

Special Representative

To:

PA President

and

PA Secretary General

Permanent Council Brief Week 6, 2008

During this week, meetings of the Permanent Council and the ACMF took place as well as an informal preparatory meeting of the Human Dimension Committee (3rd Committee) and a seminar on recruitment and training in the OSCE, the latter one focusing on election observers.

The Permanent Council heard reports by the Director of ODIHR and the Head of the Office in Astana. While the ODIHR report was general in nature, the discussion naturally concentrated on ODIHR's decision not to observe the Russian presidential elections. Upon request by the Chairmanship I informed the Permanent Council about the Parliamentary Assembly President's decision not to send a Parliamentary Assembly Election Observation Mission to observe these elections. After the meeting, the decision was welcomed by several delegations. The Russian Delegation, in its reply to ODIHR, criticized it for not going, as well for other aspects of ODIHR's activities in the Human Dimension. In contrast, Belarus, while also referring to the CIS criticism, acknowledged progress on several issues in this context, as well as positively assessing its cooperation with the ODIHR and its director.

The report of the Office in Astana spoke of a number of promising tendencies, including work on a new electoral code, with some other areas showing "light and shadow". The EU, while welcoming the steps taken by the country in many areas, named freedom of religion, of assembly and prison conditions as areas of concern. The U.S. criticized Kazakhstan's stance on smaller religious groups and so-called "missionaries", with Kazakhstan replying that the activities of some of these religious activists go beyond religious practice, offering evidence to interested delegations.

The 3rd Committee met to discuss topics for the upcoming Human Dimension events, including possible special "days" of the Annual Human Dimensions Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw, which this year will most probably be held from September 29 until October 10, 2008 under the title "constitutional justice". In response to frequent questions asked by delegations how to make the HDIM more attractive for parliamentarians I underlined the need for a clear focus on a subject of interest in a clearly defined time frame, and an active role for participating parliamentarians. The Irish Chairmanship had originally proposed a special day on "democratic law making", which might have offered the right kind of focus. This, however, was dropped from the agenda in order to accommodate other topical proposals and will now figure as a topic for a Supplementary Human Dimension Seminar (SDHM) taking place at another time.

The recruitment seminar was mainly addressed to recruitment agencies and revealed that Short Term Observers provided by the governments receive a special training only in very few countries. Even the most elaborate training presented (a 3 day STO seminar) would not be adequate to make up for a lack of experience in elections. There is only one country which formally tests the qualification of candidates, but this test is open to fraud. ODIHR cannot screen the candidates in the database, given their large number. I contrasted this with the long-standing practical experience that Parliamentary Observers have, asking for a greater awareness of the need for previous practical experience in their own national elections and more transparency in the recruitment process. The situation with LTOs is only slightly better; they are required to have had some experience in election observation – but need not necessarily have been involved in their own national elections.



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February 13, 2008