



HELSINKI COMMISSION REPORT

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IN BRIEF

Reaching Consensus on Senior OSCE Appointments

Implications for the Work of the Organization

On July 18, 2017, the 57 participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) formally approved by consensus new leaders for four OSCE institutions:

- Thomas Greminger (Switzerland): OSCE Secretary General.
- Ingbjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir (Iceland): Director of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).
- Harlem Désir (France): Representative on Freedom of the Media.
- Lamberto Zannier (Italy): High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Following weeks of debate, the agreement was reached on the margins of an informal Ministerial Council meeting in Mauerbach, near Vienna, held under the auspices of the 2017 Austrian chairmanship.

A Lengthy Process

The deal came after months of candidate interviews and intense negotiations. Combined with repeated delays or denials of consensus on Human Dimension issues as well as efforts to close field missions or restrict mission mandates, the institutional vacancies posed a serious threat to the functioning of the OSCE itself.

Although each position should be filled separately based on the relative merits of the candi-

dates and at different times, they became a negotiated package in 2016 when the Russian Federation blocked a second term for the previous High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ingrid Thors of Finland, and refused to agree to any of the nominees to succeed her.

Institutional vacancies had posed a serious threat to the functioning of the OSCE.

The Russian Federation also objected to all six candidates that had been nominated to succeed the Representative of Freedom of the Media, term-limited Dunja Mijatovic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and instead allowed only her extension on an exceptional basis for an additional year.

This delayed consideration of these two posts to 2017, when the posts of Secretary General and the ODIHR Director were vacated by Lamberto Zannier of Italy, who was term-limited, and by Michael Georg Link of Germany, who decided not to seek a second term.

A new list of candidates for Representative on Freedom of the Media was put forward, and, as a last-minute compromise, Zannier – the outgoing Secretary General – was proposed as High

Commissioner on National Minorities after Russia blocked the leading candidate who would otherwise most likely have been selected.

At the last minute, it was, ironically, the Russian Federation which sought to de-link the positions by supporting only the Secretary General appointment, perhaps with the intention of leaving the other posts vacant to the detriment of the institutions they lead. Russian representatives have been hostile to ongoing OSCE work in the Human Dimension as well as reporting that ran counter to its aggressive policies toward its neighbors, and likely saw an advantage in placing future work in these areas in limbo while allowing OSCE work on less controversial issues in the Secretariat to continue.

In the face of Russian obstructionism, it was only the determination of other participating States, including the United States, which kept up pressure to fill all the posts, not just the Secretary General.

The U.S. Helsinki Commission played a key role in the process, interviewing candidates as they visited Washington, DC, and participating in

the discussions in Vienna as part of the U.S. Mission to the OSCE. Early in 2017, the Commission's Chairman, Senator Roger F. Wicker (MS), drew the OSCE vacancies to the attention of senior foreign policy officials of the incoming Trump Administration, urging their engagement.

The Outcome

The choices reflect a combination of continuity and change in terms of geographic balance, personal prominence, gender, and parliamentary experience.

The new Secretary General, Thomas Greminger, and High Commissioner, Lamberto Zannier, are career diplomats and OSCE insiders who are well known in Vienna. They also come from countries that have been well-represented institutionally over the years.

On the other hand, the new ODIHR Director, Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, and Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir, are new faces, though both have had some interaction with the OSCE during their careers. A previous OSCE Secretary General came from

About the Institutional Appointments

Secretary-General (based in Vienna, Austria): While the post is largely administrative, it is central to staff appointments, OSCE field activities, work related to transnational threats, and the Economic Dimension. <http://www.osce.org/secretariat>

ODIHR Director (based in Warsaw, Poland): ODIHR conducts election observation missions, monitors and provides participating States assistance with human rights issues, and organizes the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. <http://www.osce.org/odihr>

Representative on Freedom of the Media (based in Vienna, Austria): The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media defends investigative journalism and promotes the safety of journalists while advising governments on media freedom. <http://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media>

High Commissioner on National Minorities (based in The Hague, Netherlands): The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities seeks to resolve inter-ethnic grievances so that they do not become a threat to peace and stability. <http://www.osce.org/hcnm>

All four positions are for one three-year term, with the possibility of extending for a second.

France, but Iceland has neither held a high-level OSCE post nor taken a turn at the annually rotating chairmanship.

Geographic Balance. The issue of geographic balance in OSCE assignments frequently has been raised by the Russian Federation, which alleges that countries to the West of Vienna are selected for institutional leadership, while countries to the East are expected to receive the election and field missions. The argument is not without some validity, and there have been gradual efforts over time to give at least more serious consideration – if not actual agreement – to candidates proposed by former Soviet countries either to chair the OSCE for a year or to place a national in a key leadership post.

Because many countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have not only failed to advance democratic transitions after more than two decades, but also have actively sought to undermine OSCE efforts to assist them in their transitions, other countries can be wary of agreeing to their candidates. Additionally, candidates are considered not just on their country of origin but on their credentials and track record, and Eastern countries have not always put forward strong candidates who are a good match for the position.

In the case of the most recent vacancies, there were only a few candidates from the East. Two – one from Kazakhstan and another from Kyrgyzstan – were candidates for the post of High Commissioner, and their chances were hindered by the fact that, under that mandate, they would

have had to recuse themselves from work in their countries. Two others were proposed for the Secretary General post, but the likely leading candidate, from Kazakhstan, withdrew his name from consideration before the selection process was complete. The remaining Eastern candidate, from Belarus, was given serious consideration despite the problematic human rights record of the Belarusian government.

Gender Balance. In the new institutional leadership, two men and two women are being replaced by three men and one woman. This is an

important issue to many delegations, and one with which the OSCE continues to struggle.

Gísladóttir is now the second woman to hold the post of ODIHR Director, but the most recent Representative on Freedom of the Media and High Commissioner on

National Minorities were the only women to have held those posts. Only men have held the Secretary General position.

Level of Prominence. A related issue is the level of prominence of the person selected for an institutional post. The position of OSCE Secretary General, in particular, has been subject to ongoing debate over whether it should be more like a “secretary” or more like a “general.”

All six Secretaries General to date have been career diplomats; none have been foreign ministers or internationally prominent parliamentarians, although several candidates in the past as well as for this latest round have held such posts. While a more prominent personality has the potential to compete with the OSCE Chair-



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in-Office or even the participating States for authority, he or she might provide more visibility to the organization as well as longer-term direction and leadership.

On the other hand, the new ODIHR Director, Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, has been a foreign minister, and new Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir has held a ministerial portfolio. In the past, those positions traditionally were held by persons with strong expertise or demonstrated commitment to the issues, rather than those at more senior levels. This will be a chance to see if a more balanced combination of both seniority and background will help counter any efforts to diminish the role of these two institutions.

The High Commissioner position is the only one under the mandate required to be “an eminent international personality,” and in practice has often previously held a ministerial post in order to be effective while working with less public visibility than other OSCE officials. Having just finished six years as the OSCE Secretary General, Lamberto Zannier meets that criterion, although in effect he was a last-minute compromise to fill the post on short notice after consensus became impossible for any of the previously proposed candidates.

Parliamentary Experience. Two strong candidates, one for the Secretary General post and the other for ODIHR Director, came from the ranks of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly leadership and have been active for years. Both received serious consideration but were not part of the final deal.

Moving forward, the appointment decisions contain potentially problematic language in-

serted by Azerbaijan “reaffirming the necessity” that those persons selected to these positions carry out their functions “in full compliance with the OSCE principles, commitments and decisions as well as with the mandate” of the institution they lead. The language seems self-evident but could be misused to curtail the autonomy of the institutions.¹ To push back against any such efforts, the United States made an interpretive statement attached to the Ministerial decisions.

Beyond the Institutions

With the senior posts now filled, the OSCE can intensify its focus on key challenges in the region, including first and foremost ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine but also ongoing migration, the threat of terrorism, rising intolerance, weakening commitments to democracy, persistent corruption, and human trafficking, all in addition to the unresolved regional conflicts.

As some countries continue to struggle in their democratic development and to violate basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, the United States and other participating States must also ensure the organization’s Human Dimension work continues. The work remains central to the OSCE from the U.S. perspective but is likely to face new threats from the Russian Federation and other OSCE countries which perceive criticism of their records and assistance with reform as threats to the ruling elites. In this regard, the U.S. Administration still needs to place a new U.S. Permanent Representative to the OSCE in Vienna, hopefully one that has strong, high-level support in Washington and is adept at multilateral diplomacy.

Meet the Incoming Officials



Thomas Greminger (Switzerland): OSCE Secretary General

Ambassador Thomas Greminger was appointed Secretary General of the OSCE on July 18, 2017 for a three-year term.

Ambassador Greminger joined the diplomatic service of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) in 1990 and has held numerous senior management positions during his career. Prior to his appointment as OSCE Secretary General, he was Deputy Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, overseeing an annual budget of \$730 million and 900 staff in Bern and abroad.

From 2010 to 2015, Greminger was the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the OSCE, serving as Chair of the Permanent Council during Switzerland's 2014 OSCE Chairmanship. Prior to his assignment at the Permanent Delegation of Switzerland to the OSCE, Greminger was Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' Human Security Division, Switzerland's competence center for peace, human rights, and humanitarian and migration policy.

Thomas Greminger holds a PhD in history from the University of Zurich and the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (General Staff) in the Swiss Armed Forces. He has authored a number of publications on military history, conflict management, peacekeeping, development and human rights. His mother tongue is German; he speaks fluent English and French, and has a working knowledge of Portuguese. In 2012, he was awarded the OSCE white ribbon for his long-standing support for gender equality.



Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir (Iceland): Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir began her tenure as Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on July 19, 2017, succeeding Michael Georg Link of Germany.

Gísladóttir has 35 years of leadership experience working on human rights, democratic governance and the rule of law at the international, national and local levels. Before taking up the position of ODIHR Director, she served from 2014 as Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia at UN Women, and Country Representative to Turkey. From 2011 to 2014 she was Country Representative of UN Women to Afghanistan.

From 2007 to 2009, Gísladóttir served as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland. She was previously a Member of Parliament and Chairperson and Leader of the Social Democratic Alliance (2005 – 2009) and

Mayor of the City of Reykjavik (1994 – 2003). Throughout her career, she has been involved in policy and development work in conflict and non-conflict countries, aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and human rights.

In the early years of her political career, in 1982, Gísladóttir was one of the founders of the Women's Party, laying the ground for Iceland's remarkable progress in gender equality.

Gísladóttir holds a Bachelor's degree in history and literature from the University of Iceland (1979), and pursued Post-graduate studies in history at the University of Copenhagen (1979 – 1981). In 2004 she was a Visiting Scholar at the European Institute, London School of Economics (LSE). She speaks English, French, and Danish.



Harlem Désir (France): Representative of Freedom of the Media

Harlem Désir was appointed as the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on July 18, 2017 for a period of three years. Prior to this position, Désir (France) was French Minister of State for European Affairs, attached to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development, since April 2014.

Harlem Désir was a Member of the European Parliament for three consecutive terms from 1999 to 2014. He was a member of the Committee on Industry, Energy and Research, the Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Development. He was also Vice-President of the Delegation for relations with the United States (2002-2004), member of the Joint ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly (2002-2009) and member of the Delegation for relations with India (2009-2014). Désir served as Vice-President of the Socialist Group of the European Parliament from 2004 to 2009 and as First Secretary of the French Socialist Party from 2012 to 2014.

In October 1984, Harlem Désir co-founded the French not-for-profit association “SOS Racisme”, whose objective is to fight against racism, anti-Semitism and all other forms of discrimination. In 1989, he also co-founded the international federation of “SOS Racisme”. Désir was President of both “SOS Racisme” France and of the eponymous international federation.

Harlem Désir holds a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy from the Paris I Sorbonne University. He has been awarded the Olof Palme Prize (Sweden, 1990) and the Grand Cross of the Order of the Phoenix (Greece, 2016).



Lamberto Zannier (Italy): High Commissioner for National Minorities

Ambassador Lamberto Zannier of Italy took up the mandate of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on July 19, 2017, succeeding Ambassador Astrid Thors of Finland, whose three-year tenure ended on 19 August 2016.

Before taking up the position as High Commissioner, Zannier was OSCE Secretary General during two consecutive three-year terms, from July 1, 2011 until June 30, 2017.

Zannier joined the Italian Foreign Ministry as a career diplomat in 1978. From June 2008 to June 2011 he was UN Special Representative for Kosovo and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). From 2006 to 2008 he was Coordinator for CFSP and ESDP (now CSDP) in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dealing inter alia with EU foreign policy issues and with Italy's participation in EU operations, both civilian and military. From 2002 to 2006, he was the Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre of the OSCE, focused on political-military issues, as well as crisis management, and responsible for managing the OSCE's field operations. Previous senior positions include Representative of Italy to the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague (2000-2002), Chairperson of the negotiations on the adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (1998-1999) and Head of Disarmament, Arms Control and Cooperative Security at NATO (1991-1997).

Previously, he served in Rome, Abu Dhabi and Vienna, mainly specializing in multilateral and security affairs. He has authored several publications on security, conflict prevention and crisis management issues.

He has been a member of the Board of Trustees of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, the Advisory Board of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and the EU ISS Board of Directors. He is currently President of the Centre for International Negotiation and Mediation of the University of Gorizia, Italy.

Zannier holds a law degree and an honorary degree in International and Diplomatic Sciences from the University of Trieste, Italy. He was awarded the distinction of Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold with Star for services to the Republic of Austria and Grand Officer in the Order of Orange Nassau by the Government of the Netherlands.

About the Helsinki Commission

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent agency of the Federal Government charged with monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords and advancing comprehensive security through promotion of human rights, democracy, and economic, environmental and military cooperation in 57 countries. The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. Senate, nine from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce.

Learn more at www.csce.gov.

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¹ Azerbaijan is in serious non-compliance with its OSCE commitments. In addition, in 2015 Azerbaijan closed the OSCE field presence it hosted in Baku and placed conditions on observation of its parliamentary elections, which compelled the OSCE to cancel its observation mission. In 2017, Azerbaijan also refused to allow the OSCE field presence in Yerevan, Armenia, to be extended, resulting in its closure.