Standing Committee discusses PA work, adopts rules change to permit remote voting

Preparation for the Standing Committee, 24 Feb. 2021.

The OSCE PA's Standing Committee, consisting of the heads of national delegations and members of the Bureau, met Wednesday to hear reports and discuss ongoing Assembly work. The online meeting was the first event of the 2021 Winter Meeting, which takes place in a virtual format from 24-26 February.

OSCE PA President Peter Lord Bowness (United Kingdom) reported to the Standing Committee on his recent activities and outlined priorities for the PA, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Noting that it will not be possible to meet in-person for the Annual Session this year, which was scheduled to take place in Bucharest in July, he stressed that it is crucial that the PA elects new leadership. This, he noted, requires a change to the Rules of Procedure to enable remote voting.

In his capacity as the Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on the Rules of Procedure and Working Practices, President Bowness introduced the proposed amendment to the Rules that would allow elections to take place remotely and the measure was adopted without objection.

Treasurer Peter Juel-Jensen (Denmark) reported on the Assembly's fiscal situation, underlining that the independent auditor for the 2019/2020 fiscal year gave a positive assessment of the PA's financial management. The savings related to the COVID-19 pandemic have been significant, the Treasurer said, and helped reduced the national contributions for the current fiscal year.

In a report by OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella, Standing Committee members heard about the Assembly's response over the past year in adapting to the pandemic. Demonstrating flexibility and dedication, Montella noted that the PA has maintained ongoing political dialogue and continuity in Assembly activities through new creative formats. He thanked the PA President and Bureau members, in particular, for providing strong leadership and clear guidance during this challenging time.

The Standing Committee also heard reports by Chairs of Ad Hoc Committees and Special Representatives, who shared information about their work. Other topics of discussion included upcoming Assembly meetings in 2021.

President Bowness meets with colleagues from PA's Nordic-Baltic Group

President Bowness met Monday with delegations from the Nordic and Baltic countries to discuss the Winter Meeting and the emergency provisions being proposed for remote voting. He also presented recent PA work on Nagorno-Karabakh and Belarus, noting that the PA should continue close co-ordination with the OSCE Chairpersonship on these matters.

Counter-terrorism work in focus at meeting of OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee

Chaired by Austrian parliamentarian Reinhold Lopatka, the OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT) met on 18 February for discussions on leveraging parliamentary assets and building partnerships with the OSCE executive structures and other international organizations in the fight against terrorism.

The meeting featured participation by Ambassador Tobias Lorentzson, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Delegation of Sweden to the OSCE, and Ambassador Alena Kupchyna, Co-ordinator of Activities to Address Transnational Threats at the OSCE Secretariat. CCT members were joined by OSCE PA President Peter Lord Bowness and Secretary General Roberto Montella, as well as by several representatives of the OSCE executive structures, the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean.

In his remarks, Lopatka stressed the importance of OSCE parliamentarians focusing on where they can most effectively tackle key threats and strengthen partnerships. Representing the Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship, Amb. Lorentzson said that parliamentarians play a crucial role in ensuring a whole-of-society approach to preventing and countering radicalization and terrorism. Amb. Kupchyna highlighted the OSCE Transnational Threats Department's planned work with OSCE parliamentarians, particularly in promoting international legal co-operation in terrorism cases.

In the discussion, the six committee members raised points regarding prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters, online radicalization, and the role of social media in preventing violent extremism. Members also discussed upcoming events and reported on some of their recent participation in international forums.

Ad Hoc Committee on Migration discusses human trafficking and COVID-related challenges

The OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Migration met on 19 February to discuss COVID-19's impact on refugees and asylum seekers and explored ways to develop synergies between the OSCE's executive structures and parliamentarians in the area of combating trafficking in human beings.

Committee Chair Margareta Cederfelt (Sweden) emphasized the particularly negative impact that the pandemic has had on refugees and migrants, including how it has been used in some cases as a pretext to suspend refugee resettlement programmes.

The meeting was joined by OSCE PA President Peter Lord Bowness (United Kingdom) and Secretary General Roberto Montella, who expressed support for the work of the committee. OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating

Trafficking in Human Beings Valiant Richey spoke to the committee about his work in the area of addressing human trafficking along migration routes with a particular focus on children, and highlighted areas in which parliamentarians could make a contribution. With eight members of the committee members participating, the discussion focused on concrete ways for OSCE parliamentarians to counter trafficking in human beings through targeted legislation and improving the conditions that lead to trafficking, including by alleviating poverty. Members also suggested thinking out of the box and using modern technologies to fight human trafficking.

The committee also discussed the possibility of organizing a parliamentary web dialogue in March, as well as possible upcoming field visits.