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President Bruce George visits Rome

Upon the invitation of the Head of the Italian Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. Marcello Pacini, the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly paid an official visit to Rome, Italy on Monday 31 March and Tuesday 1 April. While there, President George also met with Archbishop Tauran, who is responsible for relations with States at the Secretariat of State of the Holy See.

President George met with the Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, and with the Deputy Speaker of the Italian Senate, Mr. Domenico Fisichella. He also held talks with the Chairmen of the Defence and Foreign Affairs Committees of the Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Luigi Ramponi and Mr. Gustavo Selva. On the second day of his visit President George met the Italian Defence Minister, Mr. Antonio Martino, and the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Margherita Bonier. He also held a working dinner with several members of the Italian Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and senior staff from both chambers of the Italian Parliament.

Discussion topics included the role and participation of the Italian Delegation to the OSCE PA, as well as current issues affecting the OSCE area. The current international situation caused by the war in Iraq – although outside the geographical scope of the OSCE – was also a central focus of discussion with the Italian Parliamentarians

and Governmental officials, as well as with Archbishop Tauran. Mr. George also discussed the prospects and preparations for the Autumn Conference, to be held together with the Mediterranean Forum and a meeting of the Assembly's Standing Committee in Rome in October. The theme of this year's Autumn Conference will be Freedom of Religion. In addition, the Assembly – as decided during the Standing Committee Meeting held in Madrid last year – will hold its first parliamentary forum on the Mediterranean. It will be a one-day event that will focus

on the Mediterranean dimension of the OSCE and will analyse, among other issues, the prospects for enhancing dialogue and co-operation with the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. In his meetings, Mr. George stressed the importance of strengthening the Mediterranean dialogue within the OSCE.

On Monday 31 March President George addressed a Conference at the Italian Society for International Organisations (SIOI) on the topic "The OSCE and the new European Security Environment". Mr. George analysed the future role of the OSCE in the light of



President George meeting with The Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini (centre) and Head of the Italian Delegation to the OSCE PA, Mr. Marcello Pacini

EU and NATO enlargements, providing thoughts from the parliamentary perspective. Mr. George also spoke about the current international situation caused by the war in Iraq and the role of international organisations in such situations. The Conference was attended by more than 150 people, including members of the Italian Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, high ranking diplomats accredited in Rome, and students.

President Bruce George was accompanied by Mr. Vitaly Evseyev, Deputy Secretary General and Mr. Gustavo Pallarés, Presidential Adviser.

Parliamentary Field Visit to Albania

From 24-26 March 2003, an OSCE PA Delegation, including seven Members of Parliament representing five countries, visited the OSCE Presence in Albania. Mr. Roberto Battelli, MP (Slovenia), headed the Delegation. The purpose of the visit was for Members of the Parliamentary Assembly to get acquainted with the work of the OSCE Presence in Albania as well as to learn more about the general situation in the country.

During the visit, the Delegation was briefed about the mandate and work of the OSCE Presence in Albania by the Head

of Presence, Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, and other mission staff. The Delegation met with the President of Albania, Alfred Moisiu, Speaker of the Albanian Parliament, Servet Pellumbi, Prime Minister, Fatos Nano, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ilir Meta, the Ambassador of the United States, James Jeffrey, and senior representatives of the European Commission. During a visit to the city of Dürres, the Delegation was briefed on ongoing efforts by the Albanian authorities to remove illegal buildings and the possibility of cleaning the pollution caused by the Dürres

Chemical Plant in the Porto Romano area.

This visit was the ninth of its kind. OSCE parliamentarians have previously visited OSCE field activities in Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Croatia.

The Delegation was accompanied by Programme Officer Alexander Staun.



Head of Delegation, Roberto Battelli, meeting with Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Mr. Osmo Lipponen (right)

Preparations for Berne Conference

Mr. Vitaly Evseyev, Deputy Secretary General, and Mr. Gustavo Pallarés, Adviser to the President, visited Berne, Switzerland on 25 and 26 March 2003 in order to coordinate with the Swiss Parliament the Assembly's Third Sub-Regional Conference, to be held in the Swiss capital on 14-16 May 2003.

This Third Conference, organised together with the Swiss Federal Assembly, will be devoted to the topic 'Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises' with the objective of bringing together members of Parliament and representatives of various international organisations and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in order to gain further insight into the development of SMEs in the OSCE region. Members of the OSCE PA will acquaint themselves with the issue and strive to reflect their awareness in their legislative work.

Mr. Evseyev and Mr. Pallarés - hosted by the Deputy Secretary General of the Swiss Federal Assembly, Mr. John Clerc, and by the Secretary of the Swiss Delegation to the OSCE PA, Ms. Suzanne Stritt – met with the Swiss hosts and visited the premises where the Conference will take place. A meeting was also held with Mrs. Barbara Haering, Vice-President of the OSCE PA and Head of the Swiss Delegation, to discuss the programme for the Conference, which will include both high level parliamentary representatives from OSCE participating States as well as academics and experts from various international organizations dealing with SME development.