

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly



Activities of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) represents the Organization's parliamentary dimension. Comprising in total 317 parliamentarians, the Assembly's primary task is to support inter-parliamentary dialogue, which is an important aspect of the overall effort to meet the challenges of democracy throughout the OSCE region.

Originally established by the 1990 Paris Summit to promote greater involvement in the OSCE by national parliaments, the Parliamentary Assembly has grown into a very active member of the OSCE family. Its President regularly participates at the political level in the work of the OSCE, including meetings of the Ministerial Troika and the Ministerial Council. The Assembly's Secretary General and the staff of its International Secretariat work closely with the OSCE Secretariat and the other OSCE Institutions.

A unique structure

Each year, the Parliamentary Assembly elects by majority vote a

President to chair its regular meetings and act as its high representative. The President is assisted by nine elected Vice-Presidents and an elected Treasurer.

The International Secretariat is located in Copenhagen, Denmark, in facilities provided by the Danish Parliament. The International Secretariat is headed by Secretary General Spencer Oliver, who was elected in 1992 and whose current term runs through 2005. The Assembly is financed by an annual budget approved by the Standing Committee of Heads of Delegations each July. During its last fiscal year, which ended on 30 September 2004, the Assembly remained within its annual budget for the 11th year in succession. The current annual budget is €2,309,576.

In 2003, the Parliamentary Assembly Secretary General established a sub-office in Vienna, which is tasked with following the work of the Permanent Council and the OSCE Secretariat.

Winter Meeting, Vienna, February 2004

A total of 250 parliamentarians from 50 OSCE participating States attended the Assembly's third Annual Winter Meeting in Vienna. The Meeting followed up on the Declaration adopted in the previous year, prepared for the Annual Session in Edinburgh and heard reports from leading OSCE officials, including the Chairman-in-Office. He expressed his personal opinion that survival of the Organization required change in the consensus rule and that he would be very happy with a simple majority.

Annual Session, Edinburgh, July 2004

Under the title 'Co-operation and Partnership: Coping with new Security Threats', more than 300 parliamentarians from 52 OSCE participating States met in July for the Parliamentary Assembly's 13th Annual Session. The conference ended with the adoption of the Edinburgh Declaration that covered a wide range of political, economic and human rights aspects. Several additional documents were adopted, including resolutions on

- combating trafficking in human beings;
- fulfilling OSCE commitments regarding the fight against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia;
- torture;
- measures to promote commitments by non-state actors to a total ban on anti-personnel landmines;
- national minorities;
- Kosovo;
- Moldova;
- Ukraine;

- economic co-operation with the OSCE's Mediterranean Partners;
- serious human rights violations in Libya;
- peace in the Middle East; and
- Georgian peace-keepers in South Ossetia.

The parliamentarians also overwhelmingly approved resolutions urging the OSCE to carry out necessary reforms regarding its consensus-based decision-making procedures which, according to the text of the resolutions, often obstruct the work of the Organization.

As in previous years, both the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and the OSCE Secretary General addressed the Annual Session in Edinburgh and answered questions from the floor. A special meeting of woman parliamentarians was dedicated to the Assembly's 2004 Gender Report. On the final day of the conference, the Assembly elected US Congressman Alcee L. Hastings as its President. Three Vice-Presidents were elected for a term of three years: Panos Kammenos (Greece), Giovanni Kessler (Italy), and Nebahat Albayrak (Netherlands).

Ministerial Council, Sofia, December 2004

On 6 December, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Alcee L. Hastings addressed the opening session of the 12th OSCE Ministerial Council in Sofia. In his address, he highlighted the contributions of the Parliamentary Assembly to the work of the OSCE, the merits of the Bulgarian Chairmanship, the important role of parliamentarians in election observation missions, and the support of the Assembly for the OSCE Statement on Preventing

and Combating Terrorism. He also emphasized the Assembly's contributions in strengthening relations between the OSCE and its Mediterranean and Asian partners and the need to reform the Organization.

"The Parliamentary Assembly shares the Chairmanship's views on the need for reform and adaptation of the OSCE," he said. President Hastings reminded the Council that with its Resolution on Co-operation, the Assembly reiterated its previous recommendations that the OSCE carry out the necessary reforms with regard to its decision-making procedure. He said this should be undertaken both in terms of enhancing its transparency and looking into the possibility of differentiating the consensus principle. It could provide, for instance, for consensus minus two or three for decisions on budget and personnel, particularly for the appointment of Heads of Institutions and Missions as well as of other high-level personnel.

Monitoring elections

The Parliamentary Assembly continued to play a key part in the monitoring of elections in the OSCE area, particularly parliamentary elections. Whenever the Assembly plays a leading role in monitoring elections, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office appoints a senior member of the Assembly to act as his Special Co-ordinator, leading the OSCE observers and presenting the conclusions of the observation mission, in conjunction with the ODIHR and other official observers.

In 2004, the Chairman-in-Office appointed the following Parliamentary Assembly officials as his Special Co-ordinators:

- Bruce George – for the presidential election in Georgia in January and the parliamentary polls in March (as OSCE PA President) as well as for the parliamentary elections in Ukraine in October and December;
- Vice-President Ihor Ostash – for the parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan in September;
- Vice-President Tone Tingsgaard – for the parliamentary elections in Belarus in October; and
- Vice-President Barbara Haering – for the presidential and legislative elections in the United States in November.

Conducted in close co-operation with the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament and the ODIHR, the election monitoring missions in 2004 included nearly 300 parliamentarians from throughout the OSCE area.

Parliamentary field visits

To enable parliamentarians to observe the OSCE's activities in the field more closely and to support the work of the Organization's field operations, the Parliamentary Assembly organized regular parliamentary visits to OSCE missions and field offices.



OSCE PA Vice-President Ihor Ostash observing the September elections in Kazakhstan

In March, three members of the Assembly travelled to Ukraine to meet the OSCE Project Co-ordinator and Ukrainian parliamentarians. This second visit of OSCE parliamentarians to Kyiv provided the group with an opportunity to discuss with representatives of the major political groups in the country and to assess the political and electoral reforms underway prior to the November 2004 presidential election.

Ad hoc Committees

The Parliamentary Assembly has established several Ad Hoc Committees to address specific issues or areas that can benefit from parliamentary attention. In 2004, these Committees continued to make a positive contribution to the OSCE's work in the following way:

Strengthening transparency and accountability within the OSCE. The improvement of working relations between the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly is the main goal of the Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency and Accountability. At the Annual Session in Edinburgh, the Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution, sponsored by the Head of the Committee, which called for reform of the OSCE.



Bruce George hands over the 2004 OSCE Journalism Award to Ann Cooper, Executive Director of the *Committee to Protect Journalists*.

The Ninth OSCE Journalism Award

At its Winter Meeting in February, the Assembly awarded the 2004 Prize for Journalism and Democracy to the US-based *Committee to Protect Journalists* (CPJ). The CPJ is a non-profit, non-partisan organization founded in 1981, which is dedicated to the global defence of press freedom. Presenting the prize, Bruce George, the then President of the Parliamentary Assembly, said:

“By honouring the work of the *Committee to Protect Journalists*, one of the best-recognized media freedom watchdogs in the world, we are simultaneously drawing attention to the thousands of cases of media freedom abuses which CPJ has vigorously investigated and responded to, since its inception over 20 years ago.”

The award was first presented in 1996 to the journalist, Adam Michnik. Recipients have included Anna Politkovskaya, Andrei Babitsky, Christiane Amanpour, Timothy Garton Ash, Friedrich Orter and Pavel Shermet. It was also awarded posthumously in 2001 to Georgiy Gongadze and José Luis López de la Calle.

In their resolution, the parliamentarians recommended that the consensus-based decision-making procedure, on which the OSCE is based, be reformed and the level of accountability be increased. It also recommended strengthening the role and status of the OSCE Secretary General with a view to enlarging his prerogatives, especially in the political sphere. The document also included a request by the Parliamentary Assembly to be given free access to all OSCE meetings and events and to include the Assembly’s Special Representative in Vienna in the Organization’s consultative processes.

The resolution also comprised a decision to establish a working group within the Parliamentary Assembly to examine the budget process within the OSCE and to prepare a report for the Assembly on this matter. As a result, the Assembly’s President appointed a Working Group on the OSCE Budget, which met for the first time at the Assembly’s autumn meeting in Rhodes. As in previous years, the OSCE Secretary General presented the draft OSCE budget for the coming year to the Standing Committee at the autumn meeting and gave Assembly members an opportunity to pose questions.

Facilitating dialogue between political forces in Belarus. The Ad Hoc Working Group on Belarus continued its work on facilitating the dialogue between the different political actors in the country. In June, members of the Working Group travelled to Minsk. On the sidelines of the Annual Session, the Group also moderated a discussion on the media situation in Belarus, which was attended by a wide variety of Belarusian political figures and journalists from pro-government and opposition groups. In October, most of the Working Group members went to Belarus to monitor the parliamentary elections on 17 October, representing close to 50 observers from the Parliamentary Assembly in this mission.

Looking for ways to resolve the status of Transdniestria. Following the halt of negotiations on the status of the Transdniestrian region in Moldova at the end of 2003, the Assembly’s Parliamentary Team on Moldova looked for ways to promote dialogue between legislators and political forces in Chisinau and Tiraspol. A visit to the two cities in June resulted in a proposal by the Team to hold a roundtable meeting between the two legislative bodies to promote the negotiation process and to agree on principles that could serve as a basis for a potential solution. Both sides having agreed to participate in such a meeting, the Team was looking for a date convenient for all parties.

Meetings, conferences and seminars

In May, the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) and the Parliamentary Assembly held a seminar in Vienna on the parliamentary oversight of armed forces and police and security forces. The second of its kind, the seminar aimed at promoting awareness of parliamentary responsibilities outlined in the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security and furthering the dialogue between senior military personnel and parliamentarians involved in the oversight of armed forces.

In September, more than 130 parliamentarians from 43 OSCE participating States and partners travelled to the Assembly’s autumn meeting in Rhodes. The event focused on trafficking in human beings as a security challenge and as a new form of slavery and discussed international strategies in the fight against this crime. The Rhodes meeting was directly followed by the Parliamentary

Forum on the Mediterranean, which debated the fight against terrorism, economic security, and trade and co-operation in the region.

Other activities

Meetings of the Assembly's leadership. Several regular high-level meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly's leadership were held in 2004. These included meetings of the Assembly's Standing Committee in Vienna in February, in Edinburgh in June, and in Rhodes in September. The Standing Committee consists of the heads of national delegations to the Assembly, members of the Bureau, and the Chairs of the General Committees. Together with the Bureau, it prepares the work of the Assembly between sessions and ensures its efficient operation. The Bureau consists of the Assembly's President and its nine Vice-Presidents, the Treasurer and the President Emeritus. It met in July in Edinburgh and in December in Sofia.

The Expanded Bureau, which had its annual meeting in Copenhagen in April and is tasked with preparing the Assembly's Annual Session, comprises the Bureau and the Officers of the General Committees. There are three General Committees: on Political Affairs and Security; on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment; and on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions.

A new President. Prior to his election as the Assembly's seventh President at the July Annual Session, Alcee L. Hastings served several years in different functions for the Parliamentary Assembly. He occupied the position of Vice-President, Chair and Vice-Chair of the First General Committee and, for two terms, of Committee Rapporteur.

In 2004, President Hastings engaged in an active programme representing the Assembly and promoting the OSCE's parliamentary dimension. He paid official visits to Turkey, the Russian Federation and Austria, where he spoke before the OSCE Permanent Council. He addressed the 50th Annual Session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Venice and the Conference on Tolerance and the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination in Brussels, which was organized by the OSCE and the Belgian Government.

Another important point on President Hastings's agenda was the continuation of efforts to strengthen the OSCE's and the Assembly's work with the Organization's Mediterranean partners. In September, he chaired the Assembly's third Parliamentary Forum in Rhodes.

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OSCE PA President Alcee L. Hastings