) thought that the Standing Committee should accept the President's proposal that the PLC should not be invited to the Paris session.

Mr George (UK) disagreed with Mr Estrella. He felt that whatever the legal, technical subtleties, the outside world would view an invitation as whether Hamas was being invited or not. In effect, the issue had become an issue of confidence in the President, who had stated clearly that to extend an invitation would be politically damaging for him. He did not feel that the Assembly should put the President in that position. He therefore felt that there were strong arguments for not extending an invitation and for sending an envoy to Gaza. He felt that the Assembly did not want a divisive vote on this matter, nor did he wish to see Assembly members at odds with each other over this subject.

The President said that he did not want to personalise the debate. He reiterated that consensus would be needed to issue an invitation, and he was convinced that this would create difficulties for the United States delegation. He was, of course, very willing to consult the United States delegation on this matter.

Mr Koenders (NL) thought that it was important to find a compromise, and this was not yet an issue of confidence in the President. It was indeed a complicated matter. He would not want the Assembly to send a signal to the Palestinian people that their Parliament and the result of their democratic election process was not taken seriously simply because the result was one that many people outside the country did not like. He did not want to “disinvite” the PLC for that reason and because the organization’s status with the Assembly had not changed. An invitation, of course, might not lead to a result. Nor did he see any point in sending a special envoy who would not hear anything new. He felt that discretion could be given to the President to re-evaluate the situation over the coming few weeks; an invitation did not have to be sent immediately. Without substantial changes over the next few weeks, he would want to be very sure that the Assembly would not invite those who accept or abide by terrorism. But it should be clear if anyone were to be excluded that it was the connection with terrorism that was the key factor, not membership of Hamas.

Mr Lupoi (RO) disagreed with Mr Koenders and said that the invitations should only be considered after the PLC clarified their position on Israel.

The President reiterated that he was not prepared to accept a majority decision, particularly in the absence of the USA delegation: a consensus should be reached. He believed that there was a consensus on not changing the PLC’s status. Regarding a formal invitation, there were several options. One would be to invite the PLC on the condition that the delegation did not include anyone implicated in terrorism. Another would be to forgo sending an invitation, but wait until the situation becomes clearer. Still another possibility would be to tell them that they would not be invited until they joined the peace plan, the roadmap, and in the meantime we would welcome President Abbas as a special guest at the Paris session. He favoured the last option and he was prepared to ask the United States delegation for its view.

Mr Erdem (TR) said that the invitation would be issued to the Palestinian Legislative Council and not specifically to Hamas. Members of the delegation nominated by the PLC would require visas, and these would not be issued to terrorist suspects. He asked whether Standing Committee had the right not to issue an invitation bearing in mind that the PLC had the rights of a Parliamentary Observer and therefore was entitled to participate as such.

The President said that it did.

Mr Koenders (NL) said that a majority decision would be necessary for an invitation to be withdrawn. Regarding the last option described by the President, he saw a difficulty. If, as suggested, the invitation were to be kept on hold until Hamas joined the peace process, it would create problems of knowing how to judge when that had taken place. Also, it was a government that joined the peace process, not a parliament, so this would not be a realistic option. He reiterated that once status had been granted, a majority vote would be needed in order not to issue an invitation. He also noted that a lot of Palestinians had voted for Fatah, and their members of parliament would be excluded for no good reason if the PLC did not receive an invitation. Of course, it might be difficult only to invite Fatah, but he would not necessarily be against that. Again, he did not feel the Palestinian Legislative Council could easily be “dis-invited”, so the goal would be to limit the adverse consequences that everyone was concerned about.

The President said that there was no problem in inviting PLO members who had previously participated in Assembly activities. Based on his 25 years of experience visiting the Middle East, the distinction he made between the PLO, Hamas, and President Abbas was important. President Abbas had campaigned on the peace process and the road map and was elected on that basis. The PLO lost the election due to corruption and bad management, not because the Palestinian people were espousing support for al Qaeda and their methods. However, the election had been won by a group violently opposed to the peace process, but the President still supported the peace process. What message would an invitation send to moderates in the Arab world? That we would

speak to Hamas but not the PLO and President Abbas. He would therefore favour inviting President Abbas and PLO members of the PLC. That would demonstrate the Assembly's political preferences and its rejection of those who support terrorism.

Mr Estrella (ES) said that if the Standing Committee agreed with the President's proposal, it should have the courage to suspend the PLC's observer status. Certainly, one of the alternatives - crossing fingers and hoping that Hamas did not ask to attend - was not sustainable. He suggested discussing the problem with the Palestinian Legislative Council and suggesting that for the moment, the PLC should send one or two delegates from the former delegation. He said the Palestinian Legislative Council should be informed that only people without terrorist connections would be invited to the seminar in Turkey.

The President said that the seminar was a different story.

Mr Estrella (ES) said that it was important to send a political message.

The President said that he did not want to raise issue of suspension of the status of the Palestinian Legislative Council because it was important to respect the vote of the Palestinian people. It was also too early to judge, and it was possible that Hamas could come out in favour of the peace process. He was in favour of inviting PLO representatives: he had said he was in favour of inviting President Abbas or former members of the delegation, but he was not prepared to talk with Hamas.

Mr Lello (PT) said that the former delegation had been superseded and the situation had changed. He agreed to the idea of inviting President Abbas and suggesting to the Palestinian Legislative Council that they send a scholar or independent political analyst to the Istanbul seminar. He also underlined that the PLC did not just consist of Hamas: it included members of the PLO and independents. However, he did not want the Assembly to have to select a delegation but for the moment, the PLC should be asked to invite independent, perhaps academic representatives.

Mr Mates (UK) said that he had listened closely to the discussion. He suggested that the least bad solution would be to agree to the President's proposal and avoid forcing the United States delegation into a position where they felt they were unable to attend.

The President said that he could imagine problems for United States members in being seen to participate in meetings with Hamas, and he it would be very difficult for asked the members to consider the likely position of United States delegation on the matter and said that he would write to the delegation outlining the options.

Mr Lello (PT) asked which option that would include: inviting Hamas or President Abbas.

Mr Estrella (ES) said that no one had suggested inviting Hamas. No one had the approval to invite Hamas: the issue was whether to invite the PLC.

The President said that he would write a letter to the United States delegation.

Mr Koenders (NL) asked the President to clarify what would be the next steps following that letter.

The President said that he would be asking the United States delegation whether they wanted to suspend the status of the Palestinian Legislative Council and if they wanted to invite a delegation from the Palestinian Legislative Council. He would point out that none of the delegations present wished to suspend the PLC's status, but there was a division on whether to invite the PLC to Paris or not. In response to a question (inaudible) from the floor, the President said that it was obvious that inviting the PLC meant that a delegation would include Hamas members.

Mr Koenders (NL) said that it was a good idea to send a letter to determine the United States view. It was not obvious whether the United States delegation would be for or against changing the status of the Palestinian Legislative Council. He emphasised that it was for this body to make decisions and, given the parliamentary observer status of the PLC, it would require a majority decision not to invite a delegation from the PLC. If the Standing Committee was not going to take that decision, it had to decide upon another course of action, and this was not yet clear.

Mr Mates (UK) said that there had been no decision to suspend the status but it seemed that some were suggesting that the United States should have a veto. He did not believe that this should be the case, not that this was what the President had proposed.

The President said that there was a consensus on leaving the PLC's status unchanged. He would inform the United States that the status of the Palestinian Legislative Council would remain unchanged and ask their views on the matter. If the United States wished to raise the question of suspending the PLC's status, this would take place during the Paris session.

If the Palestinian Legislative Council was invited to send a delegation of its own choosing to Istanbul and Paris, the delegation was bound to include Hamas. He did not sense a consensus in the room to invite the Palestinian Legislative Council delegation. That might change later in the year, but at the moment, there seemed to be no consensus. A third option is to invite former PLO delegates on a personal basis, or President Abbas as a special guest. He would ask the United States to react to each of the options. But he felt that it was fair to say that there had been no consensus for inviting the Palestinian Legislative Council at that stage.

Mr Viggers (UK) agreed with the President's summary but asked what the Assembly would do, should the PLC ask to attend the Paris meeting. He did not feel it was practical for the Standing Committee to chart out all the possibilities that might emerge, and the best option was to pursue the course the President had outlined.

The President responded that in that event he would contact the United States delegation for their opinion. If it meant that the United States delegation would not attend the Paris session, he would not invite Hamas.

Mr Estrella (ES) reminded the Standing Committee that they were not discussing the invitation of Hamas, but whether to invite the PLC.

The President reiterated that the European Union was faced with a similar problem with its financial aid to Palestine: not wishing to punish the Palestinian people for their vote, but at the same time not wishing to support a terrorist organisation.

Mr Koenders (NL) considered that there was no consensus for the option of inviting the PLC and allowing them to choose their own delegation to the meeting in Paris and yet the Assembly would need a majority vote to un-invite the PLC. He felt that under those circumstances, the way forward was along the lines Mr Lello had suggested: to contact the PLC, explain our difficulty in having a delegation including Hamas members under current circumstances, and therefore proposing a delegation composed of non-Hamas members such as the PLO. As Mr Estrella had said, there had been a democratic election, and there was an obligation to invite a delegation from the PLC unless a majority decided against doing so. Regarding President Abbas, he would be very pleased to have him as a speaker at the Paris session, but not as an alternative to a PLC delegation.

The President agreed with Mr Koenders' proposal: that the status has not been cancelled, that the Assembly was prepared to accept a PLC delegation but not including members of Hamas.

He proposed that he write to the PLC to inform them that the Assembly would be prepared to receive a delegation, providing it was not affiliated with Hamas.

Mr Lello (PT) disagreed with the President's proposal. It had been suggested that the PLC should be contacted informally and asked to send a delegation with independent members to Paris.

The President said that he could agree with the proposal for an informal explanation to the PLC rather than a formal letter. This meant that it might be necessary to send an envoy to the Palestinian authorities rather than do this through diplomatic channels.

Mr Lupoi (RO) volunteered to be the envoy sent to Palestine.

Mr George (UK) suggested that the President should choose the envoy.

The President summed up the decisions made so far and made the following proposals: that the PLC's status as Parliamentary Observer would be retained; a special envoy would be sent to Palestine to invite President Abbas to attend the Paris session, and to explain to the PLC the Assembly's difficulties in accepting a delegation which included Hamas members. The PLC would therefore be asked to send independent members or PLO members who would be welcome to attend the spring session in Paris. The Assembly would await the envoy's report before formally inviting the PLC. The Standing Committee would be informed of the results of the envoy's mission.

The United States delegation would be informed of the Assembly's decisions on that matter.

The President's proposals were agreed to.

Mr Meckel (DE) proposed that the Bureau should be given a mandate to decide on the matter once the envoy had reported.

Mr Meckel's proposal was agreed to.

[The Standing Committee took a short break between 15.35 and 15.40]

8. The number of delegates for Algeria and Morocco [042 SC 06 E]

The President introduced the proposal to increase the number of the Algerian and Moroccan delegations to reflect the composition of their Parliaments.

The proposal was agreed to.

9. Relations with China [043 SC 06 E]

The President turned to the issue of China. He noted that the Economic and Security Committee had a successful visit to China last year and the President would visit western China in 2006, subject to the approval of the Standing Committee.

At the meeting last November in Copenhagen the Standing Committee had recognised the strategic, political and economic importance of China. However, there was concern about establishing formal relations with the People's Congress, given its lack of democratic credentials. He proposed that the Assembly choose one of two options. The first was to invite Chinese officials as individual non-parliamentary observers to the spring and annual sessions. It would not be

recognised as a parliamentary delegation and the members could be government officials or members of the People's Congress. The individuals would not have speaking rights, but the ability to speak could be conferred on an *ad hoc* basis by Committees or at the plenary session. The second option would be to invite the People's Congress to send a delegation as Parliamentary Guests. The invitation would be on an *ad hoc* basis, but the delegation would be given the rights of a Parliamentary Observer delegation. The Assembly had a precedent for establishing relations with undemocratic assemblies: for instance, the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union had been granted associate status in 1990.

The President informed the Standing Committee that China was keen to send a high-level delegation to the Spring Session in Paris. He considered that the Standing Committee should consider the proposals pragmatically as China was an important player in issues of interest to the Assembly, such as the environment, energy security and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. He also pointed out that there were other atypical governments such as Oman and the United Arab Emirates that NATO PA dealt with on a regular basis.

Mr Lello (PT) said that he was in favour of allowing a Chinese delegation to attend the Spring Session. Their presence would be strategically important to the discussions.

The President agreed with Mr Lello's comments.

Mr Meckel (DE) disagreed with Mr Lello and said that whilst it was important to have dialogue with China, it should not be on the basis of a recognised parliamentary delegation. Parties other than the so-called "Parliament" in China should be involved in discussions and it should be made clear that NATO PA was not offering China the status of Parliamentary Observer. Other methods of communication with China should be found.

Mr Koenders (NL) said that the work of the Assembly was built around democratic principles. He said that members should not be naïve about the situation. The People's Republic of China had nothing to do with democracy. Members had to consider the message that would be sent to those working to improve democracy in China. China had not even begun to start building a democracy unlike the situation in the Warsaw pact countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He was strongly against issuing an invitation to the National People's Congress. He agreed that talks could be made with businesses and non-governmental organisations, but not with the National People's Congress.

Mr Estrella (ES) said that there had been no request for formal status: the proposal was only to invite a group to the Paris session. He was not opposed to having this include members of the National People's Congress, particularly since the Assembly should reciprocate in some way for its own visits to China, which he supported. He also believed it would be useful for Chinese representatives to witness how the Assembly functioned. Contacts were important for discussions on China's relationship with the West, and to get the messages across that NATO PA member countries posed no military threat to China but it supported human rights and democracy.

The President said that the issue was not to grant associate status, but whether to issue an invitation. He felt that there was a sense in favour of contacts, and in private communications, it could be conveyed that a delegation should include representatives from different sectors of Chinese society, which might include government and legislative representatives. But it was not a question of granting Associate delegation status. He asked whether it was agreed that the composition of the delegation could be negotiated directly by the Secretary General.

Mr Koenders (NL) asked whom the Secretary General would discuss this with: representatives of government, the National People's Congress, or other individuals.

The President said they would not be independent parties since the request to participate in the session came from the Chinese government: certain NGOs and anti-Communist groupings would therefore not be likely to be included in the delegation. However, he added that the Assembly could certainly request that representatives should be active representatives from the ruling elite in industry, government etc, and not merely “ghost” figures from the People’s Congress. He called on the Secretary General to brief members on his contacts with the Chinese on this subject.

The Secretary General said that contacts had been conducted through the Chinese embassy in Brussels. It had been clear from the Economics and Security Committee visit to China during 2005 that there was interest in the Assembly. The ESC visit had been organized through an Institute of Strategic Affairs which was a semi-official body. During the visit, members met a wide range of institutions and people, including many government officials and representatives from the National People’s Congress. He would expect the Chinese delegation to be a “mixed” delegation. There had been no suggestion of acquiring a formal status, but a straightforward expression of interest in attending the session in Paris as guests.

Mr Mates (UK) asked whether the Assembly was able to negotiate with the People’s Republic of China and insist that delegates should not be from the Chinese Parliament. It would be perfectly acceptable to have a delegation from China that did not represent the People’s Congress.

The President agreed that was the question before the Standing Committee. He therefore asked if the Standing Committee agreed to let the Secretary General to arrange for a “mixed” Chinese delegation to participate in Paris, and he asked for the Standing Committee’s approval for a Presidential/Bureau visit to China in July. He said it would be useful to make contacts to discuss defence, energy, security and other issues. He asked if anyone disagreed.

Mr Estrella (ES) asked if other members could also go with the President to China.

The President pointed out that there was a committee visit to Western China planned for October.

The President’s proposals were agreed to.

10. Relations with Belarus [044 SC 06 E]

The President said that despite his efforts, the NATO PA had not been invited to monitor the Presidential elections in Belarus. Nevertheless, some members had been able to go with the OSCE PA.

He recalled recent developments in Belarus, including the predictable election result and the subsequent actions of the regime against the opposition. He had hoped that the leader of the opposition, Mr Aleksandr Milinkevich, would have been able to join the meeting in Gdynia, but for understandable reasons he was unable to leave Minsk. He added that with the Assembly’s approval he intended to invite Mr Milinkevich to address the plenary session in Paris. He said that the Assembly needed to consider the approach it wanted to adopt towards Belarus. He was sure that most members would prefer to see the Belarus Parliament remain suspended. He said the Assembly needed to consider whether there were activities that it could be undertaking that would help the situation in Belarus while avoiding legitimising the Lukashenko regime. One option would be to continue to invite people from the opposition and civil society to the spring and autumn meetings so as to ensure that Belarus was not forgotten. He said that the key question was whether there should be contacts and engagement beyond the proposed form of support and if so, with whom and in what form the contacts should be made.

Before turning to the document prepared by the Secretariat on Belarus [044 SC 06 E], the President asked the Assembly to consider his draft declaration which had been substantially amended over lunch. He wanted to amend the fourth paragraph of the amended text in order to reinsert reference to travel bans. He invited comments.

The Secretary General suggested that Mr George had raised a difficulty with the reference to travel bans.

Mr George (UK) said that there had been much debate over lunch. He wondered whether the declaration could stop a Belarus delegation going to a conference on HIV & AIDS. He thought that a blanket travel ban would raise too many complications.

The President said that the purpose of the declaration was to send a political message; it was not seeking to modify international law. He felt that references to travel bans sent a strong political signal.

Mr Olekas (LT) welcomed the focus on individuals, but asked for an additional sentence to be added calling for new free elections to be held in Belarus.

The President agreed that was an important point. The United States, but not Europe, had called for new elections. He suggested that the declaration should also state that it was from the President and Members of the Standing Committee. He asked Members whether they agreed to those amendments.

Mr Mates (UK) said that the declaration already implied new elections were necessary by stating that the regime was illegitimate, but agreed that the amendment could be added.

The President thought that it was one thing to say a regime was illegitimate and another to call for new elections.

Mr Lamers (DE) believed that the declaration should call for new elections.

The President said that, having consulted the Secretary General, he had learned that the call for new elections had accidentally been eliminated from the draft: it should have been included, and it would be reinstated unless there was disagreement.

Mr Koenders (NL) said he wished for advice because a resolution on Belarus had been adopted during the Copenhagen session, and in the NATO Secretary General's response to that resolution, he had supported low-level contacts in order to build confidence and to promote defence reform. In view of the conduct of the recent election, he felt uneasy about the continuation of such contacts and he wondered whether the Assembly should consider this question.

The President said that the consensus was to insert the amendments. The Assembly would be asked to agree the final amended text once it had been prepared by the International Secretariat. He then asked the Secretary General to introduce the document on Relations with Belarus [044 SC 06 E].

The Secretary General said that document highlighted the dilemma facing the international community: whether engagement promotes reform or is seen as legitimising the regime. The document had been based on discussions in Brussels at a policy dinner on Belarus between European Union officials and the Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and United States Ambassadors to Minsk. There were ongoing EU-funded technical assistance programmes, and there had also been low-level NATO PA contacts and programmes through PfP to discuss issues such as defence reform. There was a general feeling that low-level engagement such as that did help and should continue; that total isolation did not achieve anything, and low-level engagement might be useful.

However, it would be for the Standing Committee to decide what activities were suitable to undertake to help the situation in Belarus, without legitimising the Lukashenko regime. For the Assembly, as with other international organizations, the question was one of isolation versus engagement.

Mr Meckel (DE) praised the document which made the position clear on the so-called democratic election in Belarus which had just taken place. He thought that NATO PA ought to call for another election. The low-level contact ought to continue, but not at parliamentary level. It was important that attention continued to be paid to the problem of Belarus and that support was given to the opposition.

The President said that he did not believe there was a consensus to open the question raised by Mr Koenders concerning NATO's low-level contacts with Belarus. He said that there was an agreement that the statement should be issued on behalf of the President and the Standing Committee, and that it should include demands for a travel ban and a new election. He also asked if there was agreement to hold another special seminar in Vilnius as had been done in 2005.

The President's proposals were agreed to.

11. Georgia: Working Group on the Monitoring of the Withdrawal of Russian Forces from Georgia and proposal for a Declaration on Georgia for consideration during the Paris spring session [046 SC 06 E]

The President reminded the Standing Committee that at the meeting of the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee in Copenhagen he had proposed the creation of a monitoring group (to consist of two European Members, one American, one Georgian and one Russian Member) to follow the withdrawal of Russian Federation forces from their bases in Georgia. The President also discussed the matter with the President of Georgia, Mr Saakashvili in February at the Wehrkunde meeting in Munich. The President said that he intended to visit Georgia in May, accompanied by the Bureau, and would ask that the visit included a Russian military base. The Russian reaction will provide an indication of the likelihood of the Russian Federation agreeing to the visit of the monitoring group.

The President also suggested that the Standing Committee adopt a Declaration on Georgia's relationship with NATO at the session in Paris. He would circulate a draft Declaration to Members before the session and asked that Members submit any amendments in advance for consideration by the Standing Committee in Paris.

Mr George (UK) said he had been the sole member to express scepticism at the last meeting as to whether the Russians would permit such a visit. To avoid embarrassment to either the Assembly or the Russian Federation it was important to find out informally the likelihood of Russian agreement to such a request before making arrangements. He was sceptical about a visit to South Ossetia although Abkhazia was now more possible. It was hardly surprising that the President of Georgia supported the idea as he was very anti-Russian. He was a great leader but was happy to have the Russians embarrassed. On the question of Georgia's membership of NATO, he, Mr. George, had recently delivered a paper at a conference in Tbilisi which had been based on an enormous amount of consultation: his conclusion was that a decision on Georgian membership of NATO could be made in 2008 at the same time as the Adriatic Three. France and Germany, were opposed to Georgian membership of NATO. The US, however, would let them in under any circumstances and would use its influence on other members.

The majority view, however, was that NATO enlargement had been performance based so the message to Georgia should be that their membership was welcome but only when they had met the standards. They should not rely on the US to arm-twist others.

The President thanked Mr. George for his comments and reminded him that the feasibility of the mission had been accepted by the NATO-Russia Parliamentary meeting which in his view meant that the Russian delegation had accepted the idea of a NATO-Russia Monitoring Group to monitor the withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgia. For him this had been confirmation that it should proceed.

He was quite aware of the difficulty of visiting South Ossetia and Abkhazia or the bases. In fact, he had been there as part of a German Marshall Fund mission and he had seen how the Russians were humiliating the OSCE and others. The visit had been an eye-opener as to what the Russians were up to. He wanted to continue to make their life difficult and to help the Georgians regain sovereignty. The Russians were creating enclaves on Georgian territory, they had even distributed Russian passports that allowed Putin to say that they were Russians. Putin had even said if Kosovo could have self-determination why not South Ossetia and Abkhazia, to which one could add why not Chechnya?

He had made a personal commitment to President Saakashvili to do this mission; a withdrawal agreement now existed; and the Head of the Russian Delegation, Mrs Sliska had agreed to do this. This was an example of the political work the Assembly could be doing: it was visibility, it was politics and it was helping friends – in this case, President Saakashvili.

Likewise, he was proposing a resolution on Georgia for consideration at the Paris meeting. If all went well, they could help Georgia get a MAP by June. This did not mean membership by 2008. It was a long road for them and geography was not on their side. But it would send a powerful supportive message. He agreed there had to be conditions. But it was important to give them something and that could be that the NATO PA supported a MAP for Georgia as early as possible.

He did not intend to be humiliated in Georgia. Quite the reverse. He intended to make the Russian's life miserable. He was not sure he would be able to visit South Ossetia as during his previous visit his meeting with President, Mr. Kokoity, a former wrestler, had been tough enough. It was important to stand with Georgia and not accept the annexation of South Ossetia. The Russians were behaving totally irresponsibly in the South Caucasus and they had to be told this was unacceptable.

Bert Koenders (NL) asked whether the personal commitment the President had made to President Saakashvili that meant that there was no point in discussing this issue in the Standing Committee.

The President repeated that the commitment was given because colleagues had been asking for months for the mission to take place. If the Standing Committee did not want the trip, it could be cancelled.

Bert Koenders (NL) replied that if a personal commitment had been given a cancellation would be difficult. While he understood the President's views on Russian foreign policy, they were not shared by everyone.

The President said Mr. Koenders should feel free to express his views.

Bert Koenders (NL) asked again whether the President had given a personal commitment to do this mission or not.

The President replied that he had made a commitment to go to Georgia. If the Standing Committee would not authorise it, he would go as a French parliamentarian.

Mr. George (UK) responded that he supported the sovereignty of Georgia, but believed in 'tough love'. The Georgians needed the Assembly's advice, particularly over South Ossetia where President Saakashvili had already shown impetuosity. Georgia must be told that they had to go through the same reform process as other countries who had joined NATO. The reform program in Georgia was going up and down. The currency was devalued if countries were let in without reaching the standards.

The President said that this was exactly the idea. The resolution would stress this point.

The Secretary General said that a draft resolution would be circulated within a couple of weeks.

The President said that he sensed that Mr. Koenders had an objection to the Presidential visit and the work of the monitoring group.

The Secretary General suggested that there may be some confusion between the proposed visit of the President to Georgia and the separate work of the proposed monitoring group. The program for the Presidential visit followed the outlines of other such visits. However, it was not clear whether a visit to the bases would get the go-ahead. In this sense it would provide an indication of the practicality of establishing a monitoring group.

The President said that his visit had been planned for a long time and had been discussed in Copenhagen including agreement by the Russian delegation to the creation of a monitoring group. He said that if the reaction to his visit was negative, then it would be difficult to see how the Monitoring Group would be workable. In his view, a negative reaction would be confirmation of the a retrenchment in Russian foreign policy.

Mr. Olekas (LT) supported the proposals for the Russian Monitoring Group, which had been discussed in Copenhagen. The Georgians regularly asked for international support.

The President thanked Mr. Olekas for his support.

Mr. Berzins (LV) said that as a country that had recently joined NATO, he supported Mr. George's comments about the process of democratization being very beneficial and agreed that Georgia should be made to go through the process and meet the required standards. As a country that had to ask the Russian forces to leave he realized it was a difficult and sensitive issue. International support had been important.

The President asked Mr. Koenders if he had anything to add.

Mr. Koenders (NL) said that he did not.

The President said that the arrangements should proceed as planned. He proposed that a Joint Parliamentary Group to monitor the planned Russian Federation withdrawal could be set up. The visit would allow the assembly to test the concept.

The issue would be further discussed in Paris after the visit to Georgia. He hoped it would be possible to establish a Monitoring group but this would depend upon the results of the visit.

12. Relations with the European Parliament [047 SC 06 E]

The President said that there had been insufficient time to fully discuss the proposals made by Elmar Brok, the Chairman of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, at either of the meetings in Ljubljana or Copenhagen. He said that five questions needed addressing. Firstly, should the European Parliament delegation be given the right to submit amendments to Assembly texts, without reciprocity for the NATO PA in EP deliberations? Secondly, should the Assembly and the European Parliament delegation create a joint group which would meet twice a year to discuss issues of common interest such as ESDP, transatlantic relations, the Mediterranean, relations with Russia etc.? Thirdly, should one of the Assembly's Committees – or Sub-Committees – be tasked with holding regular meeting with the European Parliament? This could be a compromise. Fourthly, should the Assembly's members participate more frequently in European Parliament hearings? Fifthly, what format should the Assembly adopt for its meetings with the European Parliament during our joint Committee meetings in Brussels each February? He invited comments on the first question.

Mr Lello (PT) thought that this had been settled on previous occasions and suggested that any change would need the presence of the Americans. He thought people were happy with the current status of the EP in the Assembly. He had answered no on previous occasions and his view had not changed.

The President said he also had said no. He considered the matter closed as there was no one in the Standing Committee ready to say yes.

Mr Meckel (DE) said that all questions should be addressed in Paris. He suggested contacting the European Parliament and asking them what they would be prepared to offer in return before offering them the chance to participate in special events, including those relating to security matters. The matter could then be discussed again.

The President said that this had already been done many times. It was now important to see if common ground could be found on the other proposals.

Mr. Lello (PT) agreed.

Mr Estrella (ES) said no to question one and added that there had been no new development since November. He had broader concerns. He noted that NATO and Europe had been taking on wider responsibilities in areas which involved the use of national armed forces and which, therefore, properly fell under the control of national parliaments. The European Parliament which had no powers in this governmental process was seeking to get more leverage and to be the core element of the relations with national parliaments, who were more and more losing control over the use of armed forces. He said that the European Parliament would call upon national parliaments to establish a formal body for the coordination of policy. His suggestion was to devise another option. As regards question two, his suggestion was to allow a broader array of committees to discuss issues of common interest.

The President said that Mr Estrella had raised an important issue concerning the role of the EP in the use of armed forces. In his view, the role of the EP in ESDP was minute. The use of force was a national matter whether authority lay with the government or parliament or both.

He summarised the position so far: the EP delegation should not be given the right to submit amendments to Assembly texts; the Assembly and EP delegation should create a joint group to discuss areas of common interest; Assembly Members should participate more frequently in EP hearings. He asked what notice was given for these hearings.

The Deputy Secretary General replied that notice was normally between 10 days and 2 weeks in advance, but EP hearings tended to clash with NATO PA meetings. However, it would be possible to forward details of EP hearings to Members.

The President noted that no one from the NATO PA had been invited to address these hearings. He then asked what format the Assembly should adopt for the meetings with the EP during their joint Committee meetings in Brussels each February.

The Secretary General said that it had proved difficult to get a sufficient number of Members to attend afternoon meetings with the EP. The EP started late; members wanted to leave early so attendance was difficult. This year the representatives from the EP had come to the NATO PA at midday and the exchanges had been assessed as interesting. However, it was difficult to persuade Members to attend such meetings on a regular basis. Cooperation was difficult because the two bodies were completely different.

There had been an ad-hoc meeting during the afternoon this year involving several Assembly members, but in general it was quite difficult to get a good response.

The President said that the EP wanted to broaden its role in security affairs including a greater role in the use of force and were interested in entering the NATO world through the NATO PA . This question was what was that the Assembly's interest in getting greater reciprocity and in his view there was not much except in the sense of dialogue. Therefore, he was in favour of the idea of a joint working group, an ad-hoc group with one of the Assembly's Committee Chairmen and one of the EP's plus members on both sides for an exchange of views twice a year for half a day on what the respective bodies were doing on key security questions.

He would write to the EP to inform it of the Assembly's decisions on amendments to Assembly texts and the proposal to create a joint group.

The President's proposals were agreed to.

13. Comments of the Secretary General of NATO, Chairman of the North Atlantic Council on the Policy Recommendations adopted in 2005 by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly [017 SESP 06 E] and [238 SESA 05 E]

The President introduced the next item by saying that he wished to thank the Secretary General of NATO for his comments.

Mr Estrella (ES) agreed with the President and wished to stress the Assembly's appreciation for the dedication and attention paid by the Secretary General of NATO to the policy recommendations made by the Assembly.

The President proposed that he write to the Secretary General to thank him for the interest he had manifested in the policy recommendations adopted by NATO PA.

The President's proposal was agreed to.

14. Declaration on Belarus [113 SC 06 E Rev. 2]

The President returned to the declaration on Belarus, proposed by him that morning, which had been amended to take account of Members' comments.

The declaration was agreed to and the President would release it to the Press that afternoon.

15. Finances

- **Report of the Secretary General on the Financial statements (not audited) for 2005 [027 FIN 06 E]**
- **Financial Statements (not audited) at 31st December 2005 and Appendices [025 FIN 06 E and Appendices]**
- **Treasurer's report and proposal for the allocation of the surplus to the 2006 budget [026 FIN 06 E]**
- **Description of the Financial Controls of the NATO PA [055 FIN 06 E]**
- **Registration of delegates at Sessions [050 SC 06 E]**

The President turned to the next item, the financial documents presented by the Treasurer. He proposed that the document on the Registration of delegates at Sessions [050 SC 06 E] be considered separately.

Mr Ibrügger reported that the auditors had not yet finished their examination of the accounts, but had told him that they expected to report a clean bill of health. The Assembly's total expenditure in 2005 was €3.5 million. There was a diminishing surplus each year as interest rates were low. However, agreed activities would be funded, subject to the appearance of unforeseen political events that needed the Assembly's attention. A special item for the Assembly to note was the funding of €17,000 set aside from the Surplus to pay for the temporary staff budget of the Mediterranean Special Group's increased activities. There were also proposed increases in the funding of staff management and professional training. He also proposed to increase the President's budget to fund press related activities, but drew the Assembly's attention to the fact that the President's travel had been funded by the Assemblée Nationale. He proposed that as it had been the practice during the last 15 years for Presidents and Treasurers to be funded by their national parliaments, that the practice be entered into the Rules of Procedure.

The allocation of the Surplus to the 2005 Budget and Provisions was agreed to.

The Standing Committee agreed that the practice of Presidents and Treasurers being funded by their National parliaments should be entered into the Rules of Procedure. A recommendation to amend the Rules of Procedure accordingly would be made to the Assembly at its Spring Session in Paris.

The President returned to the document on the Registration of delegates at Sessions which he thought would have beneficial financial implications for the nations hosting the Assembly sessions. He summarised the proposed changes as follows: they would dispense with the need for registers of attendance at plenary sittings (Article 28 of the Rules of Procedure) and would reduce staffing requirements for host nations. For Committee meetings (Article 34) the register of attendance would be brought inside the Committee meeting room, and therefore would not need to be monitored by staff. It was also proposed to dispense with the requirement to produce a separate register for each day of a two-day meeting.

Mr Ibrügger said that, should the proposed changes be agreed to, the necessary amendments to the Rules of Procedure would be proposed for consideration and adoption by the Assembly in Paris.

The proposed changes to Articles 28 and 34 of the Rules of Procedure were agreed to and would be recommended to the Assembly at its Spring Session in Paris.

The President thanked Mr Ibrügger for his work.

17. Future sessions and meetings

- **Hosts for future sessions [051 SC 06 E]**
- **Programme for the Spring Session to be held in Paris, France from 26 to 30 May 2006 [020 SESP 06 E]**
- **Annual Study Visit, Romania, September 2006**
- **Programme for the 52nd Annual Session to be held in Quebec City, from 13-17 November 2006 [052 SESA 06 E]**
- **Future sessions and meetings [024 GEN 06 E]**

The President turned to the next item and asked the Standing Committee to consider the document on host nations for future sessions. In particular, there were no hosts for the Annual Sessions in 2008 or 2009, and no host nations for any meetings from 2011. Both Greece and Lithuania had offered to host the 2009 Standing Committee, and Estonia had offered to host the 2010 Standing Committee. Norway had offered to host the 2009 Spring Session and Latvia would host the 2010 Spring Session. Poland had offered to host the 2010 Autumn Session.

The President noted that the United Kingdom and Spain appeared to be long overdue to host sessions.

Mr Estrella (ES) said that he hoped to be able to confirm that week that Spain would be able to host the Annual Session in 2008, and it would be located in either Valencia or Madrid.

Mr George (UK) said that an approach had been made to the Speaker and he was happy to give his support for holding a session in the United Kingdom probably in 2009. Mr George added that it might even be held in his constituency in the Black Country.

The President said that left the delegations from Greece, Portugal and Lithuania.

Mr Olekas (LT) said that he would prefer hosting an event in 2009 when Vilnius, would be the European Capital of Culture.

The President asked if members agreed that Vilnius should host the 2009 Standing Committee meeting.

The proposal to hold the 2009 Standing Committee meeting in Vilnius was agreed.

The President said that he wanted to provide some details about the spring session in Paris. There were a few additional items to the programme shown. Delegates would be expected to arrive on the morning of 26 May, and a Delegation Secretaries' meeting would take place 1pm. Transport would be provided from airports to hotels. The opening ceremony would begin at 3pm that afternoon and would be introduced by Mr Nicolas Sarkozy, who was the Minister of the Interior and a hopeful Presidential candidate in 2007. The opening ceremony would also be addressed by Robert Kocharian, the President of Armenia and Michèle Alliot-Marie, the French defence minister. Other speakers for that day were still being finalized but could include President Viktor Yushchenko, and the leader of the Belarus opposition, Mr Aleksandr Milinkevich. In the Palais de

Congrès, there would be a variety of stands placed there by French high technology companies etc. On the Saturday and the Sunday, there would be visits for each of the Committees. These would include a nuclear submarine base in Brest, an air force base in Lille, some land forces' facilities, and visits to industrial locations such as EADS sites. Those visits promised to be very interesting. He would be writing shortly to the Committee chairmen concerning some of the practical matters of these visits. The session would include a reception at the residence of the speaker of the Assemblée Nationale on the Saturday evening, and on Sunday the Standing Committee dinner at the French Senate. On Monday the excursion would take place at Chantilly and would include a display. The Standing Committee would join the rest of the Assembly at Chantilly for lunch. On Tuesday, the second plenary sitting would be addressed by Mr Aliyev and Mr Saakashvili, and General Jones. There would also be a joint meeting with the NAC, including NATO's Secretary General, Japp de Hoop Scheffer. The last event would be the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee on the Tuesday afternoon. He invited Mrs Cordy to comment on the meeting in Canada.

Mrs Cordy (CA) said that she was delighted that Quebec City would host the Annual Session in November. She recommended that delegates dressed warmly. She made no promises about an opening or closing ceremony, but said that the venue had been changed to accommodate all delegates. The hotel was excellent and she would provide a fuller report at the Paris meeting.

Mr Lello (PT) recalled a previous exciting visit to Canada and outlined the programme of the Spring Session in 2007 which would take place in Madeira. He said that a number of social events had already been fixed and that delegates would be provided with scenic views of the island.

The President regretted that he and many other members of the French delegation would be unable to participate in the Madeira session due to parliamentary elections during that period. He suggested that the year would be a Francophone year with delegates able to practise their French in Paris in May, in Quebec in November, and in Romania during the annual study visit.

Mr Lupoi (RO) described the arrangements for the Annual Study Visit to Romania in September 2006. The visit would include meetings in Bucharest, Constanta and Sibiu.

Mr Tüzes (Secretary of the Hungarian Delegation) said the Hungarian Member would provide a five-minute presentation at the meeting in Paris on the 2007 Standing Committee meeting in Hungary.

17. Miscellaneous

The President said that he wished to raise the matter of protection afforded to journalists during times of war: over 89 journalists had been killed in Iraq alone. He had raised this issue and it had led to the subject being looked at by one of the Committee during the Venice session. He had also written a report on the matter for the French Parliament. Among its recommendations was the ending of the impunity for Heads of State who deliberately had journalists killed. The President believed there were substantial differences in the way that nations treated journalists in conflict situations, and that a report calling for a more harmonized approach in the NATO nations would be very useful and would also attract a lot of media attention. He suggested that one of the Committees could appoint a Special Rapporteur to be appointed on this topic. He proposed that the matter should be put on the agenda for discussion at the meeting in May.

The President's proposal was agreed to.

The President reminded the Standing Committee that Poland and Lithuania had raised the issue of energy security at the last joint NATO and EU meeting. He strongly suggested that the matter be

included in the future work of NATO PA, whether through the work of a Committee or Rapporteurs. He proposed that the International Secretariat draw up proposals for the treatment of that issue.

The President's proposal was agreed to.

The President thanked delegates for their hard work, in particular Mr Nolin and the Working Group for their recommendations which would help the Assembly to work more effectively in the future. He thanked Mr Pilka and the Polish hosts, the interpreters, the Secretary General and all the staff.

The meeting was closed at 18.00.
