

Special Representative

To:

PA President

and

PA Secretary General

Permanent Council Brief 27/28 Week, 2008

During these two weeks, meetings of the Permanent Council, the Preparatory Committee and the Advisory Committee for Management and Finance, as well as a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Sustainable Policies for Roma and Sinti Integration, and of course the PA Annual Session in Astana, took place.

The Permanent Council took no decisions. The main political debates once more dealt with Georgia. Russia had proposed a draft decision condemning Georgia for the latest incidents in the country. This proposal was rejected as unbalanced by most delegations in the PrepCom and therefore did not reach the Permanent Council. However, I just received the invitation for a special PC on Monday, in which Georgia will be the main point on the agenda.

The ACMF debated the report of the External Auditors. The Office of the External Auditor visited 10 duty stations to prepare the 2007 audit. The Auditor also performed, for the first time in many years or even ever, a field audit of ODIHR. While the Auditor spoke about eight recommendations that were issued after the audit of ODIHR, he refused to disclose the content of this and the other reports. Parliamentary Assembly Special Representative on the Budget Petur Blöndal raised this issue in Astana and urged for more transparency, urging for an oversight role that the PA should play in this.

Unfortunately, contrary to the efforts made by the Finnish Chairmanship to show an inclusive attitude towards the Parliamentary Assembly, some delegations continue - partially successfully - their attempts to roll back the level of participation of PA representatives in meetings and other activities of the governmental side of the OSCE.

The latest incident, which was confirmed only after the Annual Session in Astana and could therefore not be discussed there, is the following: Until last year, preparatory discussions for the upcoming Ministerial Councils took place in the PC subcommittees, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure, where the PA representatives have the right to participate. This year, this work has been shifted to a number of "ambassadorial retreats". I have not even been officially informed about these meetings, and even less invited to participate. I only coincidentally found out about them, because ambassadors, who did not know about my exclusion, discussed them with me. Until this day, the Finnish delegation in Vienna has not properly informed me about this serious violation of the spirit of the Parliamentary Assembly's increased participation in Vienna meetings as it had been developing over the past years, it has only confirmed my exclusion in an e-mail between staff. The official argument is that there is no need for the PA to participate; since this is something that only participating States have a stake in. Informally I've been told that the exclusion follows a strong position of the delegations of Spain and Greece and some other unnamed delegations, who also seem to have complained about the participation of President Lennmarker in the recent Ministerial Quintet meeting.

This constitutes a serious step backwards behind our status in 2005 and is in clear contrast to the resolution on transparency and reform in the OSCE passed by the recent Annual Session. Beginning in 2003 it has been established that all meetings open to all delegations are accessible for us. It makes no difference that this retreat is taking place on ambassadorial level, because since 2002 it has been established that this is the level on which the PA is represented in Vienna. The argument

that these retreats are only dealing with documents in the drafting of which the PA cannot participate, is not valid either. The participation of PA representatives in all meetings was established in an effort to enhance transparency and improve communication. This is prevented by my exclusion, and it appears to be one of the main objectives of this newly introduced working method.

In addition to their complaints about the Ministerial Quintet meeting, the delegations of Spain and Greece and others also did away with six years of an established practice in which the PA representative participated in the Contact Groups with the Partners for Cooperation. The Quintet meeting substitutes Troika meetings, which until recently had been attended by PA Presidents. Finally, on several occasions, it has been signaled to me that some delegations insist it is the governmental side that has the right to decide who speaks on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly in OSCE meetings.

On a positive note, I've been invited by the Finnish Chairmanship to present the outcome of the Annual Session in an informal briefing taking place before the PC meeting, in which I will be allowed to make a short statement under "Current Issues". It remains to be seen how much interest delegations will show.

The PA has also been invited to make opening remarks at the upcoming seminar on election observation related matters, together with the Chairmanship and the ODIHR, but – contrary to those two - not to make concluding remarks. I will participate as an expert in the session on election observation. It seems, however that the setup of the conference is strongly biased (I have five minutes which is completely inadequate for presenting the Parliamentary Assembly Election observation and to answer the questionnaire contained in the agenda, whereas ODIHR over the years has had a plenitude of opportunities to present its methodology at length in the Permanent Council). The choice of personalities who chair the meetings also seems quite peculiar, given the fact that some of them have made the cooperation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the ODIHR difficult. In addition, the choice of questions included in the questionnaire leaves out some crucial issues, for instance that of transparency of the process. Under these circumstances, it is doubtful that it will lead to any positive results.

All this and other indicators of more atmospheric nature show that there is a pattern that lies behind these nuisances. It is also obvious that in the past months Spain has taken the leadership in the attempts to reduce the amount of involvement by the PA. The Spanish ambassador and former PC Chairman has now left the Permanent Council. I will report whether this will have a positive impact on the development.



Andreas Nothelle
Ambassador
July 14, 2008