

**STANDING
COMMITTEE**

257 SC 06 E
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NATO Parliamentary Assembly

SUMMARY

Meeting of the Standing Committee
Room 2000 D, Québec City Convention Centre,
Québec City, Canada

Thursday 16 November 2006

International Secretariat

November 2006

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ATTENDANCE LIST

Vice-Presidents
 Pierre Claude Nolin (Canada)
 Bert Koenders (Netherlands)
 José Lello (Portugal)
 Vahit Erdem (Turkey)

Treasurer
 Lothar Ibrügger (Germany)

Secretary General
 Simon Lunn

MEMBERS AND ALTERNATE MEMBERS

Belgium	Daniel Bacquelaine
Bulgaria	Yani Yanev
Canada	Leon Benoit
	Jane Cordy
Czech Republic	<i>Not represented</i>
Estonia	Sven Mikser
Denmark	<i>Not represented</i>
France	Jean-Luc Reitzer
Germany	Karl A. Lamers
Greece	Sofia Kalantzakou
Hungary	Agnes Vadaï
Iceland	Óssur Skarphédinsson
Italy	<i>Not represented</i>
Latvia	Guntis Berzins
Lithuania	Rasa Juknevičienė
Luxembourg	Marc Angel
Netherlands	Jos van Gennip
Norway	Per Ove Width
Poland	Marian Pilka
Portugal	Rui Gomes da Silva
Romania	Mihail Lupoi
Slovakia	Ján Kovarcik
Slovenia	Milan Petek
Spain	Rafael Estrella
United Kingdom	Bruce George
United States	<i>Not represented</i>

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Civil Dimension of Security	Michael Clapham (United Kingdom)
Political Committee	Marcus Meckel (Germany)
Science and Technology	Michael Mates (United Kingdom)

SECRETARIES OF DELEGATION

Belgium	Frans Van Melkebeke
Bulgaria	Borislav Penchev
Canada	Denis Robert
Czech Republic	Jana Schneeweissová

Denmark	Morten Roland Hansen
Estonia	Tania Espe
France	Frédéric Taillet
Germany	Annemarie Bürsch (Bundesrat)
	Rainer Büscher (Bundestag)
Greece	Vassiliki Ioannidou
Hungary	Károly Tüzes
Iceland	Stigur Stefánsson
Italy	Cristina De Cesare (Chamber of Deputies)
Latvia	Sandra Paura
Luxembourg	Isabelle Barra
Netherlands	Leo van Waasbergen
Norway	Marit Gjetten
Poland	Natalia Jaskiewicz
Portugal	Luisa Pinto Basto
Romania	Ioan Ilie
Slovakia	Jarmila Novakova
Slovenia	Alja Skibin
Spain	Jorge Villarino
Turkey	Yesim Uslu
United Kingdom	Libby Davidson
Unites States	Susan Olson
PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORS	Chris Shaw
	Guillaume Vola
MINUTE WRITERS	Chris Stanton
	Sarah Davies
INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT	
Deputy Secretary general	David Hobbs
Deputy to the Secretary General for Partnerships and External Relations	Andrea Cellino
Head of Administration and Finance	Christine Heffinck
Committee Directors	
Science and technology	Andrius Avizius
Economics and Security	Paul Cook
Political	Steffen Sachs
Civil Dimension of Security	Ruxandra Popa
Defence and Security	Zachary Selden
Special Mediterranean Group	André Kahlmeyer
Advisor on Central and East European Activities	Svitlana Svyetova
Executive Assistant to the Secretary General	Susan Millar

The meeting opened on Thursday 16 November 2006 at 9.12 am with Vice-President Mr Pierre Claude Nolin (Canada) in the Chair.

1. Opening of the meeting

The Vice-President began by conveying the apologies of the President. He welcomed delegates to Québec City and thanked Mr Leon Benoit and his colleagues who had organised an outstanding session.

Mr Benoit (CA) thanked the Vice-President for his kind words and said he was looking forward to a good plenary sitting.

The Vice-President gave several apologies for absence and welcomed Senator Antonio Cabras, new Head of the Italian Delegation, and Mrs Rasa Jukneviene, the new Head of the Lithuanian Delegation.

2. Adoption of the draft agenda [211 SC 06 E Rev.1]

The draft agenda [211 SC 06 E Rev.1] was adopted.

It was agreed that the Vice-President had discretion to impose a three-minute limit on interventions if necessary.

3. Adoption of the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Standing Committee held in Brussels, Belgium, on 29 September 2006 [193 SC 06 E Rev. 1]

The Minutes [193 SC 06 E Rev. 1] were adopted.

4. Organization of the Plenary Sitting to be held on Friday 17 November 2006

The Vice-President informed the Committee that the Plenary Sitting was to take place as advertised in the session brochure. The organisation of the sitting was approved.

Vice-President, Mr Vahit Erdem (TR), took the Chair at 9.20 am.

The Vice-President took the opportunity to thank the Canadian delegation for its excellent organisation of the meeting.

5. The Working Group on Assembly Reform – an update [212 SC 06 E] and the Report of the Working Group on Assembly Reform [106 SC 06 E bis]

The Vice-President invited Senator Nolin, Chairman of the Working Group, to explain the changes already adopted and the proposals still to be considered.

Mr Nolin (CA) summarised progress on Assembly reform to date. He reminded the Committee that the Working Group had been established in 2005 and that all Standing Committee members had been asked to submit their ideas. These had been discussed at a meeting in February and further analysed at the Standing Committee meeting in Poland in March 2006. Some of the

recommendations had been accepted and the Working Group had been asked to draw up amendments to the Rules of Procedure. The Working Group had also been asked to pursue some recommendations further.

The Working Group had presented its second report to the Standing Committee at its meeting in Paris in May. Time for discussion had been limited but the overall reaction had been favourable. There had not been enough time to consider amendments to the rules of procedure but it had been agreed to continue preparations for the session as though the new rules were in place.

The first critical issue was the need to improve co-ordination of the Assembly's activities. In this context the idea of a co-ordination meeting brought forward by the President had proved a useful tool. The Working Group had suggested that another valuable initiative was to prepare terms of reference for committees and the Mediterranean Special Group. Drafts had been prepared and presented to committees during the session. He asked Chairmen of committees to comment.

Mr Clapham (UK), speaking as Chairman of the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security, reported that the Committee wished to include "the aftermath of terrorist attack" in its proposed terms of reference at Item H. This was agreed.

Mr Mates (UK) confirmed that the Science and Technology Committee was happy with the proposed terms of reference.

Mr Meckel (DE) raised an issue which had been reported to him. In the Defence and Security Committee there had been an incident where Russian interpreters had refused to interpret for Georgian parliamentarians. Such behaviour was completely unacceptable.

Mr Nolin (CA) noted that the matter in hand was the terms of reference of the Committees. He confirmed that Mr Meckel was happy with these.

Mr Mikser (EE) and **Mr Erdem** (TR) confirmed that the Defence and Security Committee and the Mediterranean Special Group respectively were content with their terms of reference.

Mr Nolin (CA) said that the Working Group had recommended that the Standing Committee have the right to approve subjects to be addressed by committees, which at present was for rapporteurs and committees themselves to decide. An amendment to the Rules of Procedure had been prepared in order to implement that by holding a coordination meeting. This meeting would comprise the Bureau and all committee and sub-committee chairmen to discuss all proposed activities and subjects for reports. The first such meeting had taken place on Monday and the Bureau had considered its deliberations on Wednesday. The result was a revised programme of activities for 2007, to be discussed later in the meeting. The Standing Committee would remain the body responsible for approving all activities at each session. Any changes proposed between sessions would need Bureau approval. This new coordination mechanism would be kept under review. The aim was to ensure that all activity was driven by political priorities rather than committee structure.

- **Session structure**

Turning to session structure, Mr Nolin explained that flexibility and pragmatism were again the guiding principles the Working Group had followed. Where practical, annual sessions should open and close with half-day plenary sittings, but the final decision was with the host nation. The spring session hosts had the option of holding the excursion at the end of the work programme, and this would be done in Madeira. The distinction between spring and annual sessions should remain.

Several members had said there should be the chance to produce policy recommendations at the spring sessions and the Group agreed. However, this would not be on the scale of the annual sessions for budgetary reasons.

Mr Meckel (DE) asked why the discussion of resolutions at spring sessions was a budgetary matter. He also thought it was important to coordinate resolutions in committees so that the problems in this session, where committees had had resolutions on similar subjects, would not recur.

Mr Nolin (CA) replied that resolutions required more staff and therefore more cost, particularly for translation.

The Secretary General reiterated the point about the logistical support needed for resolutions. As for having two resolutions on the same subject, this risk had been foreseen, but the rapporteurs had insisted on each having a resolution as they were addressing different aspects of the same subject. There was inevitably some overlap. It was not possible to ensure that two resolutions in different committees remained complementary due to the amendment process, but on this occasion it did appear that the texts did not conflict.

Slettet: Mr Ibrügger (DE)
(Treasurer) made the point that the annual budget for the DSC was €20,000 but the cost of interpretation for its activities was €23,000. (CHECK WITH CHRISTINE)]]

Mr Lello (PT) asked for clarification whether countries using interpretation and translation in languages other than English or French had to cover the costs themselves. This was relevant to the interpretation issue raised by Mr Meckel.

The Treasurer reported that he had established that the interpreters in question had not been in their booth and he was investigating the matter further.

Mr Nolin (CA) said that this question should be dealt with later, and on the question of costs he confirmed that the processing of resolutions was indeed costly, and much of the burden was due to the need for translation.

The Secretary General said that the preparation of resolutions entailed substantial costs to provide the staff needed for translation.

Mr Nolin (CA) reiterated that the Working Group was not saying no to resolutions in the spring, but was wanting a flexible and pragmatic approach. As far as this session had been concerned, the cost of having a plenary on the Monday when there was a crowded agenda already had led Canada to decide to have a plenary only on the final day.

- **NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee**

Mr Nolin (CA) continued by reminding members that the Working Group had been asked to consider alternative formats for meetings of the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee (NRPC). He reminded members of the discussion in the NRPC on Monday where Russia had not agreed to proposals to change the format of NRPC meetings. It had been hoped that these could be separated from sessions to make time for the new Co-ordination Meeting and to permit more extensive, in-depth dialogue by holding longer meetings in Moscow and elsewhere. However, the Russian delegation had not even agreed to a formula which would have retained one meeting during sessions and another outside the context of sessions.

The Secretary General reminded members that Russia was very attached to the formula of meetings of 27 equals and to meetings during plenaries, but he said that two such meetings a year were not sustainable. The Russian delegation was not interested in an arrangement of "10 plus

10" with equal numbers of Russian and Assembly members participating. Nor was there any recognition of the differences between interparliamentary co-operation and co-operation at the executive level. A compromise proposal had been put to the Russian delegation whereby one meeting at 27 would take place during annual sessions, and another – also at 27 – would take place in Moscow. The Russian delegation had suggested that the 'non-session' meeting need not be in Russia. The way forward might be to write to the Russian delegation proposing that the 'non-session' meeting should alternate between Russia and other countries, and that the meetings should be as substantive as possible.

Mr Nolin (CA) said that the Working Group wanted a mechanism for reporting NRPC activities to the Assembly, either in writing or verbally to the plenary sitting. He hoped that it would be possible to find a satisfactory arrangement before the Standing Committee in Budapest.

Mr Erdem (TR) supported the proposal to hold one meeting per year at a session and another that would alternate between Russia and other countries.

Mr Meckel (DE) said that he understood the Secretary General to have said he was proposing one meeting during a session and one elsewhere. The Russians were reluctant to meet in Moscow and he was too. The meetings with the Duma had been very poor. They were necessary, but it was vital that the Assembly engaged with wider civil society in Russia, not just those selected by the Duma.

Mr Estrella (ES) said that the key objective was to move closer to Russian colleagues, but the excellent relations with Russian parliamentarians involved in the Assembly did not extend to the wider Duma and the political leadership in Russia. The format of meetings needed to change in order to improve this situation. He proposed holding one meeting during regular sessions, one high-level seminar in Russia and another high-level seminar in another capital.

Mr Nolin (CA) said that with the Standing Committee's permission, he and the Secretary General would analyze all the various options and see if it would be possible to find an arrangement that would suit all parties.

- **Duration of mandates**

Mr Nolin (CA) suggested that discussion be deferred until the meeting in Budapest. **This was agreed.**

- **Declaration on the Riga Summit**

Mr Nolin (CA) reported that a special meeting of the Standing Committee had been held in Brussels on 29 September to adopt a Declaration representing the Assembly's collective views on the issues likely to feature at NATO's Riga Summit. The response from NATO's Secretary General had been circulated as part of the Working Group report. He drew the attention of the Committee to the last sentence in the second paragraph of the letter, which commended the Assembly for its "indispensable work".

- **Unfinished business**

Mr Nolin (CA) told the Committee that members could find a full account of the Working Group's deliberations and recommendations in the document that had been circulated. The work was not over and the implementation of some reforms would need to be kept under review. Two particular

outstanding issues included the question of whether rapporteurs should participate in the coordination meeting, and the question of whether existing cooperative arrangements with NATO should be formalised.

Mr van Gennip (NL) wanted to emphasise the importance of personal relationships developing between Assembly and NATO staff. He thought that further consideration of this important issue should take place before the next meeting. Cross-fertilisation of ideas was essential.

The Secretary General confirmed that there was increasing awareness of the Assembly within NATO and a greater desire to cooperate, but it was important for Assembly staff continually to remind their NATO counterparts of the work going on in the Assembly.

Mr Nolin (CA), Vice-President of the Assembly, resumed the Chair at 10.05 am.

The Treasurer commented on Mr Meckel's remarks about interpretation. As far as he was aware, the problems had been caused solely by technical difficulties and there was no political motivation whatsoever. The interpreters were recruited through the Canadian parliament and the interpreters in question were Canadian nationals. It was important that any misperception be rectified.

6. **Draft Amendments [090 SC 06 E rev. 1] to the Assembly Rules of Procedure [245 GEN 05 E] concerning Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Groups; Travel Expenses; and Registers of Attendance; Draft Amendments [091 SC 06 E rev. 1] to the Financial Regulations [246 GEN 05 E]; Draft Amendments [089 FIN 06 E rev. 1] to the Implementing Rules and Procedures for Financial Transactions and Budget Execution [088 FIN 06 E]**

The Vice-President introduced the amendments to the Rules of Procedure, the Financial Regulations and the financial implementing rules.

The Treasurer explained that the substance of the amendments had previously been agreed by the Standing Committee; the changes to the rules reflected these decisions.

The amendments to the Rules of Procedure were adopted.

The amendments to the Financial Regulations were adopted.

The amendments to the Financial Implementing Rules were adopted.

7. **Proposed Subjects and Activities for 2007 [215 SC 06 E rev. 1] and revised Table 2**

The Vice-President noted that a key recommendation of the Working Group on Assembly Reform had been that the Assembly should more rigorously review its annual programme of activities. To that end, a Coordination Meeting had taken place on Monday, and its outcome had been reviewed by the Bureau on Wednesday. The entire programme had to be submitted to the Standing Committee for approval, and three points in particular required detailed consideration.

The first was the Political Committee's Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships' request to visit Pakistan in March. It was for the Standing Committee to decide on whether such a visit – which would be the first such visit by an Assembly group – was appropriate.

Mr Meckel (DE) said that his Committee had discussed the visit the day before. His members were unanimous that the visit was an absolute priority on the grounds of Pakistan's crucial importance to NATO success in Afghanistan. He therefore asked the Standing Committee to agree the proposal. The German Embassy in Pakistan had said that it was willing to prepare the way.

The Vice-President recalled that the day before at the Bureau, Mr Lellouche, as leader of the French Delegation, had strongly opposed such a visit for political reasons.

Mr Reitzer (FR) disagreed with Mr Lellouche. He had visited Pakistan himself in the spring and had met Mr Musharraf and Pakistan officials. A parliamentary visit would be well received there. Pakistan was an impressive country that was different from the popular perception. The visit was important in view of Pakistan's role in dealing with the Taliban and many other issues stemming from its proximity to Afghanistan.

The Vice-President asked whether his opinion was shared by the French delegation.

Mr Reitzer (FR) repeated that this was his personal view. Mr Lellouche had wanted to compromise by holding a meeting with the Pakistan Ambassador in Brussels and that was the official French view.

Mr Lamers (DE) in his capacity as Chairman of the Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships supported Mr Meckel and Mr Reitzer. Talks in Brussels would be inadequate for understanding such a key country. Preliminary communications with the Chairman of the Pakistan Senate Foreign Affairs Committee had indicated that a visit would be welcomed and he asked for colleagues' support.

Mr van Gennip (NL) did not want the NATO PA to be a global travel agency but members had to follow NATO's developing role as a global security provider. A Committee had visited China and that had been regarded as successful. It was necessary to acquire good information in advance and to establish a dialogue with key government and parliamentary personalities on the ground.

Mr Lupoi (RO) said that because Afghanistan was a NATO operation, a visit to Pakistan would be valuable in order to speak to national and local leaders, and he strongly supported the proposal.

Mr Benoit (CA) agreed that it was not possible to ignore Pakistan when considering Afghanistan but he wanted to be assured that the visit would be worthwhile.

Mr Meckel (DE) said that preliminary talks had taken place but no programme could be planned in detail until the sub-committee had permission to travel. Members wanted to meet the President who was under considerable domestic pressure. They wanted to discuss the recent agreement on security in northern Pakistan and to talk to the army and the secret services if possible. Furthermore, Pakistan had recently tested a medium-range missile and they wanted to discuss that too.

Mr Benoit (CA) indicated that he was content.

Mr George (UK) had no objection to a visit but advised caution in visiting tribal areas of Pakistan. He agreed that Mr Musharraf was in a difficult situation with an unreliable army, security service and population. He advised members not to have too high a profile and to seek advice from their hosts as to how they should describe themselves. He also urged the Sub-Committee to change the title of their 2007 report ("Pakistan – potential ally or problem child for NATO") which was patronising.

Mrs Kalantzakou (GR) agreed that the report title was patronising. She agreed about the need to speak to Pakistan's parliamentarians on the visit. She wanted to know what Mr Lellouche's objections had been.

The Secretary General, speaking on Mr Lellouche's behalf, recounted that in an earlier meeting of the Bureau, Mr Lellouche had been serious in his opposition on political grounds and believed that a decision of this potential political sensitivity should be by consensus not by majority. Mr Lellouche saw Pakistan as a highly complex situation. NATO had no relationship with Pakistan and if the Assembly were to go there it might send the wrong message.

The Secretary General added that there had been hopes that a global partnership initiative would be launched at Riga. The proposal had been blocked but it was likely to return and this could involve NATO with countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan. He insisted that the Assembly could not approve visits without looking at the budgetary as well as the political implications.

Mrs Kalantzakou (GR) suggested inviting a delegation from Pakistan to meet with Assembly members during the next session as an alternative to conducting a visit.

Mr Skarphéðinsson (IS) took the view that it was essential to separate budgetary and political matters. He reminded members of the importance of Afghanistan – as underlined by the report of the incoming President which had been presented to the Political Committee – and about the need to establish an effective dialogue with Pakistan. There was no better way to achieve this than to send a delegation there. He strongly supported the proposal.

Mr Lello (PT) said that he agreed with Mr George. It was important that the Assembly was not seen as being patronising towards Pakistan. At the same time, however, it was crucial to show the political face of NATO in this unstable area.

Mr Mikser (EE) commented that while there were academic experts on Pakistan in both the United Kingdom and the United States, this was no substitute for conversations with the political elite that could be held during a visit. It would be necessary, though, to be realistic about the locations the delegation would be able to visit. He reminded the Committee that several committees had had long discussions about national caveats on the use of troops in Afghanistan. Assembly members would be able to gain credibility through a visit by seeing the situation at first hand.

Mr Lamers (DE) assured the Committee that the visit would be prepared carefully and with sensitivity. Its purpose was to seek an open dialogue.

Mr Meckel (DE) stated that he would reflect on the proposals made by other Standing Committee members, for example inviting a delegation from Pakistan, but he did not think that these measures were sufficient. The visit would have two purposes: for fact-finding, but also as a symbolic act, a way of expressing support for Pakistan. This was a chance for the Assembly to make a contribution to regional stability. He thanked colleagues for their support and confirmed that he still wished the visit to go ahead.

The Vice-President noted that there was some consensus, but asked Mr Meckel to note the strong objections of the Head of the French delegation and asked the Sub-Committee to take this into account.

Mr Meckel (DE) confirmed that he would speak to the Head of the French delegation to explain the reasons for the visit and would work with colleagues.

The Vice-President thanked Mr Meckel and said that his understanding of the sense of the meeting was to provide authority for the visit to proceed on that basis.

This was agreed by the Standing Committee.

The Vice-President asked members to consider the proposal of the Political Committee's Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations to make three visits in 2007. The Bureau had proposed that this be rejected. There were already around 45 events in the year. The principle proposed by the Working Group was that each year would begin with a blank sheet, and each Committee would have to convince the rest of the Assembly of the appropriateness of one or two Sub-Committee visits, and the subjects to be addressed in reports. As a result of Standing Committee discussions, there was a compromise which maintained the eight Sub-Committees and the understanding that there would be two visits for each Sub-Committee.

He was aware of the Political Committee's rationale for requesting three visits for that Sub-Committee, but he felt it should be explained by its chairman.

Mr Meckel (DE) told colleagues that his Sub-Committee had wanted to travel to Italy in autumn 2006 but this visit had had to be postponed. If one of the visits in 2007 were not possible, he proposed as a compromise attaching some of his members to a visit to the United States by another committee.

Mr Lamers (DE) accepted that Sub-Committees were allowed two visits a year but wanted an exception for his Sub-Committee in this case because an existing visit had had to be postponed. He did not think that there was a risk of setting a precedent.

Mr Lello (PT) was in favour of the proposal. Political work should not be constrained by rules which did not differentiate between destinations. For instance, there was clearly a difference between visits to Pakistan on the one hand, and visits within Europe, on the other. He thought each committee should have its own budget for visits, and since the visit to Italy did not take place in 2006, the money for that visit was not spent.

Mr Mates (UK) wanted to abide by the rules. The cancellation was unfortunate, but the sub-committee could have visited elsewhere. He supported the Bureau and agreed that it was necessary to set priorities.

The Vice-President did not think it was just a matter of money but also the principle of making an exception. Making a special case would set a precedent. He wondered why the sub-committee wanted to go to Italy. If it was to hear the views of the new government then perhaps it would be better to speak to members of the new Italian delegation. That was the basis on which the Bureau had thought that the Italian visit should be rejected.

Mr Lupoi (RO) supported Mr Meckel's compromise of enlarging a delegation to the United States by another committee. The United States angle was important and members of Congress often found it difficult to travel.

Mrs Cordy (CA) recalled that the Standing Committee had decided that it wanted committees to justify their activities both for financial and logistical reasons. Sub-committees needed to prioritise within their allowance of two visits a year. The Standing Committee could not start by making exceptions. She suggested the Italian visit could be held in 2008.

The Treasurer said that as Treasurer he would always try to make finances meet the political objectives of the Assembly. But there was a need for fairness. Money saved in one committee

would be available for others. The Secretariat had been asked to attach a price tag and a "work load" tag to all activities. He told members that in the coming financial year the likely out-turns for the committees – including mission and interpretation costs - were as follows:

Slettet: current

CDS	€20,000
DSC	€44,000
ESC	€33,000
PC	€50,000
STC	€21,000

He also recalled the extra bill of €11,000 that had been spent on interpretation during a visit to China. This visit had a legitimate political purpose but in view of the high costs of interpretation he believed that the Bureau had been wise to consider limiting visits. He asked the Political Committee to withdraw its request.

Slettet: limit

The Vice-President asked Mr Meckel to confirm that his compromise was that the Political Committee should travel with the Defence and Security Committee on its visit to Washington in January. He sought the views of the Defence and Security Committee.

Mr Mikser (EE) spoke in the absence of the outgoing and incoming Chairmen of the Defence and Security Committee. There were practical difficulties with Mr Meckel's suggestion. There was normally a great deal of interest in this visit among members of the Defence and Security Committee and it would be difficult to expand the numbers in the way suggested.

Ms Olson (US Delegation Secretary) confirmed that expanding the number of participants in the visit beyond the 40 or 50 already envisaged would cause major logistical problems.

Mr Selden (Committee Director) noted that the proposal would change the character of the visit from a meeting to a seminar.

Mr Meckel (DE) said that he understood the arguments about resources and was prepared to accede to the views of colleagues. The visit to Italy was already in an advanced stage of preparation and it would be difficult to cancel. He thought that there should be wider consideration of where committees wanted to travel; the proposal had to be looked at in context. Very few committees wished to travel to Italy or the United Kingdom.

Mr Mates (UK) reported that the Science and Technology Committee was visiting the United Kingdom in the spring and it might be possible to open this visit to Political Committee members. However, the visit might be better scheduled for a later date if the intention was to meet following a change in political leadership: he was not convinced that many changes would be evident by the time the visit took place.

The Secretary General offered the Committee further background on visits to the United States. It was the longstanding practice that the United States delegation hosted two visits a year. The House delegation organised a visit in January and the Senate delegation hosted a visit in the summer. Due to members' demands, the Secretariat organised a third event - the annual Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum - along with the National Defence University to provide members with an opportunity to learn about the various perspectives on NATO issues from experts in the Washington-based policy community. However, the initial understanding had been that this should impose no organizational burden on the United States delegation. Every effort is made to ensure Congressional participation in that meeting, but this could not be assured due to the realities of the Congressional schedule.

Mr Meckel (DE) agreed that the Political Committee would conduct two trips in 2007 and, seeing no prospect of a visit to the United States, suggested that he would apply for this visit for 2008. He said that a wider issue remained. It was his impression that the Defence and Security Committee regularly took the January US visit slot and questioned whether this arrangement should continue. In his view this matter should be addressed at the Standing Committee meeting in Budapest.

The Vice-President first drew a distinction between visits in Washington and visits to the wider United States. It was the role of the coordination meeting to address the wider points Mr Meckel had raised. It was not possible for the Political Committee to pre-book a slot for 2008 as these decisions were made each year on the basis of a clean slate. He asked Mr Meckel to confirm that he was withdrawing the proposal to conduct three visits in 2007.

Mr Meckel (DE) agreed not to pursue a US visit in 2007 but repeated that the general issue of United States visits should be raised in Budapest.

The Vice-President commented that it was not possible to give an undertaking at this stage about visits in 2008.

Mr Meckel (DE) reiterated that he agreed to drop the proposal for three visits, but he hoped that the Political Committee would go to Washington in due course and that the wider issue of United States visits could be addressed again. He had understood from the discussion that only two visits would be authorized, and that it would be difficult for the planned visit to the United States to take place.

The Vice-President told Mr Meckel that it was possible for the Political Committee to visit the United States in 2007 but it had then to drop either the proposed visit to Italy or the proposed visit to the United Kingdom.

Mr Meckel (DE) asked whether it would be possible for the Committee to choose either the United Kingdom or the United States visit at a later date.

The Vice-President said that this would be contrary to the new rules. Under these arrangements, the Standing Committee had the final say. He asked Mr Meckel to confirm that he now proposed that the Political Committee should visit Italy and the United States in 2007.

Mr Meckel (DE) confirmed that this was his wish.

The Vice-President said that there was clear support for that arrangement.

Mr Lello (PT) thought that the decision of the Standing Committee was giving the wrong signal and that committees should not lose the opportunity to make a visit if it had to be postponed. He also thought that the final decision should rest with committees. He also believed that there would in future be more reluctance to cancel or postpone visits and this would produce difficulties.

The Vice-President confirmed that the rules as they were stood to ensure good coordination. While committees were in charge of their agendas, they could not live in isolation.

He reported that the Committee had received a request to participate in the international election observation mission for the Serbian parliamentary elections in January. **It was agreed to.**

The Secretary General reported to the Committee that the Secretariat was seeking to arrange one or two visits to Afghanistan in 2007, and that these would naturally have to be arranged through NATO's military authorities. The likely dates would be circulated as soon as possible.

He continued that the Political Committee wanted to explore contact with Iran and as a result he had met the Iranian Ambassador in Brussels to discuss the possibility of an Assembly visit. There had been little interest at that moment but recently two Iranian parliamentarians had met him in Brussels and had expressed interest in contacts with NATO PA. He would give heads of delegations a memorandum on this but at the moment nothing further had been decided.

Thirdly, he said that seminars were planned to be held next year in Belgrade, Dubrovnik and Tbilisi.

The Vice-President said that the proposals for seminars had been accepted by the Bureau.

Mr Lupoi (RO) expressed the disappointment of Romania and Bulgaria at the low level of interest in the annual study visit that had been planned there, which had been cancelled after a lot of preparatory work.

Mr Skarphédinsson (IS) wanted to know more about the Arctic seminar and visit of the Science and Technology Committee to Canada in August.

The Vice-President said that the detail was still to be decided but it was planned to focus the programme on Arctic matters. The Standing Committee in Budapest would have firmer information.

Mr Meckel (DE) welcomed the seminar in Serbia. He also thought that Iranian contacts were to be encouraged and he wanted to take part. He suggested a workshop to discuss proliferation and related matters.

The Vice-President suggested that all activities could again be discussed during the Madeira session where there would again be a Coordination Meeting, and that perhaps the Director of the Political Committee should ascertain the Committee's wishes to aid the preparations for that meeting.

Mr Yanev (BG) endorsed the comments of Mr Lupoi. He enquired about plans for the Defence and Security Committee to visit Bulgaria and Romania the following summer.

The Deputy Secretary General said that plans had changed following the Coordination Meeting where the Defence and Security Committee had decided that it now wanted to visit an EU deployable headquarters in Greece, Germany or Italy in May and had decided not to pursue a visit to Bulgaria and Romania.

8. Finance

- Report of the NATO Board of Auditors on the Financial Audit of the Accounts of the NATO PA [179 FIN 06 E]
- Letter of Representation [180 SC 06 E]
- Statement on Internal Control [181 SC 06 E]
- Audited Financial Statements at 31 December 2005 [025 FIN 06 E bis and appendices]
- Audited Provident Fund Financial Statements for 2005 [028 FIN 06 E]
- Draft Report by the Treasurer on the Results of Financial Year 2005 and of the current Financial Year [182 FIN 06 E]
- Approval of the draft budget for 2007 [029 FIN 06 E bis]

The Treasurer paid tribute to the staff of the Secretariat. He noted that national parliaments had to cover the participation costs of their members, as well as contributions to the Assembly's budget which underpinned all the Assembly's activities. The Assembly's budgetary expenditure was scrutinized by NATO's International Board of Auditors who were extremely experienced, and whose services were provided free-of-charge by NATO. He invited Mrs Susan Westin, the Chairman of the International Board of Auditors to present the auditors' report on the Assembly's financial statements.

Mrs Westin (Auditor) said that she and her colleagues reported directly to the North Atlantic Council, and the Council had directed them to conduct the Assembly's annual audit. In February and March they had audited the 2005 financial year. They had found that both the NATO PA and NATO PA Provident Fund financial statements fairly presented their financial positions. They had made two minor management observations. All but one of their previous such observations had been settled and the last one – concerning reserves and provisions - would be verified next year.

The NATO PA had again issued a letter of representation acknowledging its responsibility for the fair presentation in the financial statements along with a statement on internal control, which was a recognition of management's responsibility to establish and maintain an effective system of internal control. As part of this year's audit, the Board had tested the implementation of these internal controls and obtained satisfactory results. Next year they would check the Assembly's IT environment. She concluded by expressing appreciation for the excellent cooperation the Board had received from the NATO PA during the audit.

The Treasurer thanked the auditors and told members that the Assembly had a small but diminishing surplus. Spending in 2006 was in line with budget forecasts, and there had been no comments or objections received to the draft 2007 budget which had been circulated. He noted that the budget key for 2007 was settled, but changes were expected for 2008. He asked colleagues to approve the financial documents and he thanked all the staff in the Secretariat for the work they did, particularly since, in his view, the Assembly was understaffed for the number of activities it handled each year.

The Vice-President thanked the Treasurer.

Mr van Gennip (NL) also thanked the Treasurer and staff. As an older member he remembered the situation of some years before and appreciated the sound financial underpinning of the Assembly's expanding activities.

The documents relating to finance were approved.

9. Approval of new Officers of Committees, Sub-Committees, Working Groups and Special Groups

The Vice-President noted that the list of Officers of all the Committees and Sub-Committees had been circulated.

The list of Officers was approved.

10. Future sessions and meetings

- February Joint Committee meetings, Brussels, Belgium, 18 - 20 February 2007
- Standing Committee meeting, Budapest, Hungary, 23 - 25 March 2007
- Spring Session, Madeira, Portugal 25 - 28 May 2007 [056 SESP 06 E]
- Annual Session, Reykjavik, Iceland, 5 - 9 October 2007 [217 SESA 06 E]
- Sessions and meetings from 2007 [024 GEN 06 E Rev. 2]

The Vice-President noted that arrangements for the February Joint Committee Meeting in Brussels were well advanced.

Mrs Vadaï (HU) confirmed that progress on the planning of the Standing Committee meeting in Budapest in March was also proceeding well.

Mr Lello (PT) told the Committee that excursions of various levels of excitement were being arranged for the session in Madeira. Further information was being distributed. He invited the Committee to view a short video, which was then shown.

Mr Skarphéðinsson (IS) looked forward to welcoming delegates to Iceland in autumn 2007. He hoped that the arrangements would live up to the organisational splendour of Canada. He noted that it was the first time that Iceland had hosted a session of this kind.

The Vice-President announced that the Assembly had hosts for its Standing Committee meetings and sessions beyond 2010 and would welcome any offer to host the meetings beyond that date.

11. Consideration of proposed candidatures for the Bureau of the Assembly [216 SC 06 E]

The Vice-President noted that the following nominations had been received:

For the office of **President** of the Assembly:

- **Mr Bert Koenders** (NL), whose candidacy was proposed by Rafael Estrella (ES), Bruce George (UK) and Jos van Gennip (NL)

For the office of **Vice-President** of the Assembly:

- **Mr José Lello** (PT), whose candidacy was proposed by Rafael Estrella (ES), Henriqué de Freitas (PT) and Roberto Soravilla (ES)
- **Mr Paul E. Gillmor** (US), whose candidacy was proposed by Hugh Bayley (UK), Vahit Erdem (TR) and Jane Cordy (CA)
- **Mr Karl A. Lamers** (DE), whose candidacy was proposed by Senator Pierre Claude Nolin (CA), Bert Koenders (NL), Joseph Day (CA), Pierre Lellouche (FR) and Loïc Bouvard (FR)

- **Mr Jan Petersen** (NO), whose candidacy was proposed by Loïc Bouvard (FR), Per Ove Width (NO) and Rasa Jukneviene (LT)
- **Mr Mihail Lupoi** (RO), whose candidacy was proposed by Claude Bachand (CA), Marian Pilka (PL), Vahit Erdem (TR), Óssur Skarphédinsson (IS), Yani Yanev (BG), Petras Austrevicius (LT) and Alvydas Sadeckas (LT)
- **Mr Sven Mikser** (EE), whose candidacy was proposed by John Shimkus (US), Rafael Estrella (ES) and Markus Meckel (DE)

He cited the Rules of Procedure – Article 5, paragraph 5 – which stipulated that the Vice-Presidents should be of different nationalities and that at least one member of the Bureau was a member of the delegation of either Canada or the United States.

He then reminded members of the procedure that adopted during the Venice session in 2004 to take account of the additional - fifth – vice-presidency created to account for the incorporation of new member delegations. In 2004 it was decided that as an interim measure the election of the Vice-President from a new member country would be held separately from those of the other four Vice-Presidents.

He therefore declared that Mr Gilmour could be elected by acclamation as being the only candidate from North America, and that Mr Lamers, Mr Petersen and Mr Lello could be elected by acclamation, there being three candidates for the three remaining Vice-President positions for the “traditional” member countries.

He announced that in keeping with the procedure established in 2004, an election would take place for the Vice-Presidency for the “new” member countries, between Mr Lupoi and Mr Mikser.

He concluded by proposing that the Standing Committee should discuss this procedure during its Budapest meeting.

12. Miscellaneous

The Secretary General reported that a key member of the Assembly Secretariat, Zachary Selden, was leaving to pursue an academic career in Florida. He paid tribute to his outstanding work over the last four years and said that he would be missed by colleagues and members alike. The Committee expressed its thanks by acclamation.

The Secretary General continued that the Assembly had recruited an experienced replacement who was currently working for the State Department and was a bilingual dual US/French national.

The Vice-President said that there had been some concern about having separate resolutions on Afghanistan from the Political Committee and the Defence and Security Committee. However, this had been resolved following the agreement by both committees of similar texts. These would be integrated into a consolidated draft.

It was agreed to submit a joint text to the Plenary Sitting.

Mr Meckel (DE) indicated in response to Mr Nolin that the point he had raised regarding problems with interpretation did not need further discussion.

The Vice-President paid tribute to former President Rafael Estrella, who was leaving NATO PA to become the Spanish Ambassador to Argentina.

Mr Benoit (CA) thanked members for their attendance on behalf of his Delegation.

The Vice-President thanked the Canadian Delegation and closed the meeting.

The meeting was closed at 12.34 pm.
