

Special Representative

To:

PA President

and

PA Secretary General

Permanent Council Brief Weeks 48/49, 2009

Both weeks were marked by the Ministerial Council (MC) Meeting in Athens. By the end of the first week, most Vienna diplomats had moved to Athens where the PrepCom was constantly in session. The ministers were meeting in parallel in order to deliver their statements. The only statement which did not exhaustively repeat what can be heard in the PC every Thursday morning was the one by the PA President. Reactions among ambassadors were mixed; his outspoken criticism of the rituals and the lack of results from the PC's work as well as his plea for a 2010 summit were well received as an honest analysis by many, but it also made others unhappy.

It is noteworthy that several important ministers were absent, among them the US Secretary of State; the UK's leadership was totally absent. Also, many of the ministers present stayed for only a few hours. Discussions did focus on the Corfu Process – as had been expected – and were very much influenced by a surprise last-minute change in the Russian attitude to the process and the documents that relate to it. At first, this delegation, which on the eve of the MC had circulated its ideas for a European Security Treaty which would minimize the OSCE's role by creating a new structure, said that it would not accept anything more than a continuation of the informal non-committing discussions. During the last 24 hours of the MC, however, the tone changed dramatically, and from then on the Russian delegation presented itself as being very cooperative and supportive not only of the Corfu texts and a decisive role for the OSCE in the "new" European security dialogue, but also on some texts in the Human Dimension, including on media freedom. The Russian ambassador kept repeating that this was the result of a most "generous" decision by Foreign Minister Lavrov.

In the end, with the MC Declaration on the future of the Corfu Process, a sort of a political declaration "light", and the related decision, the MC ambassadors were relieved, even though the results were very meager. The lengthy text for a general political declaration was silently buried, meaning that this was already the 7th MC in a row that ended without such a general document. Even the incoming Kazakh Chairmanship accepted the result, although the way in which the Corfu Declaration mentions the possibility of a summit is very vague and conditioned and was additionally watered down in a literally last-minute move by Uzbekistan. Whether the PC will manage to set up the conditions that the text asks for is questionable. Also, there is still a deadlock on the issue of legal personality.

Uzbekistan overtook even Turkmenistan in watering down and blocking many documents, especially in the Human Dimension and even opposing Kazakh initiatives for language. The most remarkable failure of the MC was probably the non-adoption of the decision on free media, but also of texts on the rule of law and trafficking in human beings, and the watering down of the decisions on women's participation in public and political life. But even the decisions taken are of little substance, and are mostly a repetition of already agreed texts, although the decision on energy security at least acknowledged that this is a legitimate security concern and not just a trade issue. Ireland will provide the OSCE Chairmanship in 2012, after Lithuania. As in previous years, it was - just as the President had predicted it in his speech – difficult to see why the PC had had to work so long under the excellent Greek Chairmanship in order to achieve so little.



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