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Parliamentary Working Group on Belarus Visits Gomel and Minsk

Three members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly ad hoc Working Group on Belarus, Ms. Uta Zapf (Germany), the Chair of the Group, Mr. Urban Ahlin (Sweden) and Lord Ponsonby (United Kingdom) visited Gomel and Minsk from 25-28 May 2003. The delegation was accompanied by Programme Officer Paul LeGendre.

This visit was the first since the February 2003 decision of the Standing Committee of the OSCE PA to admit the Belarusian National Assembly into the Parliamentary Assembly. Discussions included preparations for the 2004 parliamentary elections and ways to promote dialogue between Members of the National Assembly, opposition voices within the National Assembly, opposition political parties and civil society representatives.

The Working Group travelled outside of Minsk to the city of Gomel where the Members met with local government officials



and civil society representatives and were briefed on the lingering effects of the Chernobyl disaster as well as on local political developments.

During the course of the visit in Minsk, the delegation met with Mr. Voitovich, Chairman of the Council of the Republic, Mr. Popov, Chairman of the House of Representatives, Mr. Konoplev, Deputy Chairman of the House of Representatives, as well as other parliamentarians, including from the Respublika group. The delegation also met with Mr. Latypov, the Head of the Presidential Administration, Mr. Martynov, the Foreign

Minister as well as Ms. Yermoshina, the Chair of the Central Election Commission. The delegation held talks with representatives of opposition parties and civic organizations, as well as with OSCE Ambassadors. The delegation met as well with family members of those who have disappeared and been imprisoned in circumstances widely believed to be politically motivated.

Barbara Haering Represents PA at OSCE Economic Forum

Barbara Haering MP (Switzerland), Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, addressed the 11th OSCE Economic Forum held in Prague on 20-23 May. Mrs. Haering reported about the Assembly's Sub-Regional Conference on Promoting Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises held in Bern on 14 and 15 May. She underlined that the Parliamentary Assembly is looking forward to cooperating with the governmental side of the OSCE on this subject.



Tone Tingsgaard holds talks in Georgia

Tone Tingsgaard MP (Sweden), Head of the OSCE PA ad hoc Committee on Abkhazia (Georgia) visited Tbilisi from 29 May to 1 June 2003 in order to discuss the future work of the Committee. Mrs. Tingsgaard met with Mrs. Burjanadze, Speaker of the Parliament, Mr. Kolbaia, Head of the Georgian OSCE PA Delegation, Mr. Kakabadze, Minister for Special Affairs, and Mr. Batiashvili, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Defence and Security. She also visited the OSCE Mission headquarters and the UN Observer Mission to Georgia for talks on the role parliamentarians can play in supporting ongoing international efforts to find a solution to the conflict in Abkhazia within the mandate of the OSCE PA ad hoc Committee on Abkhazia (Georgia).

Programme Officer Tina Schoen accompanied Mrs. Tingsgaard on the visit.



Bruce George Meets Czech Delegation

On 28 May Bruce George, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, met in Prague with the Czech Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, headed by Mr. Petr Sulak. President George discussed the activities and short-term objectives of the OSCE PA, including the Trans-Asian Parliamentary Forum and the Rotterdam Annual Session. The Assembly's election observation missions - including the recent mission to Armenia - were also discussed, given the Czech Delegation's special interest in these activities. A representative of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs also participated in the meeting.

OSCE Heads of Institution Meeting

On May 27 Deputy Secretary General Vitaly Evseyev represented the OSCE PA at the OSCE Heads of Institutions meeting held in the Hague. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss OSCE policy on a number of specific regional and thematic issues which are currently on the agenda of the OSCE. These meetings provide a useful opportunity for the various OSCE Institutions to inform each other of current and upcoming activities and to better co-ordinate their work.