



REPORT OF OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY  
PRESIDENT PIA KAUMA  
TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE



23 February  
2024

Dear colleagues,

Our Winter Meeting has traditionally been the occasion for all OSCE PA Delegations to meet at the seat of the OSCE in the Hofburg, interact with representatives of the OSCE executive structures and representatives of participating States' Governments, and identify the key issues to be addressed in our annual declaration.

In Vancouver, you had taken the unprecedented step to include a fourth chapter focusing on the **institutional crisis** facing our organization. When we last met in Yerevan, we faced an unparalleled situation: an Organization which was about to lose its Chairpersonship, Secretary General, or Heads of Institutions. While the Ministerial Council Meeting in Skopje averted this perilous leadership vacuum, it is clear that the solution reached falls short of ensuring the OSCE's long-term sustainability.

This Winter Meeting will offer you the opportunity to exchange on this crucial issue with the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, the Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of Malta, Ian Borg, with the Secretary General of the OSCE, Helga Maria Schmid, and with the heads of OSCE Institutions. As I have done during my most recent address to the OSCE Permanent Council this month, I encourage you to seize this occasion **to express our collective support for the work of the OSCE and explore avenues through which we can address this existential crisis.**

For the third consecutive year, our Winter Meeting will serve as a powerful symbol of **solidarity with our colleagues in Ukraine.** Recently, I led a delegation to Kyiv as part of the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine (PSTU), reaffirming our unwavering support and advocating for accountability regarding the devastation inflicted by the Russian Federation. Our discussions centered on the humanitarian ramifications of the conflict, investigations into war crimes, and initiatives aimed at repatriating abducted children. I also reiterated support for the three former local staff members of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine illegally detained by the Russian Federation. We, parliamentarians, hold a crucial role in addressing these critical issues and fostering positive change.

Prior to our Autumn Meeting, I conducted - together with Special Representative Kari Henriksen - a visit to Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, focused on promoting development through dialogue and regional co-operation. **The South Caucasus requires our continued attention and engagement to achieve long-term peace and stability.** In particular, I stand ready to work with the delegations from Armenia and Azerbaijan to identify avenues through which parliamentarians can contribute to the ongoing peace process.

In Yerevan, our Mediterranean Forum brought to light a prevailing concern about the escalating security challenges in the Middle East and beyond. Evidently, there is a collective eagerness to actively contribute to identifying solutions. Although this conflict is not on the agenda of the OSCE, our work should take into account any major global security issue. This begs us to find ways to **reinvigorate the OSCE's Mediterranean dimension**. I welcome the expected participation of Delegations from OSCE Partner countries in this Winter Meeting. I encourage all Delegations to leverage all available resources to bolster the connections between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and parliaments from the southern rim of the Mediterranean Sea.

Our debates on these critical issues underscore our shared apprehension regarding the **growing threats to the fundamental norms and principles governing international relations**. This was particularly evident during our discussions in Washington, DC earlier this month. I extend my thanks to the Helsinki Commission for its steadfast commitment and active involvement in our efforts.

It is deeply regrettable that the authorities in Belarus and the Russian Federation have chosen not to extend invitations to OSCE observers for their upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections. This decision not only hampers the transparency and credibility of the electoral process but also deprives our citizens and institutions of the opportunity for an impartial, transparent, and comprehensive assessment. The fact that **democratic backsliding** has escalated to such a critical juncture is extremely concerning.

Furthermore, I am troubled by the apparent **disregard for our collective OSCE commitments**, which appears to extend to financial obligations. It is disheartening that the Russian Federation, in particular, failed to fulfill its agreed contribution last year, accounting for 6 per cent of our annual budget. Since my election, I have sent two letters co-signed by the Treasurer and the Secretary General requesting the contribution to be made in full, on time, and without preconditions. I have also raised this issue in my address to the Permanent Council in February. In line with our Rules of Procedure, this non-payment has resulted in the suspension of the Russian Delegation's voting rights. I am disappointed that rather than engaging constructively on this practical matter, the Russian parliament has declared its intention to suspend its participation in the Assembly. While this decision does not lessen the obligations stemming from membership in the OSCE PA, it may signify the Russian Delegation's intent to withhold its contribution for the foreseeable future. While corrective measures have been initiated by the OSCE PA's International Secretariat, finding a sustainable long-term solution is imperative.

I, along with numerous other Members, have long valued and derived significant benefits from the professional guidance and adaptable support provided by our International Secretariat. I therefore particularly welcome the fact that the integrated financial and business / performance audit report for the past financial year also underscores the International Secretariat's strong commitment to meticulous resource management. The exchanges I have had with our auditor, together with our Treasurer and the Secretary General, have confirmed that **our operations maintain a high level of effectiveness and cost-efficiency**. While this is something that many of us have generally assumed from our daily interactions, the validation provided by external auditors is indeed reassuring. I would like to bring your attention to the audit's findings concerning staff salaries, which confirms that they are below the industry standards set by similar international organizations. As leaders of this Assembly, **we must ensure that the International Secretariat has the requisite resources to recruit and retain staff and effectively support our work**.

In addition to our ongoing efforts to uphold efficiency, I have initiated a new process aimed at **assessing the future trajectory of the OSCE PA and offering clearer guidance on our Assembly's priorities**. Recognizing that we stand at a pivotal juncture, it is essential to take the time to reflect on our identity and envision our aspirations for the decades ahead. In January, members of our Bureau gathered in Copenhagen to brainstorm strategies for how our Parliamentary Assembly can more effectively address the challenges we encounter. I am confident that our Winter Meeting, particularly the special debate on "European Security Today and Tomorrow: Parliamentary Perspectives on the Future of the OSCE," will provide all our members with an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to this endeavor.

President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Pia Kauma

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