

**Address by President Pia Kauma to the 1438<sup>th</sup> Permanent Council Meeting  
07 September 2023**

*As delivered*

Mr. Chairperson,  
Your Excellencies, dear colleagues,

I am deeply honoured with this opportunity to address you for the first time in the capacity of the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, after being elected to this high office at the Annual Session in Vancouver in July. I am looking forward to the continuation and further improvement of the cooperation between the two sides – parliamentary and governmental – of the OSCE family in the months and years to come and I am ready to give my humble contribution to it.

We all know that Russia’s unprovoked invasion and ongoing war against Ukraine has changed the world. This impact is felt first and foremost in Russia’s brutalizing of the Ukrainian people, who remained at the centre of the OSCE PA’s attention in our most recent meeting.

I wish I could come to you today with a positive message, but the state of our region does not allow this. The OSCE PA recently concluded a very successful Session in Vancouver, with excellent and substantive exchanges among parliamentarians from 49 countries on the many challenges facing our region.

But the conclusions of our meeting could not be more sobering. For the first time in our Assembly’s 30-year history, parliamentarians added a fourth chapter to our main declaration. As I hope all of you have seen, it focuses on the institutional crises facing our organization.

We took this unprecedented step because, as firm believers in the mission of the OSCE, we are very concerned with the diminished capacity of the Organization to deliver on its promise. As our Vancouver Declaration states, “the OSCE is facing an existential crisis, exacerbated by the politicized withholding of financial resources and a systematic misuse of the consensus rule”.

For years, we have boasted that the OSCE is the most cost-effective instrument to deliver comprehensive security in Europe. Alas, years of zero-growth policies have strangled our Organization. Today, its financial resources clearly do not match our collective ambitions. This requires urgent action, starting with the adoption of the OSCE budget.

We are also deeply concerned at the inability to reach agreement on a Chairperson for the Organization next year and on the senior executive posts. This unprecedented situation requires immediate attention at the highest level.

Our Members will continue to raise these issues in their respective capitals until a solution is found. I trust that you will also convey this message.

As I noted, Russia's war on Ukraine is primarily an attack on the people and sovereignty of Ukraine, but it has also poisoned diplomatic and political contacts. Despite this extremely challenging environment, to the credit of the Chairmanship and Secretariat, the OSCE continues to work. But for how long can we carry on like this? Blocking the OSCE budget, failing to reach agreement on a Chair for next year, or limiting the role of the Field Operations will only diminish our collective security. All our citizens will suffer from it.

As OSCE parliamentarians we interact with our constituents every day. Diverting blame for the OSCE's current situation cannot be our go-to answer. They expect results from us. And we expect results from our close co-operation: we need you and your Governments to heed this urgent message to maintain the OSCE fully operational.

With unprecedented insecurity in our region, I continue to believe that the OSCE is more important now than ever. This understanding will be at the heart of my presidency of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I trust that you have all taken good note of the various recommendations put forward by OSCE parliamentarians in our Vancouver Declaration. I will not spend time reiterating these. In the OSCE PA we are fortunate to work by majority vote, enabling us to work in a more democratic manner. It also enables us to say things as they are and in plain and clear language.

And we have been clear: Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine constitutes a clear, gross and uncorrected violation of Helsinki principles. This unprovoked violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territory must not go unanswered. Russia's brutal execution of this war – through bombings of civilians, widespread mining, destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam, threats to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and use of forces that are terroristic in nature and intent – reinforce our determination to support Ukraine.

And I take this opportunity to deplore Russia's so-called 'elections' in occupied Ukraine. Russia has no legitimate reason for its occupation of Ukrainian territory, and arranging some sham election will not confer any legitimacy.

Our Vancouver declaration calls for continued political, financial, humanitarian and military support to Ukraine for its self-defence. But we also stress the importance of real accountability which not only imprisons individual war criminals, but we call for an accountability system that puts victims of conflicts at the centre of its focus. Simply put: finding Russian leaders guilty is important, but not sufficient.

Within the Parliamentary Assembly, we have continued to debate how to hold our Members accountable for the criminal policies carried out by their State, in line with well-established traditions of parliamentary discipline. While there is currently no consensus within the Assembly to introduce a suspension mechanism, I am convinced that our Rules of

Procedure already provide sufficient latitude to protect the integrity and dignity of our Parliamentary Assembly.

Within the OSCE PA, we recognize the need to be responsive to the needs of our colleagues in Kyiv. We therefore took the step to establish a Parliamentary Support Team focused on Ukraine. I have appointed the Head of the Ukrainian Delegation, Mykyta Poturaiev, to serve as my co-chair of this group along with Joe Wilson of the United States, to ensure that Ukrainian colleagues can set priorities and that we as an Assembly are supporting Ukraine to the best of our abilities.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

You know well the work of the OSCE PA. Our main priorities will not change under my presidency, but I do hope that we can find ways to reinforce some of our work.

The OSCE PA is first and foremost a forum for political dialogue on OSCE topics. This will continue during our Autumn Meeting in two months in Yerevan, as well as next year during our February Winter Meeting here in Vienna in and our Annual Session in Bucharest. We will not shy away from difficult or controversial topics, and we will continue to come forward with recommendations to the OSCE and to OSCE governments.

But this should not be a one-way road: I want to hear what you think are the challenges facing our Organization, and how you think our Assembly can be most useful to the OSCE. We must continue to engage with one another in vibrant debates, as we have for the past three years in the framework of the OSCE PA's Call for Action / Helsinki+50 initiative. We are passionate advocates of the OSCE, so I have highlighted our concerns about institutional sustainability as a matter of ongoing care for the organization. But we are also public servants interested to engage on behalf of the organization in the many fields of its work, whether that is promoting gender equality, sharpening mediation capacities, working to protect victims of human trafficking, or observing electoral processes.

We are fully committed to remaining an active OSCE Institution, even though some of our operations will be restricted by the Russian Federation's refusal to pay their contribution to the OSCE PA's budget for the 2022-2023 Financial Year. In application of our Rules of Procedure, note that this has led to the suspension of the Russian Delegation's voting rights.

We will continue to reinforce synergies with the whole OSCE family. We particularly value our co-operation with ODIHR in the field of election observation, and this is an excellent example of how our Organization can exploit strengths of different offices. The information gathering and analytical capacity of ODIHR's experts, together with the political experience and visibility of OSCE parliamentarians makes the OSCE a global leader in this area. I hope to continue strengthening this work, and to this end I will personally lead observers for next month's elections in Poland.

You are no doubt familiar with OSCE PA work in the fields of migration and combating terrorism. The complexity of these topics has led our Assembly to establish small committees

dedicated to addressing the many associated challenges. In these, and in other fields, OSCE parliamentarians serve both as customers and as suppliers to the OSCE; we parliamentarians benefit from OSCE expertise, but also provide important input gained from our domestic political experiences. On several regional or thematic areas of priority, our Special Representatives will continue to strengthen synergies between our Assembly, your Committees, and the Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office.

Since my election in July, I have worked closely with Secretary General Montella and his team to best exploit the expertise and energy of our Members. I look forward to regularly exchanging with you, with the Troika, and with the OSCE Secretariat on ways the OSCE as a whole can reap the benefits of our close co-operation.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As a Finn, I am acutely aware that we are now less than two years away from the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. Finnish President Urho Kekkonen described 1 August 1975 as "a day of joy and hope" that would usher in a new era. I think it did, but we now find ourselves in an entirely different era.

While it is hard to look at European security relations these days and find any of President Kekkonen's joy, we must maintain hope. And I dare say that all that is needed to give substance to that hope is to live up to the commitments made in 1975. We now have the benefit of a functional OSCE with specialized bodies to help us fulfil our commitments. But the responsibility lies with the participating States, and with you as their designated representatives.

As we approach Helsinki + 50 years, we need to work harder to fulfil our commitments to each other. This starts with respect for territorial integrity, and with refraining from the use of force, but obviously also includes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr. Chairperson, allow me to conclude by saying that in the OSCE PA, you will find dedicated partners who are willing to apply their political capital to improve European security through the OSCE. But we need a fully functioning partner in the OSCE. So, on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly, I again appeal to all OSCE Governments to find ways to make this Organization have the greatest impact. To quote Minister Osmani: "It's about people." They count on us and they count on you.

I thank you for your attention.