

Special Representative

To:

PA President

and

PA Secretary General

Permanent Council Brief Week 1, 2006

The first working week of the year hosted the inaugural meeting of the Permanent Council under the Belgian Chairmanship, as well as the traditional Heads of Mission's meeting. During these events, the OSCE PA was represented by PA Secretary General Spencer Oliver, who was accompanied by Dep. Secretary General Tina Schøn and Presidential Advisor Gustavo Pallares. Also, a meeting of the ACMF took place.

In the PC, the new Chairman-in-Office and Belgian Foreign Minister Karel de Gucht outlined the priorities of the Belgian Chairmanship, transport, rule of law, regional cooperation and the settlement of "frozen" conflicts. The discussion did not reveal fundamental controversies, except for the fact that the EU and other delegations urged for a quick extension of ODIHR Director Strohal's mandate, whereas others either did not touch the subject or stressed the need for improvements in ODIHR's election related activities. The U.S. and others also urged Belarus to extend an invitation to the OSCE to observe the upcoming elections.

In the Heads of Mission's Meeting, in addition to the Chairman-in-Office's priorities, a discussion of the reform agenda took place. The traditional four Working Groups on East Europe, South East Europe, the Caucus and Central Asia, discussed issues specific to the regions. A general underlying topic was the Heads of Mission's Meeting fears that the never-ending strife for more transparency through managerial reforms will put additional bureaucratic burden on the missions, drawing resources away from operative activities. Another issue was the lack of funds in the face of additional tasking and priorities combined with a stagnating or decreasing budget. The lack of funds, for instance, for policing projects could lead to detrimental competition for extra-budgetary funds. Unanimously, the Head of Mission called for a two-year budget cycle. Also, some major providers of seconded staff had reduced their staff supply. This plus the inadequate remuneration of local staff is leading to serious problems in staffing. The Chairman-in-Office's transportation priority seems to be endangered by a budget that could not take this into account and by limited mandates of the missions. The feasibility of sub-regional cooperation was discussed in a slightly controversial manner. Finally, a discussion on the implementation of the Gender Action Plan arose. The representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly offered further cooperation to the Heads of Missions. and invited the Heads of Missions to put forward ideas and requests for initiatives the PA could undertake with regard to their respective countries.

Two weeks from now, in Vienna, the OSCE will hold the first segment of the Annual Economic Forum, on the issue of transport. The Forum will also host a side-meeting on cross-border transport in South-East Europe.



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