

**Report by Vice-President Margareta Cederfelt,
Acting Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, to the Standing Committee**
(20th OSCE PA Winter Meeting, Vienna, 24 February 2021)

Dear President
Dear Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to present to you a snapshot of current migration trends in our region and the initiatives of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration since I last reported to you on occasion of the 2020 Winter Meeting.

Five years ago you voted unanimously to establish this special Committee, primarily in response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Ever since, it has actively pursued its mandate to promote discussion within the Assembly on issues related to migration and to contribute to the parliamentary exchanges of best practice with the aim to enhance the OSCE's work in the field of migration as well as to improve prospects for migrants in OSCE countries.

I. Snapshot of Migration Trends in 2020

This past year has been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic which exacerbated the precarious conditions in which refugees and migrants live in many of our countries. While some OSCE states were quick to adopt measures to soften the impact of the pandemic on asylum seekers, **quarantine measures imposed on overcrowded migrant camps**, combined with frustration over miserable conditions, acted as a spark, precipitating humanitarian crises in Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The vulnerability of over **11 million** internally and externally displaced **Syrians** has been significantly aggravated by the pandemic and the economic downturn. Strict measures implemented by the Turkish government prevented a humanitarian disaster amongst its population of the 4 million externally displaced persons, including 3.6 million Syrians, but the COVID-19 pandemic nevertheless hit refugee communities in larger cities such as Istanbul, Izmir and Gaziantep particularly hard.

Developments in Spain's **Canary Islands** are also worth monitoring as it faced 23,000 irregular arrivals, a tenfold increase compared to 2019. In December, authorities finally dismantled a controversial emergency camp on a pier on the island of Gran Canaria which had become known as "the dock of shame". Migrants have been transferred to vacant hotels but this has created tensions with locals who fear they will scare tourists away.

Cyprus continues to hold the record for the highest number of asylum-seekers per capita in the EU and tensions are high in the overcrowded Pournara reception camp.

We have also unfortunately witnessed an increase in **misinformation and hate speech** with potentially devastating consequences for migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups. **Anti-migrant rhetoric** and the **scapegoating of migrants** for the spread of the Coronavirus should not be tolerated. Neither should **non-governmental organizations** working with refugees and migrants be penalised for the vital services they provide.

As countries are rolling out their **vaccination programs**, undocumented persons are being left out with some notable exceptions in France, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Travel bans and other containment measures further reduced already limited safe and legal pathways. Combined with an **economic downturn** which disproportionately impacts migrant communities, the pandemic has provided fertile ground for **smuggling and cross-border trafficking networks**. It is especially concerning that it has been used as a pretext to **suspend refugee resettlement programs**. Despite an estimated 1.44 million refugees in urgent need of resettlement globally, fewer than 23,000 were resettled through UNHCR last year compared to 64,000 in 2019.

II. Implemented Activities

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic which led to the cancellation of most in-person activities, the Committee managed to hold no fewer than eight online meetings and focused discussions with members of the Committee and other parliamentarians, national authorities, representatives of the OSCE and OSCE Missions, the European Commission, international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Our discussions explored the multifaceted impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on refugee and migrant communities and on two humanitarian crises in particular in **Lesbos** and in northwestern **Bosnia and Herzegovina**.

1. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on refugee and migrant populations

Our first virtual meeting at the beginning of May focused on the **impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on refugee and migrant populations** and featured remarks by former PA Vice-President and Migration Committee Vice-Chair Isabel Santos who continues to be actively engaged in migration issues within the European Parliament.

We followed up on this topic with a **parliamentary web dialogue** at the end of May focusing on “**Protecting refugees and migrants during the pandemic: Camps and closed centres under lockdown**”. This was an opportunity to invite another OSCE friend, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatovic, as well as the Head of the International Organization for Migration in Greece. The highlights of this webinar were shared with members. In addition, the specific recommendations which emanated from the discussions were included in the report “OSCE PA vs. Covid-19” issued last July on behalf of the OSCE PA President.

2. Situation on Lesbos

Due to the great concern for the situation in **Lesbos** in the wake of the fire which destroyed the Moria Reception and Identification Centre, we focused on the humanitarian situation there during our second online meeting in September, and engaged in comprehensive discussions on 27 October with the Greek Minister for Migration and Asylum as well as non-governmental organizations.

I would like to thank Committee Vice-Chair Alf Dubs (United Kingdom) for facilitating this meeting and commend him for his tireless efforts to promote the relocation of unaccompanied minors from Greece and elsewhere.

While it is encouraging to hear that Lesbos and the other Aegean islands have been partially decongested, we continue to be concerned by the poor living conditions of asylum seekers, including children and other vulnerable persons, living in tent camps. Construction has begun on permanent reception facilities with EU assistance, and we hope to find out more about them and in particular whether they will be closed centres.

3. Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Committee has also been closely monitoring developments in Una-Sana canton in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, which has been experiencing increased migratory pressure as migrants have sought alternative routes to the EU via its border with Croatia.

On 17 December 2020, we convened an online roundtable on the migratory situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina with representatives of the OSCE Mission, UNHCR and dedicated NGOs. During this meeting, the Committee was made aware of an impending humanitarian crisis in connection with the imminent closure of the Lipa camp.

The interlocutors also informed the Committee about their efforts to document violent pushbacks of migrants by Croatian and other border authorities throughout South Eastern Europe, and shared their recommendations for enhancing independent human rights monitoring mechanisms at the EU's external borders.

We followed up with representatives of the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina who underlined the complexities of their country's system of governance and their inability to override the decisions of local authorities.

In a statement issued on 18 December on the occasion of **International Migrants' Day** we stressed the need for urgent action to prevent a humanitarian crisis. Sadly, one week later, frustrated by the continued deadlock over their fate, migrants set fire to the Lipa camp, leaving an additional 1,000 persons without shelter.

Political leaders at all levels need to overcome their differences to find a joint, humane and durable solution to the humanitarian crisis in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina, as we emphasized in a joint press release on 6 January with the Third Committee.

I would like to commend Committee Vice-Chair Gudrun Kugler (Austria) for keeping the humanitarian situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina high on the agenda and for helping secure €1 million in humanitarian assistance from her government.

We are also grateful to the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina for its regular updates and for indicating that it will support a field visit of the Committee.

4. EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

The Committee has also kept abreast of developments in EU policy. In July, in anticipation of the long-awaited **EU Pact on Migration and Asylum**, we held an online dialogue with the European Commission's Director-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG-HOME), European Commission Ms. Monique Pariat. Committee members also met virtually with Ms. Paraskevi Michou, Director-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG-ECHO), to discuss measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 amongst refugees and migrants as well as humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict in **Syria**.

5. Combating human trafficking along migration routes

The Committee has expressed interest in learning more about **combating human trafficking along migration routes** and exploring synergies between the work of the OSCE and the OSCE PA. I therefore invited the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings to attend our meeting last week to present his work in this field with a special focus on children. This meeting was a further step towards mainstreaming policies in the area of combating trafficking in human beings, building on the work of the OSCE PA's Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues Chris Smith.

6. Partnerships

We also reinforced partnership with the equivalent of the Migration Committee at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), thanks to Committee Vice-Chair Alf Dubs, through a series of **web-conferences organized by the UK House of Lords** focusing on child refugees and other vulnerable refugees.

I encourage you all to take part in the upcoming web-conference on 5 March on "**Humanitarian emergencies, voluntary resettlement of refugees and assisted voluntary returns of migrants**" during which **Dr. Hedy Fry** will share the lessons learned from Canada's programmes for the resettlement of refugees. This event will also feature keynote remarks by Isabel Santos.

III. Next Steps

At our online meeting on 19 February, the Committee agreed to continue to follow developments in **Lesbos** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and to carry out field visits as soon as conditions permit.

The Committee wishes to pursue co-operation with the OSCE in the field of **combating human trafficking along migration routes**. One such form which this co-operation can

take is through a joint webinar or side-event focusing on the impact of the pandemic on the trafficking of migrant children and other vulnerable persons. Members also expressed interest in the innovative simulation-based training on identifying victims of trafficking along migration routes which the OSCE's Special Representative/Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings has developed. A joint field visit, building on the success of the 2016 joint visit to Lampedusa, could also be envisaged.

We will also maintain regular contacts with the European Commission as it implements the Migration and Asylum Pact. We will continue to emphasize the need to reinforce mechanisms for **independent human rights monitoring, especially at the EU's external borders**. This could be the topic of a web dialogue addressing the "pushbacks" and other human rights violations which have been occurring throughout South Eastern Europe, involving both EU and non-EU member states.

I look forward to reporting to you at the Bucharest Annual Session where we plan to present our recommendations in the form of a resolution.

Thank you for your attention.

ANNEX I

Mandate of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

The Ad Hoc Committee on Migration was established following the unanimous decision of the OSCE PA Standing Committee on 25 February 2016 in Vienna. Its mandate is defined as follows:

- Serve as a focal point for the OSCE PA's work in the field of migration in all three dimensions of the OSCE: political and security questions; economic issues; and human rights and humanitarian questions; and report back to the President and the Standing Committee;
- Develop policy recommendations aimed at enhancing OSCE work in the field of migration and at improving the treatment of, and prospects for, migrants in OSCE countries;
- Promote discussion within the Assembly on issues related to migration, and promote parliamentary exchanges of best practice in these fields;
- Work closely with the OSCE Secretariat and Institutions as well as with relevant outside actors on issues related to migration to promote the understanding among the members of the Assembly of the importance of the work done in this field.

Membership of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration (as of 22 February 2021)

1. **Vice-President Margareta Cederfelt (Sweden), Acting Chair**
2. Lord Alfred Dubs (United Kingdom), **Vice-Chair**
3. Ms. Farah Karimi (The Netherlands), **Vice-Chair**
4. Mr. Laurynas Kasciunas (Lithuania), **Vice-Chair**
5. Dr. Gudrun Kugler (Austria), **Vice-Chair**
6. Mr. Jan Bauer (Czech Republic)
7. Ms. Valérie Boyer (France)
8. Dr. Daniela De Ridder (Germany)
9. Mr. Gianluca Ferrara (Italy)
10. Dr. Hedy Fry (Canada)
11. Ms. Elona Hoxha Gjebrea (Albania)
12. Ms. Sheila Jackson Lee (United States of America)
13. Mr. Mehmet Sait Kirazoglu (Turkey)
14. Mr. Kyriakos Kyriakou-Hadjjiyianni (Cyprus)
15. Mr. Massimo Mallegni (Italy)
16. Ms. Gwen Moore (United States)
17. Mr. Georgios Varemenos (Greece)

ANNEX II

Implemented Activities (February 2020-February 2021)

| DATES | VENUE | DESCRIPTION |
|----------------|---------------------|--|
| 2020 | | |
| 20-21 February | AUSTRIA (Vienna) | OSCE PA Winter Meeting - Meeting of the Committee (21 February, 12:00-13:00) - Report by Acting Chair Cederfelt to the Standing Committee (20 February 2020) |
| 27 April | online | - Report by Acting Chair Cederfelt to the virtual meeting of the Bureau |
| 6 May | online | - First virtual meeting of the Committee, including remarks by former OSCE PA Vice-President Isabel Santos (MEP) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant and refugee populations |
| 26 May | online | - Parliamentary Web Dialogue on “Protecting refugees and migrants during the pandemic: Camps and closed centres under lockdown” including remarks by VP/Acting Chair Margareta Cederfelt; Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatovic; Gianluca Rocco, Chief of Mission and Regional Response Coordinator, IOM Office in Greece, Lord Alf Dubs, Member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration |
| 19 June | Online | - Contribution to the UK House of Lords web-conference (PACE/OSCE PA) on “Protecting unaccompanied child refugees: enabling relocations and preventing human trafficking” co-chaired by Lord Dubs and with remarks by President George Tsereteli and Vice-President Margareta Cederfelt. |
| 3 July | Online | - Online dialogue with Ms. Monique Pariat, Director-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG-HOME), European Commission. |
| 6 July | Online | - Online dialogue with Ms. Paraskevi Michou, Director-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG-ECHO), European Commission. |
| 23 September | Online | - Second Virtual Meeting of the Committee , including a special focus on the situation on LESBOS (overview provided by Mr. Evangelos Syrigos, Member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration and the OSCE PA Hellenic delegation) |

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|-------------|--------|--|
| 1 October | Online | - Online meeting between Acting Chair Cederfelt and OSCE Special Representative/Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Valiant Richey on shared priorities and future co-operation. |
| 27 October | Online | - Focussed discussion on the situation on Lesbos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meeting with Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum Notis Mitarachi; ○ Roundtable with NGOs present on the ground (Lesvos Solidarity, Doctors Without Borders, Safe Passage). |
| 4 December | Online | - Contribution to the UK House of Lords web-conference on “Voluntary relocation of child refugees and other vulnerable refugees: achievements and future challenges” (PACE/OSCE PA) co-chaired by Lord Dubs and with remarks by Vice-President Margareta Cederfelt and Kyriakos Hadjiyianni. |
| 17 December | Online | - Online discussion on the Migratory Situation in BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Roundtable with OSCE Mission to BiH, UNHCR in BiH, Danish Refugee Council, “SOS Balkanroute”, Are You Syrious, Border Violence Monitoring Network. ○ Meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| 2021 | | |
| 19 February | Online | - Third virtual Meeting of the Committee with a special focus on Combating Human Trafficking along Migration Routes, with a focus on children; with the objective to explore synergies between the work of the OSCE PA & OSCE. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Presentation by OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Valiant Richey |

ANNEX III

Draft Plan of Upcoming Activities (2021)

| DATES | VENUE | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------------|------------------------|--|
| 24 February | Online | - Report by Acting Chair Cederfelt to the Standing Committee, 20 th OSCE PA Winter Meeting |
| 5 March | | - Contribution to the UK House of Lords web-conference on “Humanitarian emergencies, voluntary resettlement of refugees and assisted voluntary returns of migrants” (OSCE PA / PACE) co-chaired by Lord Dubs and with a presentation by Dr. Hedy Fry and remarks by Vice-President Margareta Cederfelt. |
| 15 March | Online | - Online event of the Committee (topic tbc) |
| 14 April | Online | - Meeting of the Committee |
| 19 April | Copenhagen | - Report by Acting Chair Cederfelt to the meeting of the Bureau |
| May/June | TBD | - Field mission or Parliamentary Web Dialogue (tbc) |
| 18 June | TBD | - Event on the occasion of World Refugee Day (Sunday, 20 June)(tbc) |
| 6-10 July 2021 | ROMANIA (Bucharest) | OSCE PA Annual Session - Meeting of the Committee (exact date tbc) - Report of the Chair to the Standing Committee (6 July) (tbc) - Debate on Supplementary Item (tbc) |
| September/October | TBD | - Field mission (tbc) |
| 27-29 October | IRELAND (Dublin) | - OSCE PA Autumn Meeting o Report of the Chair to the Standing Committee (tbc) |
| November | TBD | - Field mission (tbc) |
| 17 December | TBD | - Event on the occasion of International Migrants Day (Saturday, 18 December)(tbc) |