

News from Copenhagen

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Winter Meeting concludes with Special Debate on Afghanistan



OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues Tone Tingsgaard



Vice-President and Head of the Kazakh Delegation Kassym-Jomart Tokayev



OSCE PA Special Representative on Afghanistan Michel Voisin

Nearly 50 parliamentarians participated in the special debate on the situation in Afghanistan during the second day of the OSCE PA's ninth Winter Meeting held in Vienna on 18-19 February. The debate was introduced by OSCE PA Vice-President and Head of the Kazakh Delegation Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, and Michel Voisin who serves as the Assembly's Special Representative on Afghanistan and as head of France's delegation to the OSCE PA.

Mr. Tokayev noted that the Kazakh Chairmanship has made stabilizing Afghanistan one of its top concerns. He said that "one of Kazakhstan's main priorities for this Chairmanship of the OSCE is to enhance the Organization's role in the international efforts to rehabilitate Afghanistan."

Mr. Voisin lamented that "coalition forces have not been able to provide adequate security, which has led to a crisis of faith." He called for greater focus in fighting corruption and tackling poverty, both of which are necessary to combat drug trafficking.

The special debate on Afghanistan was the main highlight of the Winter Meeting, which also included meetings of the three General Committees and a meeting of the Standing Committee. Addressing the Standing Committee, OSCE PA President Joao Soares reported on the recent election observation mission to Ukraine and Treasurer Roberto Battelli spoke on the excellent financial health of the Secretariat.

Mr. Battelli said that for the 17th year in a row the Assembly has remained within budget. Last year, he reported, the Assembly was four per cent under budget and received a clean bill of health from the external auditors. 94 per cent of the countries' contributions have been received.

In his speech at the opening session of the Winter Meeting, President Joao Soares underlined the importance of the Parliamentary Assembly within the OSCE, particularly because it is the only part of the OSCE that works in a democratic manner. Parliamentarians, he said, not only function under democratic rules, they also speak out on controversial issues and make recommendations by majority vote.

In addition to Mr. Soares, the opening day speakers included President of the Austrian Nationalrat Barbara Prammer and the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev. In his address, Mr. Saudabayev called for

strengthening co-operation with OSCE parliamentarians as an important component in tackling regional challenges such as protracted conflicts and the European arms control regime.

OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut spoke during the closing session on 19 February, and answered questions from the assembled parliamentarians.

Other speakers included the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities Knut Vollebaek, ODIHR Director Janez Lenarcic, CPC Director Herbert Salber, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities Goran Svilanovic and the new OSCE Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Maria Grazia Giammarinaro.

Tone Tingsgaard, the Assembly's Special Representative on Gender Issues, presented her report on gender balance in the OSCE during the closing session on 19 February. She said that representation in decision-making bodies is crucial to reach gender equality and that the OSCE needs improvement. She lamented the fact that within the last ten years, no women have led an OSCE Institution, and that of the OSCE's 18 Field Missions only one is currently headed by a woman.

Parliamentarians from 52 participating States, along with parliamentarians from three Mediterranean Partners, most members of the OSCE Permanent Council, and several heads of Field Missions -- including Ambassador Philip Remler who reported on the work of the OSCE Mission to Moldova -- attended the Winter Meeting.

The Winter Meeting is the second largest event on the PA's annual calendar after the Annual Session, which this year is being held from 6 to 10 July in Oslo.



The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev, meets with OSCE PA President Joao Soares on 18 February.