

Special Representative

To:

PA President

and

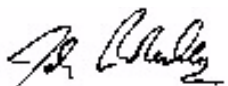
PA Secretary General

PC Brief Week 6, 2006

This week, meetings of the Permanent Council, the Preparatory Committee, and the Contact Group with the Partners from Asia, took place. The Permanent Council was marked by three major issues: The address of the Georgian Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili, the report by the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and, under Current Issues, by a debate about the events in relation to the Mohammed caricatures published in European press.

Minister Bezhuashvili, in his statement, expressed his concern about recent tendencies among Georgia's friends giving the impression that there are shifts in their position towards the issues of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. In fact, in the ensuing debate, while underlining the peace plan as a good basis for a settlement and also deploring the lack of success of the last JCC (Joint Control Commission) meeting, the EU and the US also made some critical remarks directed at Georgia. Russia repeated that it was ready to continue on the path of reconciliation. **The High Commissioner on National Minorities** Rolf Ekeus, who had distributed a paper with recommendations on police in multi-ethnic societies, which he referred to, devoted much of his oral statement to his response to the Parliamentary Assembly's calls for extending his activities to so-called new minorities. He quoted decisions taken by the Parliamentary Assembly and announced that he will launch the study about integration policies that the PA had asked for. The US and the Russian delegation supported this in their statements, as did the Chairmanship and others. The EU, while generally subscribing to the HCNM's proposed activities, remained silent on this point and focused on the police recommendations. Under "**Current Issues**" figured three items: caricatures of Mohammed in the Western press and the reactions in Islamic countries hereto, capital punishment in the US (imminent danger of the execution of a mentally ill convict in the State of Texas) and Uzbek refugees in Kyrgyzstan. The Chair referred to the pertinent statement of the Chairman-in-Office on the **caricatures** and invited the participants to an informal meeting to take place in the following week. Austria on behalf of the EU referred to several statements by the EU Presidency and condemned the violent actions in Muslim countries, without repeating what the Austrian FM had said the week before about the need to condemn blasphemy. The US, while regarding the cartons as "extremely offensive" and in clear violation of the respect owed to all religions, stated that in a free society people have the right to express even "offensive" and "plain wrong" views, and that others have the same right to criticize these views, but without violence. Russia emphasized the need for implementing the principle of press freedom in consistence with due respect for religion and beliefs. Delegations from OSCE participating States with a strong or majority Muslim population condemned the publication of the caricatures and assessed them as an expression of religious intolerance that everybody should speak out against. Turkey made it clear that it was disappointed about the statements of the Chairman-in-Office and the EU and the late reaction of the OSCE which it sees as the organization most fit to look into the matter. It stated that it was wrong to claim that the freedom of the press was unlimited anywhere, and that insults intended to mock the religious feelings of others could and should be prosecuted.

The **Contact Group with the Asian Partners** discussed a number of issues, among them the upcoming OSCE-Thailand Conference. I briefly reminded the Partners of the standing invitations to parliamentary delegations from their countries to attend our conferences. In another meeting, **Morocco's Ambassador** Zniher expressed the interest of his country to host one of the next Autumn Meetings. The Mediterranean Partners would like to play more active role on an equal level with the participating States, including holding conferences on their soil. Especially in the current tense situation between Europe and the Muslim world, positive signs of cooperation could be seen as contributing to a better understanding.



Andreas Nothelle
Ambassador
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