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REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CHAIRMAN IN OFFICE (16 February - 22 February)

OSCE Panel of Eminent Persons Holds Maiden Meeting

BRDO PRI KRANJU - The OSCE Panel of Eminent Persons, appointed by the Chairman-in-Office Dimitrij Rupel to review its effectiveness and make recommendations on its future, held its maiden meeting at Brdo pri Kranju on 17 February. Former Norwegian foreign minister Knut Vollebaek, who was chosen to head the panel, said the group realised that reforms are necessary in order for the OSCE to tackle problems. He added they were optimistic about the future of the organisation. The panel was briefed on the current OSCE activities by SG Jan Kubis. The panel will meet regularly until the end of June, when it is scheduled to come up with its recommendations.

Rupel Points to Problematic Issues During His Kazakhstan Visit

ASTANA - After talks with Kazakh officials on 15 February, the OSCE Chair Dimitrij Rupel told the press there were some issues with Kazakhstan meeting the OSCE democratic standards. Rupel mentioned the problem of the recent outlawing of an opposition party, the new law on extremism, media legislation and the negative OSCE evaluation of last year's general election. The OSCE Chair offered Kazakhstan assistance in drafting new media legislation. He added he was pleasantly surprised by the progress the country had achieved in some areas. Rupel pointed to the fight against terrorism as one of the positive results of Kazakhstan's cooperation with the OSCE.

Rupel Tells Uzbekistan OSCE Wants to Help, Not Instruct

TASHKENT - The OSCE Chair Dimitrij Rupel has called on the authorities in Uzbekistan to boost cooperation with OSCE institutions. The organisation's task is not to give instructions, but to help when this is desired and needed, Rupel said in Tashkent on 16 February. He therefore stressed the need for cooperation between Uzbek authorities and the Tashkent-based OSCE office in all three dimensions the OSCE was working on. In the talks, Rupel brought up some of the problems Uzbekistan is facing in the development of democracy, among others the freedom of the press, the need for an effective justice system and for tackling torture in custody. Rupel also reminded Uzbek officials - among others he met with President Islam Karimov - of the assessment of OSCE observers that the recent parliamentary election failed to meet democratic standards. He pledged the OSCE's support in improving the electoral system in Uzbekistan and assisting with economic reform.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

STRASBOURG, 23 FEBRUARY - The OSCE Chair Dimitrij Rupel addresses the Committee of Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe

VIENNA, 24 FEBRUARY - The OSCE Chair Dimitrij Rupel will address the Winter Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.