OSCE PA vs COVID-19
Phase 1 (March - July 2020)

Reflections, policy contributions and recommendations presented by OSCE PA President George Tsereteli

Foreword

In the absence of an Annual Session Final Declaration this year, we offer a Presidential Summary of OSCE Parliamentary Assembly activities in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This document collects general conclusions and recommendations stemming from a series of Parliamentary Web Dialogues organized by the OSCE PA during the period March-June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on reporting by OSCE PA staff with the input and endorsement of the OSCE parliamentarians who served as Chairs for each of the Parliamentary Web Dialogues, the document is authored by the President and issued by the International Secretariat of the OSCE PA.

The International Secretariat

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Message from the OSCE PA President

Dear Members,
Dear Friends,

Let me first extend my best wishes of good health to you, your families, and your close ones, and hope for a speedy and full recovery of all those infected by COVID-19.

Despite these difficult circumstances, which have upended our usual working practices, I want to praise you for your constant engagement, both in your national parliaments and within our Parliamentary Assembly. Although there is no replacement to in-person dialogue, we have managed to adapt rapidly and efficiently to maintain our precious channels of communication. This has been possible thanks to the International Secretariat's flexibility and the support of technical and administrative staff in our parliaments and Delegations.

As the OSCE region began to seriously face the pandemic last March, the OSCE PA immediately recognized that this grave multifaceted crisis called for greater international assistance and solidarity.

In the initial phase of the crisis, this was necessary to provide medical support and protective equipment where it was most needed. As most countries shut down their economies and imposed confinement, new challenges emerged, calling for the exchange of best practices. Today, as many of our countries are gradually reopening their economies in preparation for the summer holidays, clear and direct international communication is key to preventing or controlling an eventual second outbreak.

Going forward, we also need to maintain international co-operation as countries, pharmaceutical companies, and research laboratories race towards the development of safe treatments and a vaccine. We must ensure an equal therapeutic response on a global scale, once available.

In this peculiar context, our parliaments have been required to operate with limited interaction and debate to pass emergency measures. We, parliamentarians, have played our role as a link between citizens and their governments by educating about new health and safety guidelines, such as social distancing, and by relaying concerns and, sometimes, shedding light on situations of despair.

The fact that parliaments continued to function at the height of this crisis was precious to ensure the continuity of parliamentary democracy in the OSCE area. In the post-COVID era, we are invited to make the full use of our parliamentary prerogatives, in particular oversight.

Beyond the health and economic crises, we have seen that major issues, such as corruption, human trafficking, or disinformation, have been exacerbated. All of these are challenges that the OSCE PA had already identified and developed an acquis, which can help develop adequate legislative responses.

The core work of the OSCE, however, remains the same, although under even more complicated conditions: facilitating dialogue to prevent and mediate conflicts, foster economic co-operation and sustainable development, and promote and protect human rights.

Throughout these challenging times, the OSCE PA has continued to uphold our founding principles and the fundamental rights of our citizens. In our mission to help protect our populations against the wide range of enduring threats to their security, we must continue to denounce violations of the Helsinki principles.

We have made it clear that we cannot solve this unprecedented crisis by walking away from the many challenges the OSCE region continues to face. We must continue to defend the most vulnerable among us, especially those living in conflict zones or in refugee camps, as well as women and minorities. We must carry on reporting electoral fraud and denouncing votes organized in violation of the principles of the OSCE and the norms of international law. We must continue to promote greater engagement and equal opportunities from people of all genders, ages, and origins. And of course, we must also pay the utmost attention to the highest vital issue of our time, climate change.

Faced with the need to provide a global response to this global crisis, the OSCE PA has encouraged close co-ordination with parliaments at the national and the international level to promote democratic, effective, and coherent public policy responses, and to address our citizens' concerns.

Although the pandemic has canceled our meetings and conferences, including our 2020 Annual Session and our Autumn Meeting as well as a number of planned election observation missions, we have managed to navigate through unchartered territory for our Parliamentary Assembly, thanks to regular consultations with our elected leadership and advice from Secretary General Roberto Montella and his team. These discussions have been complemented by regional talks with many Delegations to ensure that the OSCE PA remains an inclusive forum for dialogue. Overall, the situation has encouraged us to continue in our efforts to modernize the work of the PA.

Our Parliamentary Web Dialogues have provided new platforms for our Members to hear from experts, and share experience and best practices, in order to learn lessons from this crisis and enhance preparedness, resilience, and response for an eventual new pandemic. Our collective work during this difficult period has been compiled in this "OSCE PA vs. COVID-19," which is being presented to the OSCE PA Standing Committee in July 2020.

Thanking you once again for your diligent work and engagement in support of multilateralism and the OSCE, I look forward to seeing you in person very soon.

George Tsereteli

As soon as it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic was not just a normal flu and that we were heading towards unprecedented challenges, we immediately made "rethinking" and "readapting" our key words. The first priority was to think of ways, creative and innovative, on how to enable our Assembly, an international parliamentary platform for more than 300 Parliamentarians from 57 participating States representing more than one billion citizens, to continue to provide an added value and a distinct contribution.

We promptly acknowledged that, during such an unprecedented type of crisis, international organizations like ours had a strong role to play. Therefore, it was necessary for the OSCE PA to develop a new sense of purpose for our work, in line with the new reality brought about by the pandemic. This, besides a number of administrative decisions, such as the cancellation of meetings and other activities, switching to telecommuting and reinforcing our digital and technical capacities, included ensuring that the political relevance and added value of the Assembly would not diminish in a context where our main opportunity to meet and debate - the Annual Session - was being cancelled.

This is why I shared with our Members in April the OSCE PA - COVID Compact, a Report on Readapting the Parliamentary Assembly to challenges in the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic . The report focuses, inter alia, on a three-pillar strategy: a) continuation of the political dialogue through new formats; b) increase of public messaging; c) facilitation of exchange of information, best practices and aid requests.

As new format for the political debate, we have launched a cycle of Parliamentary Web Dialogues - online meetings on the model of webinars - which gave the opportunity to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on a number of priority areas for the OSCE's work. They have been very successful, and their results are what this document is all about. But before diving into that, I wish to give a personal reflection on our duty as international organizations in this critical period.

The COVID-19 pandemic is much more than a health emergency: it impacts on the security of our societies and citizens, which are at the core of the OSCE's focus. The economic recession and the growing social discontent which most likely will hit our societies in the coming months will also impact political systems with a prevailing climate of uncertainty affecting domestic policy as well as international relations.

Global problems require global responses and that is why international cooperation and coordination at all levels, including the parliamentary one, are a key asset. The risk of entering into blame games and mistrust is always present and could lead to a period of even deeper divisions and a

general failure to cooperate. International Organizations are instrumental to keep multilateralism alive and effective, promoting a strong sense of solidarity, responsibility and joint ownership of efforts among States.

This concept has been our "mantra" in the last few months. Debating the issues at stake, collecting information and successful experiences from all over the OSCE region to enable Members of Parliament to make more informed decisions, replicate positive measures, and facilitate the sharing of vital information to the people they represent in their constituencies. This is a great value of the PA's unique infrastructure, as it allows a swift two-way linkage between the international and the local levels of decision making.

Of course, to achieve all of this we need two important tools: reciprocal trust and strategic long-term foresight. In other words, we need strong leadership and politics with a capital P. That politics that has the courage to think big and look ahead without drowning in the daily tittle-tattle of party fights and the electoral cycle. I often made this appeal to our PA Members: use our platform to fly high on these objectives.

Strategic thinking is particularly crucial now, as we embark on the post (post is my optimistic approach!) COVID phase, a new normal whose facet is very difficult to predict at the moment. When we plan the future we may need to be creative and think, perhaps even unconventionally, of alternative working methodologies for the implementation of our regular activities, including with a more effective use of new communication technologies and a careful, coherent and responsible utilization of the resources, especially in the coming economic hardship period. In this regard, I wish to thank our Standing Committee for a smooth approval of our next year's budget.

Finally, we need to maintain unity among international actors, avoiding duplication of efforts and investing in each other's added values to prove that only effective multilateralism will bring about concrete solutions to the current crisis. For our Assembly, there are two main avenues of cooperation, one is within the OSCE and the other is with partner interparliamentary organizations. In this regard, I wish to draw your attention to the joint statement on the "Comprehensive security approach needed for global response to COVID-19" issued by all OSCE Heads of Institution on the occasion of the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, positioning the Organization and its unique toolbox to play a role in facilitating international cooperation to address the pandemic.

In conclusion, I wish to thank our Members for their precious support, active engagement and dedicated contributions. Be it around the same table or connected from a computer in some remote areas of the world, we continue to prove the added value of this Assembly and of parliamentary diplomacy. I would also like to thank the OSCE PA Staff, including those who recently joined our team and our research assistants, who committed with passion and dedication to the new working modalities. We will spare no efforts to ensure this continues for the benefit of the only real end-users of our "product", the citizens of the OSCE region.

Roberto Montella

IMPACT ON CONFLICTS

Parliamentary Web Dialogue: *"COVID'S Impact on Conflicts in the OSCE region"* - 15 May 2020

SUMMARY

On 23 March UN Secretary General António Guterres urged warring parties across the world to lay down their weapons in support of the bigger battle against COVID-19. The global pandemic poses a particular threat to countries and societies affected by conflicts. The populations of conflict-affected countries are likely to be especially vulnerable to outbreaks of disease. With limited access to basic healthcare infrastructure and public services, people in conflict areas are in the most dangerous frontline of the pandemic risk zone. With emergency measures restricting movement, national and international medics and humanitarian and crisis management actors are struggling to get relief to people in need. While international institutions working on conflict resolution have faced obstacles in their activities and movements following the restrictions, closure of borders, travel bans, and bans on social gathering also negatively impact the work of observers and peace builders, increasing the risk of rapid conflict escalation. In order to assess these challenges, the OSCE PA organized a web-based seminar focused on the topic "COVID's Impact on Conflicts in the OSCE Region". The event was chaired by Congressman Richard Hudson, Chair of the OSCE PA General Committee on Political Affairs and Security and was moderated by OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares. In total, the event was virtually attended by 110 participants, more than 50 of which were OSCE PA Members.

The web dialogue participants included parliamentarians and staff from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as a range of OSCE experts and others.

Opening the event, **Chair of the OSCE PA General Committee on Political Affairs and Security Congressman Richard Hudson** stressed the crucial role that the Committee plays, saying "we must continue working toward a free and peaceful OSCE area in which all participating states fully implement the fundamental principles agreed under the Helsinki Final Act." Congressman Hudson went on to say, "Unfortunately, the OSCE region bears sad witness to a number of ongoing conflicts in countries including Ukraine, which continues to be subjected to a war that has killed thousands and impacted millions, including civilians who continue to suffer today. Additionally, the invasion in parts of Georgia is ongoing. These and other conflicts in the OSCE region defy resolution year after year."

In his welcoming remarks, **OSCE PA President George Tsereteli (Georgia)** noted that conflicts will not magically disappear in the post COVID-19 world. He stressed that to overcome the crisis, a comprehensive response on various issues, which are, in general, at the heart of all OSCE work: public health, economic collapse, and ongoing conflicts is much needed. President Tsereteli continued underlining the need to keep monitoring occupied territories and conflict zones, where people are living in harsh conditions, and encouraged to keep these issues high on the agenda of national parliaments.

EXPERTS' KEY POINTS

Presentation by Ambassador Tuula Yrjölä, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre

- The COVID-19 crisis and its indirect effects can have a heavy impact on conflict-affected populations, already enduring precarious conditions: the closure of crossing points or entry-exit checkpoints, reduced access to healthcare and economic difficulties place a heavy burden on vulnerable populations.

- The crisis has disrupted meetings and prevents the direct and informal interactions which are essential for securing progress in any mediation process. It also risks diverting attention and resources away from formal negotiation and resolution processes.

  ◊ The Trilateral Contact Group and its four Working Groups (Security, Political, Humanitarian and Economic) now meet exclusively in VTC format, but are keeping the same rhythm as before: discussions have continued to focus on the measures set out by the Normandy Four leaders in December. There have been some encouraging steps such as the further exchange of detainees on 16 April. But the commitment made during the Paris N4 Summit for a full and comprehensive implementation of the ceasefire, has yet to materialize.

  ◊ The Transdniestrian Settlement Process has been heavily affected by the pandemic. The Mission to Moldova and Special Representative Thomas Mayr-Harting remain very active. Contacts continue on issues such as medical supplies and the visit of a WHO mission to Tiraspol last week, such co-operation is encouraging. However, the regular Working Groups and meetings between the chief negotiators of the sides (1+1) have been discontinued, and there is little evidence of agreement on moving to a wider meeting in the 5+2 format.

  ◊ Moreover, the pandemic has influenced the Geneva International Discussions as well. There are no clear indications as to when these discussions could be resumed. The associated Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms already faced challenges before, and their resumption would be even more crucial now.

- Unfortunately, the already difficult conditions for people affected by conflict seem to have generally worsened. Conflict resolution has become harder, and progress on the efforts has slowed. We should consider the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to promote new tools for enhanced interaction. When in-person meetings cannot take place, digital tools offer viable

alternatives. However, it's important to bear in mind the importance of trust-building and the strengthening of interpersonal relations in negotiations. The risks and opportunities of digital tools need to be carefully weighed. But COVID-19 restrictions may be long lasting, and so mediators need to increase the digital literacy of their mediation teams.

- Despite these challenges, the OSCE itself can be proud of how it is responding operationally to the pandemic and its effects; it will continue to seek to help societies recover from the severe economic impact and socio-political consequences of the pandemic in many OSCE countries.

Presentation by Ambassador Yasar Halit Çevik, Head of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

- Outbursts of violence continue along the line of contact, despite the commitment made to a full and comprehensive implementation of the ceasefire and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

  ◊ Since the beginning of May the Mission has received the most serious increase in reported civilian casualties in at least two years. Even with the challenges linked with COVID-19, the Mission remains dedicated to corroborating civilian casualties.

  ◊ The Mission continues to record damages to civilian properties: heavy weapons are still observed near populated areas and civilian infrastructure. The continued fighting around essential civilian infrastructure is threatening, amongst the others, water supply, vital to protecting the health of civilians.

  ◊ Recent weeks have seen frequent incidents affecting the safety and security of Mission personnel, which are unacceptable. Illegitimate restrictions on the Mission also include numerous instances of monitors being blocked from accessing areas within its mandate under the pretext of restrictions relating to the pandemic.

- The working group on security issues of the Trilateral Contact Group, which has continued to meet through VTC, has focused on key points: ceasefire, disengagement, and mine action. To achieve progress in the implementation of such measures, discussions need to become more constructive.

- A long-standing concern that remains unaddressed is the Mission's access to the southern part of the Donetsk region outside of government control, where the SMM's restrictions are chronic. Any impediment to the SMM's freedom of movement is a violation of the SMM mandate agreed by the Permanent Council, as well as of the commitments undertaken in the Minsk Agreements.

- The SMM follows the strictest measures to protect the Mission members and to reduce the risk for the local population, while implementing the mandate. The Mission has adapted and continues to carry out core activities, including monitoring and reporting on the security situation in eastern Ukraine.

THE DISCUSSION

In the ensuing discussion, more than fifteen parliamentarians shared their perspectives, experiences, and concerns on the developments in conflicts in the OSCE area. Members highlighted that the pandemic should not distract from the need to focus on conflict resolution, uphold international law, and defend principles of the Helsinki Final Act. The need for expansion of multilateral approach and diplomatic work in conflict resolution was stressed outlining the important role that parliamentarians can play in this process.
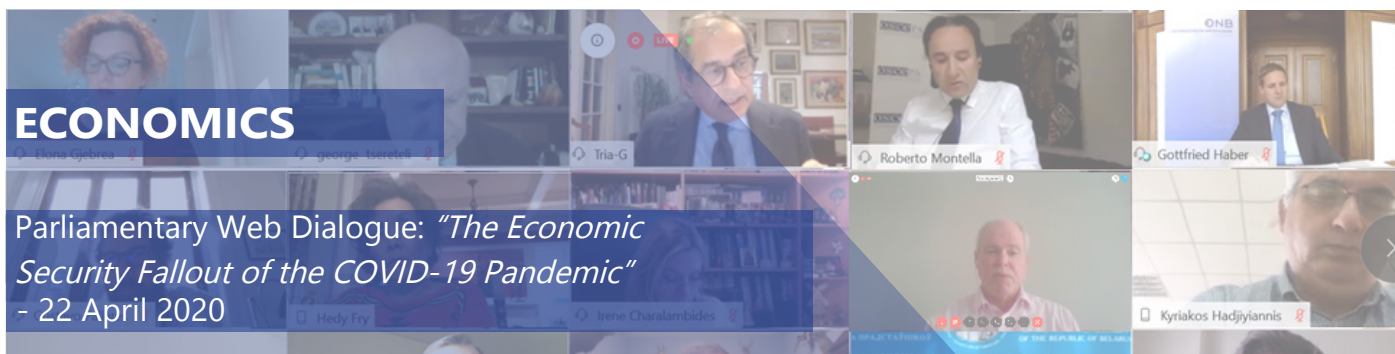
Highlights:

- Implications of the global pandemic are going beyond the health crisis and heavily affecting dynamics of conflicts. Governments are preoccupied with COVID-19 challenges and issues of ongoing conflicts are slipping down from international agenda.

- Civilians in conflict-affected areas remain among the most vulnerable groups during the outbreak due to limited access to healthcare and public services. The humanitarian aid provision chain was significantly affected by pandemic-related border closures and travel restrictions.

- Unfortunately, the global cease-fire call by UN Secretary General António Guterres was disregarded by combatants in the OSCE area. Full implementation of Helsinki Final Act commitments and other international obligations should be the basis for addressing these conflicts.

- Lockdown measures introduced by countries affected by conflicts have slowed down international mediation efforts and peace negotiations. Nevertheless, travel restrictions must not be allowed to interfere with the work of mediators and observers. The OSCE will have to adapt to meet current circumstances in order to most effectively continue its crucial role in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution.

- Containment of the so-called "protracted conflicts" cannot be viewed as a success and strong political will should be demonstrated by all parties to stop the violence. Their perpetuation only increases the negative effects on people, government and challenge the trust and confidence in OSCE. Constructive dialogue and multilateral approaches for conflict resolution should continue to be a priority.

- Despite the pandemic, participating States should demonstrate readiness to maintain and improve international co-operation, provide mutual support, and show solidarity in order to minimize the negative consequences of conflicts and tensions. Conflict parties should restrain from engaging in military activities and demonstrate solidarity with the UNSG's call for cease-fire.

- Efforts taken by the OSCE under the leadership of Albanian Chairmanship and activities of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre in order to continue the work on conflict resolution and mediation are positively evaluated and highly appreciated.

- Efforts to address the pandemic should not be politicized, and emergency measures should not be misused for political purposes.

- The pandemic is likely to aggravate challenges in areas as diverse as unemployment, migration, and inequality, which could in turn trigger social tensions and foster new conflicts in the OSCE area. Collective and national responses should seek to take these challenges into account.

Ukraine:

- The deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in Eastern Ukraine was lamented by nearly all participants. Civilians and health structures are under the pressure of conflict conditions and threats from COVID at the same time. The number of civilian casualties is increasing. The situation with internally displaced persons is alarming and the risk of the number of IDPs to grow (which is currently around 1.5 million people) is only increasing. OSCE SMM observers are facing more movement restrictions (especially with crossing checkpoints) which, in addition to general lockdown and unavailability of Mission's staff to travel to the country, creates significant challenges for the Mission to implement its mandate.

- These challenges demanded continued attention from the international community, participants agreed. Civilians suffering in the contact zone required assistance and support, and the flow of the humanitarian aid and healthcare services should also extend beyond areas of governmental control. All sides should fully remain committed to the conflict resolution objective while the basis for it still should be the same – full implementation of Minsk agreements. Joint measures aiming to contain the spread of COVID might serve as an example of practical collaboration to build the trust among the parties. The OSCE could consider, for example, offering to facilitate access to medical assistance across the contact line. One participant called for the immediate re-establishment of the joint centre for co-ordination and control.

- Parliamentarians highlighted the immediate importance for OSCE observers and humanitarian aid organizations to be provided with necessary access and freedom of movement to report on the humanitarian crisis and assist in delivery of humanitarian aid.

ECONOMICS

Parliamentary Web Dialogue: *"The Economic Security Fallout of the COVID-19 Pandemic"* - 22 April 2020

BACKGROUND

The Parliamentary Web Dialogue on "The Economic Security Fallout of the COVID-19 Pandemic" was aimed at raising awareness about the short and long-term economic and security repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Experts and parliamentarians exchanged views on the socio-economic impact of the health crisis, shared preliminary lessons learned, and considered the way forward for economic recovery in the region.

KEY FINDINGS

1. While the COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a health crisis, its social and economic repercussions have severely impacted the lives of millions of citizens by generating significant economic and security fallouts which are pushing both advanced and emerging economies into a recession. The worst affected economies seem to be those that are most integrated into the global supply chain or supply intermediate inputs.[1] Ultimately, the crisis triggered by the pandemic overlaps with other important themes, such as the rule of law, conflicts, migration-related challenges, climate protection, and health care.

2. Drastic public health measures adopted to contain the virus (e.g., quarantine, social distancing, and border controls) disrupted production, trade, and logistic chains at national and international levels and led to extreme shutdowns, job losses, and severe disruption of travel, mobility and financial activities.[2]

3. While the crisis is expected to be temporary in nature, the mobility, tourism, trade, and entertainment sectors will likely face longer-term, possibly fatal, repercussions. The economic impact of the crisis has been particularly profound for smaller businesses, low income workers, undocumented migrants and the underemployed and self-employed. Countries hosting large migrant communities are particularly exposed at this critical juncture.

4. Consequently, OSCE participating States are facing serious policy problems, such as rising sovereign debt levels, triggering state interventions which could distort market competition, changes in supply chains, and a potential long-term rise in unemployment rates.

5. Supporting the economy in this critical moment is essential for safeguarding social security. Policy makers are called to make difficult choices which require trade-offs between addressing the public health crisis and limiting its economic damage. While it

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[1]Such as commodities, raw materials and oil.
[2]For example, the pandemic has led to historic drops in oil prices (due to the lack of storage capacity).

is critical to be quick and flexible in developing/implementing these new policies, it is also important to keep in mind that they should serve a longer-term perspective.
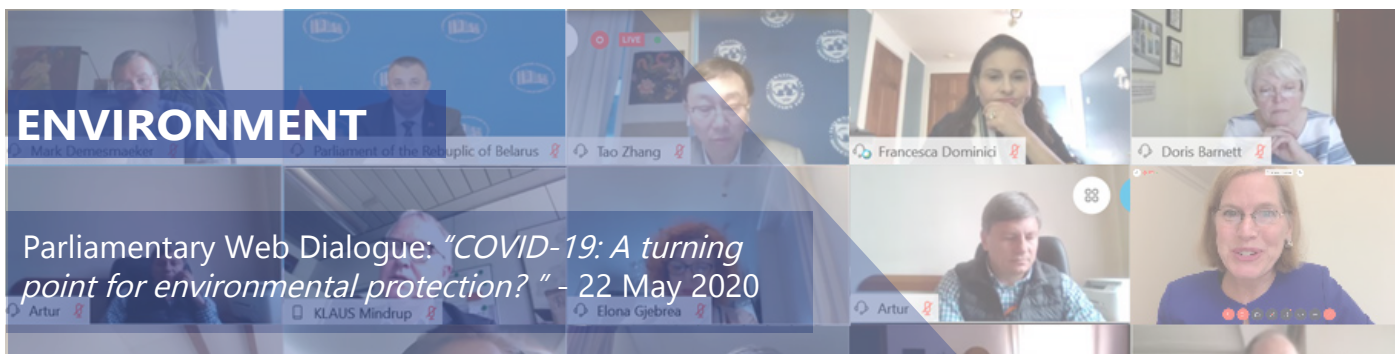
6. Monetary policy co-ordination between central banks is key to stabilizing financial markets, as well as to ensure the liquidity required by governments and markets. Public guaranties, equity measures, wage subsidies, and tax deferrals are required to support the most affected companies. While demand-side measures might be less effective at this juncture, preserving the regulatory supervisory framework is paramount.

7. At this critical juncture, the role of national parliaments is key to provide strong oversight of governments' actions and to promote good governance principles in public spending to avoid any waste of critical resources and prevent corruption.

8. Considering the pandemic's extensive reach, as well as globalized economic relations, the need for a well-co-ordinated international response is clear. International co-operation among countries and multilateral organizations is instrumental for the effectiveness of healthcare and economic measures, as well as to prevent the recession from becoming a long-term depression.

9. Ultimately, the pandemic has brought to light certain fragilities of the neoliberal globalized world, which provides an opportunity for revisiting certain aspects of our economic system.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Against this backdrop, OSCE participating States should urgently introduce balanced fiscal, monetary, and financial market measures to mitigate the economic and social impact of the crisis. More specifically, policy makers should subsidize the economy through targeted instruments and provide emergency financing to their healthcare and infrastructure systems, while keeping public spending and financial stability in mind.

2. Public interventions should target the IT, healthcare, manufacturing, and other vital sectors of the economy, starting from those hit hardest by the lockdown, such as the mobility, tourism, and entertainment sectors. The focus should be on saving as many businesses as possible and on preserving employment.

3. Supporting the most vulnerable and exposed groups is a priority that requires well-conceived measures. For instance, it is imperative to adequately assist those who are left without any income, as well as those who do not have internet access (i.e., the digital divide).

4. Governments should ensure liquidity for additional bank lending to private companies, as they are often experiencing severe decreases in income, while sustaining high fixed costs. Banks should be part of the solution by providing the required liquidity, loans, and guarantees to their clients.

5. Parliaments must ensure that recovery measures are adopted taking all stakes into account and implemented in a balanced manner, thereby safeguarding public health and keeping the economy running. It is vital that parliamentarians work together to build recovery in

the post-COVID-19 world and avoid future similar crises.

6. OSCE participating States should refraining from excessively protectionist and inward-look-ing policies. In particular, they should resist political arguments fuelled by the psychological pressure of the emergency that advocate for national self-sufficiency in the provision of essential goods, nor exploit the asymmetric impact of the emergency to restructure trans-national production and trade networks to their advantage

7. Rather, OSCE participating States must be solidary in the recovery process. They should es-tablish security corridors to overcome sudden supply shortages due to the delocalization of production. Similarly, the expansion of the private sector at the expense of key public ser-vices – such as healthcare and emergency response - should be duly considered as against the interests of the end-users. Finally, OSCE participating Sates should create emergency lines to better co-ordinate during similar future crises.

8. International organizations, such as the OSCE, should provide privileged fora for co-ordination and sharing of information and lessons learned, thereby building a safer and brighter future for all citizens.

ENVIRONMENT

Parliamentary Web Dialogue: *"COVID-19: A turning point for environmental protection?"* - 22 May 2020

BACKGROUND

The Parliamentary Web Dialogue on "COVID-19: A Turning Point for Environmental Protection?" enabled OSCE PA members and renowned experts to explore the interlinkages between environmental degradation and public health, foster dialogue around the need to better protect our environment in order to enhance human security, and consider opportunities for targeted "green" policy interventions in response to the crisis.

KEY FINDINGS

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a spotlight on the links between the environment and public health. As such, it should serve as an opportunity to pause and reflect, rethink old habits and consider how to make the globalization process more fair, solidary, sustainable and safe. Sustainable development can only be achieved if economic, social, environmental, and public health factors are duly balanced and given equal attention by policymakers.

2. Long-term exposure to air pollution and particulate matter (PM) adversely affects respiratory and cardiovascular systems and increases mortality risk. Numerous scientific studies have linked air pollution exposure to health issues including non-fatal heart attacks, irregular heartbeats, aggravated asthma, decreased lung function, increased respiratory symptoms (such as airway irritation, coughing or difficulty breathing), dementia, and premature death.

3. Notably, most of these diseases seem to exacerbate the severity of COVID-19 infection symptoms. While researchers continue to investigate whether there is a direct link between exposure to air pollution and adverse outcomes, or more difficult recoveries, from COVID-19, early indications suggest that such a connection exists.

4. Breathing polluted air clearly increases the risk of heart attack, pneumonia and, if infected by COVID-19, death. Low-income and minority communities seem to be particularly at risk, as they usually live in more polluted areas. In short, air pollution kills! All citizens have the right to breathe clean air.

5. The decisions taken at this juncture will shape economies and the global system for decades. If recovery from the crisis is to be sustainable - if the world is to become more resilient – OSCE participating States should do everything in their power to promote "green" recoveries.

6. National green recovery plans should be recognized as beneficial both in the short run, for example through technical innovation and job creation, and in the long run,

by contributing to promote a more healthy, secure, and resilient world.

7. Clean energies which are environmentally friendly should be considered as financial and economic opportunities. The transition from fossil fuel to green energy is generally recognized as the single most relevant step towards cleaner air and the mitigation of climate change. Countries that are relaxing environmental laws as part of their COVID-19 response will cause long-term environmental damage.

8. It is essential to preserve natural habitats, revisit our relationship with nature and rebuild a more environmentally responsible world - a healthy planet is critical to our ability to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic and prevent future global disease crises.

9. The severe health implications brought on by inadequate environmental protection should serve as a wake-up call for legislators. National parliaments play a central role in making sure that sound policies and laws are adopted and implemented to safeguard public health and prevent future similar crises, including through direct public support towards green projects, green finance and higher carbon pricing. Youth also play a key role in this field.

10. Despite the COVID-19 crisis, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change remain the best road maps for future actions in this field.

11. The commitment of the European Union with regards to the development of a sustainable climate plan, including the recently launched "Green Deal", is also deemed critical.

12. Intensified international co-operation and co-ordination is urgently needed to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, as well as to build resilience against similar future health crises and to mitigate the effects of climate change.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Against this background, OSCE participating States' should reinforce their commitment to environmental protection, public health, and green economy. The pandemic should provide momentum for developing and implementing green economic recovery plans throughout the OSCE region.

2. OSCE participating States should consider declaring a "state of climate emergency" and appointing dedicated Ministers with expertise in environmental protection to take charge of elaborating on green recovery plans.

3. OSCE participating States should impose tighter regulations to ensure cleaner air, thereby contributing to minimize the COVID-19 death toll and related hospitalizations. Governments should ensure better air quality by greening and electrifying transportation and by decreasing greenhouse gas emissions.

4. OSCE participating States should implement green recovery plans prioritizing green

investments, promoting clean energies (e.g. carbon pricing) and low-carbon technologies, advancing green finance, and ensure a just green transition by providing the necessary support.

5. Opportunities for investing in nature should be expanded as part of the global socio-economic response to the COVID-19 crisis. This could be achieved by facilitating innovative financing and investments to safeguard nature and promoting investments that recognize the immense value of nature and ecosystem services.

6. Bearing in mind that COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease, wildlife trade should be banned throughout the OSCE region, and beyond.

7. Awareness about the linkages between nature and health should be raised through targeted communication campaigns, innovative educational content and by wider sharing of science-based information. Participating States should pro-actively engage young in this context.

8. If environmental protection is to be successful, dedicated efforts shall be deployed at local and global levels, including through transboundary collaboration. Transboundary management of ecosystems should be enhanced by fighting zoonotic disease transmission, improving support to ecosystem services and advancing the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements.[3]

9. International support should be provided to those countries which do not currently have the capacity to put into place ecologically sound measures.

10. Recalling the Ottawa (1995) and Stockholm (1996) Declarations, the OSCE PA should renew its political commitment to protect public health and safeguard the environment as two sides of the same coin, as well as its determination to promote environmental good governance principles and coordinate environmentally sound recovery policies, including through the targeted work of its committees.

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[3] The EU funded Central European Green Corridors Project was hailed as a successful example of a transborder effort of decarbonization and electrification of road transport.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Parliamentary Web Dialogue: *"Respecting human rights and maintaining democratic control during states of emergency"* - 8 May 2020

BACKGROUND

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, some two-thirds of OSCE participating States declared a state of emergency or a similar regime establishing different degrees of containment and mitigation measures. Given that such scenarios typically entail not only additional powers to governments, but often place restrictions on the enjoyment of human rights, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly organized a web-based seminar on 8 May 2020 focused on 'Respecting Human Rights and Maintaining Democratic Control During States of Emergency'.

KEY FINDINGS

1. When implementing states of emergency, it is crucial to maintain the widely recognized standards that any restrictions on rights and freedoms should be proportionate and limited to the situation, consistent with other legal obligations, and non-discriminatory. Restrictions must also be limited in duration, and legislative bodies should continue their functioning to the highest degree possible.

2. In some cases, initial government plans for emergency measures required adjustment, as parliaments demanded a greater ability to intervene and maintain oversight than originally proposed by governments. Not all countries had legislation governing states of emergency in place at the beginning of the crisis that could be invoked, requiring intensive work by parliaments.

3. Governmental and parliamentary actions during this period will have long-term consequences for public trust in institutions. At the end of this crisis, the world will be different. The changes caused by the crisis pro-vide an opportunity to shape better, more inclusive and responsive societies.

4. Parliaments, by nature consultative bodies, have been significantly affected by the outbreak, with many legislative bodies reducing their work to only the necessary emergency decision-making processes.

5. Some parliaments have adapted their procedures to enable work to continue. Measures have included amending regulations, remote consultation, and voting to accommodate social distancing; reducing physical presence to a minimum required by quorum; increased video conferencing; oversight through special committees or parliamentary enquiries; and increased use of written questions. Some efforts appear to have increased transparency overall. The impact these may have on parliamentary oversight functions remains to be seen. Other parliaments have been less able to quickly adapt processes.

6. There has been a disturbing trend in parts

of the OSCE region towards a breakdown in parliamentary tolerance for the 'other' side. The crisis should not be a pretext for persecution of the opposition, nor for the opposition to target the government in bad faith.

7. This is not an appropriate time to make permanent changes that may restrict people's rights. The crisis has already compromised respect for freedom of expression, with a number of violations noted, including through efforts to criminalize false information and attempts to require journalists to report only officially issued information.

8. Surveillance mechanisms serve as important tools in efforts to combat the pandemic. In collecting such information, however, there is the potential for misuse of private data if safeguards are not put in place.

9. Electoral processes may need some adaptation of procedures in order to proceed safely during a pandemic. These adaptations can take time. Proceeding with elections immediately may stress untried procedures and

result in limited and unfair opportunities for campaigning and/or for voting. Parliamentarians and political candidates also need to establish new methods to meet with the public in a safe manner.

10. Coming out of the pandemic, it is crucial that elections are free and fair so that the political challenges caused by the crisis do not continue into the future without accountability.

11. Particularly during the pandemic, there is a critical need for international co-ordination, including in steps to reopen societies following lockdowns and recommencing international travel. States can also benefit from experience in other countries through multilateral exchanges.

12. Civil society continues to play a very important role during the pandemic, particularly given their potential to provide information based on their networks at a time when travel is restricted.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. With the functioning of parliaments limited, it is inappropriate to take any steps that may have a permanent impact on people's rights, such as by criminalizing false information or permanent changes to laws on assembly. It is crucial that parliaments undertake careful scrutiny of all conferral of power under extraordinary measures. All such extraordinary measures should be strictly limited in time.

2. Parliamentary oversight and transparent legislative procedures are particularly important under the current circumstances. Parliaments should play an important role in shaping both immediate responses as well as longer-term solutions.

3. All political actors should work in good faith at this time, and governments should look for ways to strengthen co-operation across party lines to improve responses to the crisis. It is important to fully respect parliamentary minorities' role and ability to conduct robust questioning and oversight. Parliaments should also work inclusively to ensure that all voices in society are heard.

4. A more complete study of the impact this crisis has had on parliamentary procedures and functioning will be important.

5. It may be necessary to postpone some elections in order for them to be conducted safely and fairly. Standard approaches cannot necessarily be relied upon for campaigning or voting, with some groups likely to be significantly disadvantaged if precautions are not taken. The pandemic must not be used as an opportunity to hold elections within a severely restricted campaign.

6. Firewalls between public health use of personal data and national security use must be maintained to safeguard against misuse of private information.

7. To help ensure the sustainability of a healthy civil society, continued funding for NGO efforts is needed, also within the challenging budgetary situation faced by many countries.

8. Pressure should be applied to ensure the release of all prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, particularly considering the vulnerability of prisons to the spread of infectious diseases.

9. The pandemic has made clear that access to health care services should be recognized as a basic human right.

10. Parliamentarians should lead efforts aimed at increased international co-operation and solidarity coming out of the pandemic response.

SOCIAL COHESION

Parliamentary Web Dialogue: *"COVID-19 response in diverse societies: challenges and opportunities for stability and social cohesion"* - 22 June 2020

BACKGROUND

Racism and discrimination against ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities is becoming increasingly widespread during the COVID-19 crisis. In the face of this alarming trend, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres appealed for global action as the COVID-19 pandemic "continues to unleash a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scaremongering." Following this appeal, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly organized a web-based dialogue on 22 June 2020 focused on 'COVID-19 Response: Challenges and Opportunities for Stability and Social Cohesion' aimed at better understanding the particular challenges faced by minorities and vulnerable populations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and exploring opportunities to build more inclusive and cohesive societies.

KEY FINDINGS

1. The social and psychological aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic are significant and should be taken seriously. There is a long history of public health crises leading to stigma and discrimination, and the pandemic is exacerbating existing social and economic divisions.

2. The pandemic has revealed many alarming systemic inequalities resulting from marginalization, discrimination, racism, and xenophobia, with serious shortcomings in policies. Governmental and parliamentary actions during this period have an increased potential to bring long-lasting changes for our societies.

3. The COVID-19 pandemic has created an opportunity to build new, more inclusive, and equal societies with the help of the lessons learned from this crisis. These efforts will require us to understand and embrace the indivisibility of human rights and how all rights are connected (access to health care, right to work, right to housing, education, etc).

4. Some minority communities have been disproportionately targeted by the police, and the pandemic has been used to justify harsher measures against migrants and refugees. The closure of borders has also impacted the ability of some minority groups to work, with trade suffering massively from these closures.

5. The Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted a pressing need for police reform.

6. Minorities often provide frontline services in health care, transport, and other fields, placing them in a particularly vulnerable situation. Some workplaces employing large shares of minority workers have become hotspots for the disease.

7. Minorities and vulnerable groups often

do not have the same degree of access to health care, and in many cases do not have health insurance, limiting their access to treatment. As a result, the percentage of fatalities linked to COVID-19 tends to be higher in these communities.

8. With travel restrictions impacting many people and impacting abilities to collect data on emerging problems, parliamentarians have an important role to play in identifying problematic areas in need of increased attention.

9. Women have also been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, with mortality rates linked to COVID-19 being higher for women of colour, for instance.

10. Failure to provide information in minority languages has increased the vulnerability of minority groups, migrants, and refugees. In many cases teaching was continued on online platforms solely in the state language, while the same investment in online learning for minority languages was not made. Disruptions in education caused by COVID-19 may have long-term consequences and a disproportionate impact on those already impacted by discriminatory schooling.

11. Parliamentarians have the ability to help migrants and unaccompanied minors who are particularly vulnerable by supporting measures promoting relocation, access to health care, housing, and education.

12. A prolonged pandemic may affect electoral processes, with significant consequences for minority groups.

13. The COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-term impact not only on health care, but also on the economic and social spheres. The global fight against COVID-19 can only be successful if it is carried out on the basis of international co-operation, solidarity, and inclusiveness in all areas.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Parliamentarians have a unique role and ability to bring a human rights and anti-discrimination perspective into their work and legislation. Members of the Assembly have a duty to speak out against intolerance and to work towards of social cohesion.

2. Authorities should intervene to stop the spread of false information blaming minority groups for spreading the virus. The fight against false information must remain at the forefront and both governments and internet companies need to address the so-called "infodemic" of unsubstantiated claims, fake cures and conspiracy theories associated with the pandemic. Governments must promote and protect access to the free flow of reliable information during the pandemic.

3. There is a pressing need for disaggregated data on testing. Gathering data on race, religion, ethnicity, and gender would allow policymakers to obtain a clearer picture of the ways in which different groups are affected by the pandemic.

4. Greater attention needs to be dedicated to nurturing multilateralism and international co-operation in order to effectively combat this cross-border challenge. The social, eco-

nomic, and health care issues involved in rebuilding cohesive societies benefit from such collaboration.

5. Within the ongoing health crisis, it is important to continue to respect the right to freedom of assembly in relation to the Black Lives Matter protests and other movements.

6. As we approach the recovery phase, it is crucial to implement corrective economic measures to ensure minorities are not more penalized than they have already been. Effective policies for recovery can only be developed with the full engagement of all those affected, particularly those who are not usually involved in decision-making. Parliamentarians are uniquely equipped to encourage genuine inclusive participation.

7. There is a need for parliamentary oversight of military authorities and policing, as these have the potential to exacerbate relations with minority groups and erode public trust in government.

8. In making adjustments to procedures during the pandemic, whether related to elections, health care, education or other fields, it may be prudent to restrict these to temporary measures to ensure no groups are disproportionately affected in the longer term.

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Parliamentary Web Dialogue:*"Protecting refugees and migrants during the pandemic: Camps and closed centres under lockdown"* - 26 May 2020

BACKGROUND

Refugees and migrants, especially those in camps and immigration detention centres, are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 due to overcrowded living conditions; limited access to health, water, sanitation and hygiene services; limited access to reliable information in their own languages; and reduced access to humanitarian aid. On 26 May the OSCE PA organized a web dialogue focused on "Protecting Refugees and Migrants During the Pandemic: Camps and Closed Centres under Lockdown" with the objective of discussing the specific challenges associated with protecting refugees and mi-grants during the pandemic throughout the OSCE region.

Participants paid special attention to the humanitarian crisis in Greece and the Western Balkans, as well as vulnerable migrants such as women and unaccompanied minors. This event also aimed to exchange examples of 'good practice' and to put forth recommendations on how to address migration management challenges whilst ensuring the protection of the human rights of refugees and migrants, including the right to health and the right to seek asylum.

KEY FINDINGS

1. The multifaceted impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the exceptional exposure of vulnerable people on the move. It has had a disproportionate effect on refugees, asylum seekers and migrants across the OSCE region, in particular women and children, adding to their vulnerabilities due to poor living conditions, and limited access to health and hygiene services.

2. COVID-19 has exacerbated the problem of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, as well as anti-Roma and anti-Chinese sentiments. There has been a significant increase of violent incidents against Asians.

3. The risk of human trafficking has also in-creased during the pandemic as livelihoods have been lost; children are at even greater risk of exploitation due to school closures.

4. Essential workers of migrant backgrounds have made a particular contribution during the crisis and have been at greater risk of exposure.

5. Authorities have so far been successful in mitigating infection risks by decongesting migrant facilities, testing, implementing quarantines for new arrivals, and separating infected and non-infected persons. However, standards are generally low in reception centers and social distancing and other guidelines cannot be adequately followed. Migrants and staff in immigration detention

centres are at particular risk.

6. Access to asylum has been severely limited due to the closure of borders and suspension of asylum services, leaving migrants at risk and without a legal status. Rescue at sea has been delayed or has not taken place at all and ports have been closed, leaving rescued migrants without a safe port of disembarkation.

7. The detention of children, regardless of whether they are unaccompanied or not, is in violation of their rights and puts them at greater risk during the current pandemic.

8. The COVID-19 pandemic is not only creating problems; it is also amplifying existing ones which have deep roots and which need to be addressed, such as underlying policies of exclusion, containment, and deterrence.

9. There is also an urgent need to develop anticipatory mechanisms and to build on lessons learned, as the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of states and societies in responding to large-scale crises.

10. Implementing human rights standards from the beginning enables asylum and migration systems to become more resilient and better cope with unexpected challenges. This serves not only refugees and migrants but society as a whole.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Refugee and migrant communities must be an integral part of any public health response. They must have equal access to medical services and reliable information without language barriers. Their inclusion is necessary for an effective response and is for the benefit of the whole of society. At the same time, COVID-19 prevention measures should be implemented in a reasonable, proportionate, and non-discriminatory fashion and should not stigmatize these communities.

2. The vulnerability of low-paid and seasonal migrant workers should be recognized. The health impact on these persons should be mitigated, and their living and working conditions should be improved.

3. Authorities should work together with local communities to develop inclusive migration policies and address prejudice, discrimination, racism, and conspiracy theories which scapegoat migrant and minority populations.

4. Dialogue and co-operation among police, border management, and other law enforcement authorities must also be reinforced to foster a humane treatment of refugees and migrants.

5. States should ensure that measures taken in response to the Coronavirus pandemic which limit freedom of movement are compatible with international and regional human rights obligations and do not undermine fundamental principles of international protection of refugees, including the principle of non-refoulement.

6. States should consider providing asylum services through videoconferencing. If this is not possible, they should consider the automatic extension of residence permits and regularizing the status of asylum seekers to ensure access to health and support services.

7. States should refrain from implementing returns during the pandemic in order to protect the health of both migrant and local communities.

8. Given the limited prospects of returns, states should consider releasing immigration detainees and implementing alternatives to detention on a larger scale. No person should be subjected to unjustifiable and/or long-term detention based on their migration status.

9. Children – whether unaccompanied or with their families – should never be detained based on migration status.

10. Access to education of refugee and migrant children should be ensured during lockdown.

11. Policy makers should view the current crisis as an opportunity to advance dialogue on migration issues and to address root causes. Human rights, shared responsibility, solidarity, and accountability should be placed at the heart of migration policies.

12. The European Union should adopt as soon as possible an equitable mechanism for the redistribution of asylum seekers.

13. Parliamentarians should speak out to protect fundamental human rights principles and push their governments to do more, by relocating unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable migrants and by displaying solidarity towards migrants rescued in the Mediterranean.

14. Ensuring legal and safe passage should be a priority of migration policies. Human trafficking should be addressed through a common OSCE approach with common rules and a joint plan based on respect for the dignity of persons and solidarity.

15. There is a need for enhanced international co-operation in implementing effective long-term responses to migratory issues.

COUNTERING TERRORISM

Parliamentary Web Dialogue: *"Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic"* - 30 June 2020

BACKGROUND

The Parliamentary Web Dialogue "Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic" was jointly organized with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) on 30 June 2020. The event provided an opportunity for representatives of over 65 parliaments to engage in a focused security debate, take stock of the latest terrorism and violent extremism trends, and recognize the important role of parliamentarians in contributing to effective responses to interrelated regional security challenges in this context. As such, it served as an informal platform to exchange views on how counter-terrorism efforts can remain high on governments' agendas, both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and how parliamentary co-operation can be reinforced at this critical juncture.

KEY FINDINGS

1. While the long-term impact of COVID-19 on terrorism is yet to be fully comprehended, the uncertainty caused by the health crisis is likely to trigger dangerous dynamics and fuel violent extremism throughout the OSCE region, which should be closely monitored by all OSCE participating States (pS) in the upcoming period.

2. It is critical to closely follow terrorism-related trends in adjacent regions, in particular in North Africa, the Middle East and the Sahel, as they are interconnected and likely to impact the security of the OSCE region.

3. The unprecedented global health crisis has exacerbated existing grievances and protracted conflicts worldwide, while the humanitarian and security situation in camps and places of detention is particularly worrisome.

4. Repatriation of FTFs and family members, in particular children, remains a matter of utmost urgency.

5. All forms of ideological extremism thrive off instability and have exploited the COVID-19 crisis in the short term to support their narratives and overall agenda. For instance, the use of extreme right-wing rhetoric has increased on online platforms, thus undermining trust in democracy and highlighting hate narratives and conspiracy theories that target minorities and migrant groups in particular.

6. The longer-term change in the terrorist threat depends on the severity of the crisis in individual States. Many regions could become vulnerable to the (re-)emergence of terrorist groups as a result of the current health crisis, while the most dangerous outcome could be a resurgence of ISIS.

7. There is a concern that some terrorist groups use the pandemic to "replace" and undermine the official authorities in countries which are unable to provide basic needs to their citizens by offering health services and economic relief to their respective communities.

8. There are predictions that after the major financial crisis induced by COVID-19, voters could be drawn to more extreme political narratives which blame state authorities, foreigners and minorities for their woes.

9. The health crisis, however, has also illustrated the fundamental necessity of togetherness, partnerships, and collective responses as the only way to secure sustainable results and build more resilience in the field of counter-terrorism as well as renew the focus on what can be done remotely, including for parliaments. Multilateralism in this regard is, and must remain, crucial in essence.

10. Strong and continuous inter-organizational co-operation remains vital. In this context, the OSCE PA strategic partnership with UNOCT, enhanced by the MoU signed in February 2020, serves to engage in goal-oriented initiatives for preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism in the OSCE region. In addition, the UNOCT views the OSCE PA Publication on Strengthening Border Security and Information Sharing in the OSCE Region: A Parliamentary Oversight Exercise from 2019 as a good practice which could be replicated on other terrorism-related resolutions, thus strengthening parliamentary oversight.

11. It is crucial to fully explore the nexus between terrorism and organized crime to improve OSCE participating States' responses against these interlinked phenomena. An enhanced OSCE – OSCE PA partnership in this context is deemed essential, and several concrete project proposals to better leverage on the potential of parliamentarians are being jointly developed.

12. To be effective in the longer run, counter-terrorism responses must consider the private sector, communities on the ground, and have a strong gender perspective, thus applying a whole of society approach.

13. Providing accurate, accessible, and inclusive information about the pandemic and addressing disinformation disseminated online is essential.

14. Technological ways of tracking the spread of virus is a valuable, but double-edged sword, since it tends to increase social concerns pertaining to privacy and human rights. Against this backdrop, parliamentary oversight is important, as some countries might use counter-terrorism legislation and mass digital surveillance in ways that do not comply with human rights, under the pretext of the pandemic response.

15. It remains essential to draw a clear distinction between social movements seeking to address legitimate concerns in constitutionally guaranteed ways, and terrorist movements resorting to violence to pursue their illegal agendas. Hence, there is a need to achieve a greater balance between countering terrorism and preserving individual liberties and human rights.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Counter-terrorism efforts should always be kept high on the agendas of all OSCE pS, especially in times of crises, as authorities' attention tends to shift towards other priorities, creating fertile ground for terrorist groups to exploit these challenging circumstances and pursue their own criminal ends.

2. The OSCE pS should continue to monitor trends and share assessments on how extremist groups are exploiting COVID-19, and thus consolidate national, regional, and international policy and legislative strategies in this domain. In this context, international co-operation and parliamentary dialogue in exchanging relevant information remains vital.

3. It is crucial to try to stay ahead of groups that capitalize from states' lack of resources, by increasing COVID-19-related services and providing reliable information to citizens. In addition, pS should continue addressing online disinformation and conspiracy theories spread by terrorist groups.

4. While countering terrorism, pS should ensure that emergency powers, and the use of counter-terrorism tools to support response efforts to health crises, should be time-limited, non-discriminatory and proportional. It is vital to remain committed to human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law at all times.

5. In order to properly address the issue of returning FTFs and their relatives, OSCE pS should come up with adequate policies, legislation and programs for repatriation and reintegration that are tailored to their needs, and in particular to those of women and children.

GENDER

Parliamentary Web Dialogue: *"The Gendered Impacts of COVID-19"*- 15 June 2020
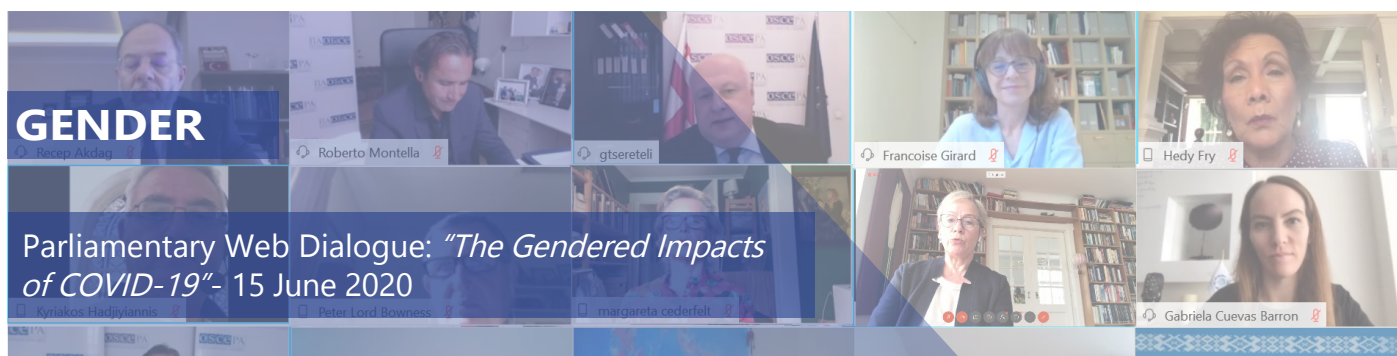
BACKGROUND

The Parliamentary Web Dialogue on "The Gendered Impacts of COVID-19" aimed at highlighting the differentiated impact of the health crisis on women and girls while raising awareness about its short- and long-term repercussions on women's health and security. The webinar, drawing upon main conclusions from the 2020 OSCE PA Gender Balance Report, published in early June, presented an opportunity for experts and parliamentarians to exchange views on the short- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and led to the consideration of preliminary gender-sensitive policy recommendations for lawmakers across the region.

KEY FINDINGS

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has reaffirmed women's vital and meaningful role in our societies. Women currently represent 70 per cent of the health and social care sector workforce globally, providing essential care and aid during this crisis, while also facing significant infection and psychological risks.

2. The crisis has brought to light and exacerbated chronic hardships faced by women and girls regarding their safe and unhindered access to quality health care services, further restraining the enjoyment of basic sexual, reproductive, and maternity rights. In addition, the crisis has compromised women's access to basic maternal and reproductive commodities exposing them to significant risks to their well-being.

3. The economic downturn inflicted by the crisis has affected women more acutely than men. Early evidence points to an increase in unpaid care work with a higher proportion of female unpaid care workers than men. Labour rights are enduring significant

pressures as a result of the economic hardship, especially for women workers, who are already in a precarious situation due to chronic inequalities, including the gender wage gap.

4. Drastic public health measures adopted to contain the virus (e.g. quarantine, social distancing) are having an important impact on women's security. Women and girls are at risk of intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence due to increased emotional tension and financial stress in the household, recommendations and orders from authorities to stay at home, and disruptions in social networks and services.

5. Access to services and structures destined to protect women and girls, including community centres, has been interrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus increasing women's vulnerability and feelings of helplessness.

6. The COVID-19 crisis has had a dispropor-

tionate effect on certain groups of women. Women with disabilities, women living in extreme poverty, racialized and Indigenous women, LGBTI+ individuals, refugee and migrant women and senior women, among other vulnerable groups, have been exposed to additional risks during this pandemic, further worsening their already precarious living conditions. Risks of abuse and illness due to the lack of equal access or/and availability of services put women of these groups at further risk.

7. State responses to the crisis reveal an important lack of gender-sensitive policymaking. The low proportionality of women in all branches of government limits the incorporation of women's perspectives, which will negatively affect effectiveness of policies focusing on mitigating the effects of the pandemic.

8. Ultimately, the pandemic has brought to light a considerable absence of social awareness on gender issues, presenting significant challenges and accentuating risks of abuse and discrimination towards LGBTI+ communities and other vulnerable groups across the OSCE region.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Against this backdrop, OSCE participating States should upgrade their work to ensure their responses are implemented in a gender-conscious manner. More specifically, policymakers should engage in dialogue with diverse women as well as women-led civil society organizations in the creation and implementation of gender-responsive policies, especially in addressing observed deficiencies of health care system models exposed by the pandemic.

2. Comprehensive responses to the effects of the health crisis require the collection and analysis of data disaggregated not only by sex but also by other intersectional factors such as race, indigeneity, sexuality, age, disability, socioeconomic status and migratory status. Such data is crucial in outlining gender-sensitive policies. By investing in analysis of the ongoing developments from a gender perspective, participating States would enhance their prevention and crisis-response capabilities that will allow for the implementation of justified, targeted, and cost-efficient responses to future crises.

3. Policies aiming at mitigating the impact of the health crisis should also ensure that women, particularly those who are marginalized, benefit from equal and unhindered access to quality health care services. Setbacks observed in the availability and provision of maternal and reproductive health care should be addressed while ensuring that women and girls fully enjoy their sexual and reproductive rights.

4. Considering the observed increase of gender-based and intimate partner violence incidents across the OSCE region during the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts should be multiplied by State institutions in addressing the root causes of gender-based and intimate partner violence, as well as the immediate and long-term effects of gender-based crimes.

5. Emergency support lines, shelters and psychological support services must remain

available and reachable to women and girls, and participating States should ensure these services receive adequate financing and undisrupted functioning.

6. In parallel, law enforcement bodies must provide their personnel with continuous and comprehensive training on gender-related issues as they often act as first-responders to reported incidents of gender-based and intimate partner violence.

7. Participating States must ensure that their economic recovery and social assistance plans are gender-responsive by taking into account the prevalence of women in many of the industries affected by COVID-19 shutdowns and providing specific assistance to women-led businesses. These plans should also support women and families who face increased care responsibilities at home as a result of the pandemic, including single parents, the majority of whom are women.

8. Efforts should be multiplied in defining and implementing inclusive and well-targeted educational curricula, an important element for enhancing social empowerment and awareness. Accelerating gender mainstreaming efforts through education, life-long learning opportunities on civic education and open public dialogue should be supported and reinforced as they constitute a key driver for the formation of a gender aware society.

9. Gender-sensitive policymaking is considered key for ensuring democratic, inclusive, and holistic responses to old and new socioeconomic challenges. While efforts to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis should remain gender-responsive, participating States must also advance their efforts in ensuring equal and fair representation of women in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.

10. The crisis is also exposing the lack of women in health care leadership positions, despite making up the vast majority of health care workers. Participating States should work to address this discrepancy and increase the representation of diverse women in health care leadership.

11. Parliaments must ensure that recovery measures are adopted while taking all stakeholders into account and that these measures are implemented in a gender-sensitive manner. Parliamentarians should enhance their efforts in achieving more equal and proportionate participation of women in legislative bodies, particularly advocating for equal representation of women in budgetary committees and leadership positions. It is also vital that parliamentarians co-operate in a gender-sensitive spirit in building State recovery responses, also in co-operation with colleagues across the OSCE region.

12. International Organizations, such as the OSCE, must do their utmost to encourage their participating States to advance their gender mainstreaming efforts while ensuring that these are also mirrored in the work of the entire Organization.

DISINFORMATION

Contribution of OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Special Rapporteur on Disinformation and Propaganda Oscar Mina (San Marino)
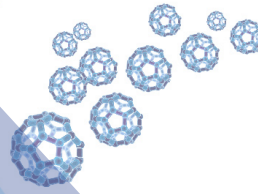
KEY FINDINGS

1. An enormous amount of false and misleading information related to the COVID-19 pandemic led the World Health Organization (WHO) and several governments to warn in March of a so-called "infodemic."

2. Since the start of the crisis, misleading healthcare information, conspiracy theories, fake claims about vaccines, bogus cures, and medicines have been circulating on the internet and on social media platforms, which resulted in the spread of panic, confusion, and distrust.

3. With quarantine and lockdown being implemented worldwide, citizens have been forced to stay home and rely heavily on the internet as source of information. The increased use of social media and the overabundance of information in links and posts, some of it fake or inaccurate, together with the lack of knowledge about the virus, given its novelty, made it complicated for people to find the trustworthy sources they needed.

4. Vulnerable groups, such as young people, the elderly, children, and people with limited access to the internet and plurality of information sources, face a higher risk of being misinformed.

5. Disinformation is being disseminated by some governments and authorities in order to discredit opposition, interfere in foreign affairs, or manipulate public discourse. In these cases, multilateral co-operation and the work of international organizations becomes key to addressing the issues and ensuring that citizens have access to plurality of information and to increase resistance to the spread of disinformation.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Combating the flow of disinformation must be a common effort of OSCE participating States' competent authorities, civil society, social media platforms, and international organi-zations.

2. OSCE participating States should strengthen legislation to combat disinformation and propaganda by promoting high-quality journalism, developing norms and standards that apply to both traditional and digital platforms, and encourage accurate and diverse media content.

3. All efforts taken by parliaments and governments to address the spread of disinformation

must comply with international legal guarantees of the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

4. Building on experience in fighting COVID-19-related disinformation so far, the OSCE participating States should take further steps to strengthen co-operation within the OSCE and its partners and other international organizations for a more co-ordinated and faster response to future challenges.

5. While maintaining a democratic debate, key decisions by governments and authorities should be science-based and include vetted advice from researchers and scientists.

6. Measures should be taken to empower citizens to critically analyze information online, by implementing measures that promote media literacy and improve digital skills. In this regard, authorities should develop strategies and work in conjunction with civil society organizations, the private sector, and the relevant OSCE institutions, including the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Parliamentary Web Dialogue "The Economic Security Fallout of the COVID-19 Pandemic" - 22 April 2020

- Prof. Giovanni Tria, former Italian Minister of Economy and Finance
- Jeffrey Schlagenhauf, Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD
- Prof. Gottfried Haber, Vice Governor of the National Bank of Austria

Parliamentary Web Dialogue "Respecting human rights and maintaining democratic control during states of emergency" - 8 May 2020

- Ingibjorg Gisladottir, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
- Michael Abramowitz, President of Freedom House

Parliamentary Web Dialogue "COVID's impact on conflicts in the OSCE region" - 15 May 2020

- Ambassador Tuula Yrjölä, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre
- Ambassador Yasar Halit Çevik, Head of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

Parliamentary Web Dialogue "COVID-19: A turning point for environmental protection?" - 22 May 2020

- Dr. Francesca Dominici, Co-Director of the Harvard Data Science Initiative, Clarence James Gamble Professor of Biostatistics, Population and Data Science at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
- Tao Zhang, Deputy Managing Director, International Monetary Fund
- Susan Gardner, Director of the Ecosystems Division of the UN Environment Programme

Parliamentary Web Dialogue "Protecting refugees and migrants during the pandemic: Camps and closed centres under lockdown" - 26 May 2020

- Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
- Gianluca Rocco, IOM Chief of Mission in Greece and Regional Response Coordinator

Parliamentary Web Dialogue "Gendered Impacts of COVID-19" - 15 June 2020

- Gabriela Cuevas Barron, Inter-Parliamentary Union President
- Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
- Françoise Girard, President of the International Women's Health Coalition

Parliamentary Web Dialogue "COVID-19 response in diverse societies: challenges and opportunities for stability and social cohesion" - 22 June 2020

- Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities
- Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Parliamentary Web Dialogue "Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic" - 30 June 2020

- Gennaro Migliore, Chair of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean's Special Committee on Counterterrorism
- Mauro Miedico, Deputy Director, and Chief, Special Projects and Innovation Branch, UN Office of Counter-Terrorism
- Reinhold Lopatka, Chair of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism
- Ambassador Mohamed El-Amine Ould Ikek, Assistant Secretary General for Legal Affairs, League of Arab States
- Ambassador Alena Kupchyna, Co-ordinator of Activities to Address Transnational Threats, Transnational Threats Department, OSCE Secretariat
- Dr. Andrea Margelletti, President, International Studies Centre (Ce.SI), Advisor to the Ministry of Defense of Italy

SOCIAL MEDIA

All media content pertaining to the Parliamentary Web Dialogues, including videos of all the events, as well as related op-eds and interviews, can be found on the OSCE PA social media accounts and on our website, www.oscepa.org. We encourage OSCE PA members and supporters to use these tools, subscribe to our channels, and share our content widely.
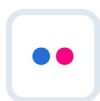
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