



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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TO THE MARSHALL CENTRE – SECURITY SEMINAR NORTH 2020

PANEL ON THE GEOSTRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE ARCTIC

Garmisch-Partenkirchen, 2 March 2020

Ambassador Coninx,
Vice Admiral Lewis, Vice Admiral Feldt,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Discussing Arctic security in high level fora is very important. Let me start by thanking the Marshall Centre for organizing this seminar and for inviting me, in my capacity as OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Special Representative on Arctic Issues, to address and discuss with you the current challenges and priorities of the High North. It is a true honour to be here and I look forward to a fruitful panel debate.

A new ocean is opening up due to global climate change and, while the Arctic has been amongst the most peaceful regions in the world, it is still not immune to future tensions. Therefore, I wish to welcome the fact that more and more organizations – be it international governmental organizations, civil society or academia fora – are increasing their focus on the Arctic, acknowledging its key geostrategic importance and, most important of all, its relevance for our countries, our lives and our relations.

There is this saying that *what happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic*. This cannot be more true and I will come back to it later.

In this panel we (heard) (are going to hear) the position of two very important global actors such as the United States of America and the European Union. I will instead try to offer you a wider perspective, as I represent an organization with 57 members, including all eight Arctic countries, that has at the core of its mission the facilitation of dialogue and international co-operation on matters of security. The added value of the OSCE is its comprehensive approach to security, which ranges from “hard” military security to the so called “human” security, i.e. the protection of human rights and of the environment. And it is exactly with this human security approach that I wish to address the current geostrategic importance of the Arctic. To do this, let me shortly explain how the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly got a Special Representative on the Arctic.

In May last year, the Norwegian parliament – the Storting – invited the leadership of the OSCE PA to visit the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. The aim was to provide first-hand knowledge of the effects of climate change in the Arctic. As a follow up to this visit and acknowledging the importance and urgency of the issues at stake in the region, as well as their linkage with our collective security, PA President George Tsereteli appointed me as his Special Representative, thereby giving to the whole organization an increased focus in the area.

I wish now to touch upon three main points:

1. What are the priorities in the Arctic
2. What my role as Special representative is to address them
3. How you all can contribute

The challenges in the High North are complex and multifaceted, but there is one clear issue that needs to be stressed: **the factor that is increasing the geostrategic importance of the Arctic is climate change**. The Arctic is the world's most affected region by climate change, and, in the words of researchers, it shows in advance what will happen to the rest of the planet. Again, as I said, *what happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic*, this must be our *mantra* today in this panel.

Climate change is having effects on a wide range of issues:

- **On the natural environment:** think about the ice melting and its effects on flora and fauna, the wildfires, landslides and the rise of the sea level. For instance, at Svalbard, we are now experiencing the tenth year in a row of above-average temperatures. Moreover, a warmer Arctic means not only a rapid melting of ice but it also weakens the surface reflectivity, absorbing more heat and exponentially amplifying the warming. This has permanent effects.
- **On the life of Arctic communities and their economy:** think about the need for resettlements, massive changes in communications, and the thawing permafrost causing disruption to infrastructures, as well as changing agriculture, hunting, herding, fishing and farming patterns. Moreover, the thawing permafrost also causes more greenhouse gases release. Also human health is in high danger.
- **On the global economy:** also business patterns are changing. For instance, the melting sea ice is opening new trade routes that will create strong international competition. You all know that China, a non-Arctic country, has put the Arctic as a key priority area for the next decade. This is a clear example.

- And of course, also **on military security**, because with changing economic dynamics we all know that military interests can change and develop, and tensions can arise. I will not focus on this aspect now. Should tensions arise, the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre has a unique *early warning* toolbox.

It is climate change – the *root cause* - that needs to be addressed, not its effects alone. The Arctic needs to be an area of co-operation between countries, and this is my key priority. This is why I insist on focusing on the environmental dimension. Climate change is a threat multiplier intensifying already existing threats. States need to understand the devastating potential this can have towards our planet. We are now in the middle of a panic wave for the *coronavirus*, but do we fully realize the risk factor of climate change? The COP25 negotiations in Madrid as well as the implementation phase of the COP21 Paris Agreement have so far been a failure. There is still not enough political will, and the little efforts are oriented towards adaptation rather than towards mitigation, while the key lays in an immediate reduction of CO2 emissions.

The Arctic is primarily not warming for activities conducted in the Arctic, but because of global greenhouse emissions. And, being it the “refrigerator” of the world, warming the Arctic will in turn speed up the warming of the rest of the planet.

Colleagues,

You also invited me here to learn about what the OSCE PA and I are doing.

In this first phase of my mandate, I am striving to establish contacts and build partnerships with relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, and to exploring how parliamentarians can add value to broader efforts in the Arctic. My

role is not permanent, and my resources are limited. However, **as parliamentarians, I would claim that we have three great assets:**

1. we can **propose legislation.**
2. we can **hold our governments to account** for their actions and for the implementation of laws and international commitments.
3. we are the **direct link between our people and institutions.**

As a Special Representative of an international parliamentary assembly, my role is to **ensure that these three assets are coordinated and amplified on a wider stage.** As mentioned, the OSCE PA is a platform for no less than 57 States. As such, it also provides a unique opportunity to raise awareness on Arctic challenges and opportunities to non-Arctic countries. We need an inclusive debate, possibly leading to a legislative push factor in our own countries, on the environmental mutations we are witnessing.

The OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly have worked on these issues before, but of course have no specific expertise on the Arctic. This is why it is key for us to join forces and leverage on our comparative advantages based on our core values. In the case of the OSCE PA, the advantage is our outreach. That's why I have been engaging inter alia with the Council of Europe, the Arctic Council and the Nordic Council, to offer them the OSCE platform. Moreover, I have also recently met with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to join our efforts on the protection of Arctic indigenous communities.

In more concrete terms, I am working on a **parliamentary resolution with specific and concrete policy recommendations**, addressed to both national parliaments and the organization as a whole, to be proposed for adoption at our Annual Session which

will take place in July in Vancouver. The Annual Session brings together more than 300 parliamentarians and has a total of almost 1000 participants including staff, state officials, and the media. Moreover, in that framework, we also plan to organize a **side event on the Arctic**, inviting relevant stakeholders and further raising awareness on the situation and on ways parliamentarians could give a contribution.

In general, there are two additional concepts I am trying to integrate in all of my efforts. The first is **the rejection of hopelessness**: too often we face rhetoric, aimed at attacking politicians for deliberately wanting to destroy the environment. What we need is to promote the idea of working together: only with renewed hope will we manage to achieve results. We need the political sphere to assume its responsibilities towards future generations. The teenager star Greta Thunberg is a symbol of how easily we can raise awareness, but now this battle must be taken on institutional shoulders and the call of our youth must turn out into concerted and responsible institutional action. The era of slogans must come to an end. The second concept is **the sense of urgency**, which should be a factor that fosters and triggers co-operation and joint efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What can you all do when you go back home? First of all mainstream these two concepts into the public debate. Second, believe in it: rejection of hopelessness and sense of urgency.

I want to highlight one example: the outcome of the recent bilateral meeting between the Foreign Ministers of Iceland (current chair of the Arctic Council) and of the Russian Federation (incoming chair), where they agreed that, despite divergences in many fields (and we know they are very strong), the Arctic is an area

of common efforts and unity. This is the kind of commitment we should aim at. The Arctic can be an area of confidence building.

I am glad Ambassador Coninx is here, because I would also like to welcome the recent conclusions on Arctic policy of the EU Council, and in particular its acknowledgment *that many of the issues affecting the region are of a global nature and are more effectively addressed through regional or multilateral co-operation*. This is yet another example of how challenges relating to the High North are increasingly coming under the world's microscope, and of how we should make use of this momentum for concerted and determined action.

I mentioned we need climate change related legislation both at the international and national levels: to achieve it, there should also be a higher "interplay" between scientists and politicians. I would like to emphasize the importance of creating the so-called public-private-partnerships (PPPs), where all relevant stakeholders can give their contribution. Especially in an overarching field like climate change, we need inclusive approaches.

Dear Colleagues,

Arctic climate change matters also in global security perspectives. In conclusion, let me say one more thing. Perhaps some of you today were expecting me to talk about military security in the Arctic and about strategic confrontation of great powers in the High North, and will thus be disappointed, as this does not fall into my priorities or my mandate. But please trust me on this: security and environment are intrinsically linked and addressing the climate crisis is priority number one for our

security. The Arctic can be geostrategically important also in giving a sign that co-operation is possible and we can truly work together.

Thank you!