

## **REPORT**

### **FOR THE GENERAL COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL AFFAIRS AND SECURITY**

#### ***Reinforcing Multilateralism in Times of Global Crisis: A Parliamentary Call for Future Action***

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## **1. Introduction**

Last year, we all marked the 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe – the two documents that form the foundation for our common security. Many commemorative events were organized in Vienna and in our respective capitals, and many speeches with our recommitment to the basic OSCE principles were made.

However, celebrations and nice speeches aside, the reality on the ground was not, and is not, so shiny. At the very same time, in some participating States, these fundamental OSCE principles continued to be violated.

From military aggression against neighboring countries, occupation and illegal annexation of their territories to blatant violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, from non-implementation of previously undertaken commitments to unprecedented internal repression against political opposition, peaceful protesters, and independent media. This is what we witness, regretfully, every day.

It is high time to meet our words with actions. We, parliamentarians, are especially responsible for this, as we must seek to hold our governments accountable for their policies and decisions.

Due to the prevailing health and safety restrictions, this year's Annual Session unfortunately will have to take place remotely. Yet this is only one of the many events that has had to be adjusted or cancelled in the wake of the virus. Although COVID-19 has dramatically disrupted everyone's daily lives, the suspension of essential diplomatic channels of communication has especially impeded open exchanges in international fora and detrimentally affected the regional security order.

Accordingly, this report will touch upon several critical topics. First, it will examine the current crisis of multilateralism. Next, the report will give an overview of relevant developments concerning protracted conflicts in the OSCE area, as well as efforts to obtain a lasting settlement. Finally, it will provide a short analysis of the requirement of further regulation in the cybersecurity sphere and COVID-19's effect on transnational threats.

## **2. Crisis of Multilateralism**

Given the pandemic's incitement of more rampant nationalism, it was a fitting decision of our leadership to make the theme of this year's Annual Session that of "Reinforcing Multilateralism in Times of Global Crisis: A Parliamentary Call for Future Action." As COVID-19 spread from one country to the next, so did the symptoms of isolationism and intransigence.

This feverish atmosphere has been marked by mounting tensions between participating States and outbreaks of violence. While the aggravation of long-standing rivalries has meant that

protracted conflicts carry on unresolved, the arising of new hostilities has led to fighting elsewhere.

The decline of military transparency is intractably linked to the resurgence of these animosities. It is worrying that the absence of consensus among participating States on the preservation and refinement of the OSCE's established security structures has left texts like the Vienna Document outdated and inadequate.

Simultaneously, the declaration of sweeping states of emergency and attendant limitations on fundamental freedoms have diminished parliamentary control, enabled the repression of political opponents and frustrated the activity of civil society. We have witnessed major political upheavals across the OSCE area over the past few months, with the most concerning ones in the Russian Federation and in Belarus.

This breach of OSCE principles is unacceptable and has led many to lose faith in domestic democratic institutions and international organizations like the OSCE. To combat the erosion of mutual trust and the dereliction of the regional security architecture, our respective governments must urgently recommit to the core obligations they have previously undertaken. Indeed, the Chairperson-in-Office, Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde, has reminded participating States of the need to more consciously reflect on the very origins of the OSCE and recognize their shared responsibility in establishing peace and stability going forward.<sup>1</sup>

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has contributed to this endeavour by launching the "OSCE Call for Action: Reaffirming a Common Purpose" initiative at the 27<sup>th</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council. Through the resultant discussions, it has become even more clear that we, as parliamentarians, can play an important part by setting national agendas, reviewing the work of our governments and raising public awareness. The notion of comprehensive security can only ever be attained once executive and legislative structures join together in defending basic OSCE principles and commitments.

### **3. Protracted Conflicts in the OSCE Area**

When it comes to conflict settlement, the engagement of parliamentarians is indispensable. They can prevent the escalation of aggression due to their distinctive ability to connect and mediate between constituents. If such attempts were to fail however, parliamentarians, representing all segments of society, can not only ratify ceasefire agreements but also contribute to their longevity by ensuring their inclusivity.

On an international level, the 323 members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly can exert significant pressure on governments to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other participating States. Collectively, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has adopted many resolutions on protracted conflicts within the OSCE area over the course of the past decade.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Government Offices of Sweden, Presentation by Chairperson-in-Office and Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde on Sweden's Chairpersonship programme and priorities for the OSCE to its Permanent Council (14 January 2021) available [here](#) Compare the Programme of the 2021 Swedish OSCE Chairmanship (21 January 2021) available [here](#)

<sup>2</sup> Resolution on Moldova (2011), Resolution on Moldova (2012), Resolution on the Situation in Georgia (2012), Resolution on the Transnistrian Settlement Process (2013), Resolution on Clear, Gross and Uncorrected Violations of Helsinki Principles by the Russian Federation (2014), Resolution on the Continuation of Clear, Gross and Uncorrected Violations of OSCE Commitments and International Norms by the Russian Federation (2015), Resolution on Adherence to the Helsinki Principles in Inter-State Relations Across the OSCE Area (2015),

More recently, the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security has been proactive in fostering dialogue on pressing matters, like “COVID-19’s Impact on Conflicts in the OSCE region”, at which members noted the precarious conditions to which individuals were subjected and warned against diverting resources away from conflict resolution.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, at the end of last year, OSCE PA President George Tsereteli appointed Ditmir Bushati as Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Daniela De Ridder as Special Representative for Eastern Europe, and Reinhold Lopatka as Special Representative for Central Asia. In coordination with the OSCE Chairmanship and executive structures, they are mandated to promote inter-parliamentary reconciliation and rehabilitation in the designated regions.

Regretfully, across the OSCE area, force continues to be employed as a method to alter established territorial borders in blatant disregard of other states’ sovereign rights and international law. We therefore strongly support the increased focus of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde, on peaceful resolution of all these protracted conflicts.

### **3.1. Russia-Ukraine Conflict**

Seven years have passed since the Russian Federation’s illegal annexation of Crimea and the start of Russia’s war against Ukraine, which shows no signs of abating. Only this spring, unusual Russian military activity in the vicinity of Ukraine and in the illegally annexed Crimea drew international attention. This goes against Russia’s OSCE commitments, as well as several OSCE Parliamentary Assembly exhortations for the Russian Federation to withdraw all its troops from within Ukraine’s internationally recognized borders.<sup>4</sup>

We continue to condemn this in strongest possible terms, and we will insist our governments maintain their respective sanctions against Russia until the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders is fully restored.

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission’s impartial reporting is crucial to keep us apprised of happenings on the ground. Frequent accounts of the obstruction of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission’s movement and destruction of its surveillance property, in the absolute majority of cases by Russia-backed armed formations, are thus very troubling.

Nevertheless, the members of the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security welcome the extension of its mandate for another year and look forward to future interactions.<sup>5</sup>

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Resolution on the Conflict in Georgia (2016), Resolution on the Republic of Moldova (2016), Resolution on Violations of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol (2016), Resolution on Restoration of the Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Ukraine (2017), Resolution on Ten Years After the August 2008 War in Georgia (2018), ), Resolution on Ongoing Violations of the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in the autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol (2018), Resolution on the Militarization by the Russian Federation of the Temporarily Occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov (2019), Resolution on the Security and Human Rights Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, Georgia (2019)

<sup>3</sup> Discussed in OSCE, OSCE PA v COVID-19: Reflections, policy contributions and recommendations presented by OSCE PA President George Tsereteli (13 July 2021) available [here](#)

<sup>4</sup> Most recently OSCE PA, Resolution on the Militarization by the Russian Federation of the Temporarily Occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov (2019)

<sup>5</sup> OSCE, Extension of the Mandate of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (31 March 2021) PC/DEC1401

At the same time, we are deeply concerned that the mandate of the OSCE Border monitoring mission at the Russian border check points in Gukovo and Donetsk (BOM), due to the position of Russia, has been prolonged only for 2 months (until July 31, 2021). We call on Russia to join consensus to allow BOM operation after July 31, 2021, and to adopt longer mandates. Russia-Ukraine border monitoring and verification is an integral part of peaceful and political resolution of this conflict.

Recently, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission has warned of an increasingly volatile environment in eastern Ukraine. Although the parties entered into a new ceasefire on 22 July 2020, which relaxed the situation along the line of contact, the numbers of violations now stand at around twice what they were at the end of 2020.<sup>6</sup> The prolonged contact line closures implemented under the pretext of COVID-19, the presence of mines, the deployment of heavy weapons, and intermittent skirmishes near essential civilian infrastructure have seriously added to the burden of the local population. The work of the Trilateral Contact Group is lately paralyzed, due to the unconstructive position of Russia.

Let me use this opportunity to once again reiterate our collective call on Russia to stop its aggression against neighbouring Ukraine and to find the political will to resolve this conflict peacefully and to take the necessary actions. Russia is a party to this conflict, not a mediator. It has signed the Minsk Agreements and the Normandy Summit decisions, and therefore shares responsibility in implementing them.

### **3.2. Nagorno-Karabakh**

This last year also saw six weeks of intense combat in Nagorno-Karabakh, which ended on 9 November 2020 when a ceasefire finally took effect. In this period, upwards of 5,000 Azerbaijani and Armenian servicemen were killed and hundreds more are missing to this day.<sup>7</sup>

Good progress has been made since the cessation of hostilities, in particular with regard to the repatriation of remains of the deceased and the return of internally displaced people.<sup>8</sup> However, taking note of the reported detention of six Armenian soldiers on 27 May 2021, the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group “called for the release of all prisoners of war on an all for all basis” and “underscored the obligation to treat (such individuals) in accordance with international humanitarian law.”<sup>9</sup> I echo these calls and encourage Azerbaijan and Armenia to meet their commitments under the European Convention of Human Rights in letter and spirit. Both parties must without delay see to the welfare of any individuals within their custody, safeguard the historical and religious heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh, and allow access of humanitarian organizations to the region.

I also wish to underline that border delimitation and demarcation must be implemented through negotiations and exclusively peaceful means, without the involvement of the military. In this context, I urge Azerbaijan and Armenia to withdraw their forces to their previous positions before 12 May 2021 and to prevent other actions that could be seen as provocations.

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<sup>6</sup> OSCE, Report of the SMM Chief Monitor to the Permanent Council (16 April 2021) PCFR/9/21

<sup>7</sup> According to BBC, “Nagorno-Karabakh conflict killed 5,000 soldiers” (3 December 2020) available [here](#). The death toll has been revised several times since then.

<sup>8</sup> OSCE, Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (5 May 2021) available [here](#)

<sup>9</sup> OSCE, Statement by Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (28 May 2021) available [here](#)

Given the frequent civilian casualties caused by unexploded ordnance, I moreover wish to praise the recent decision by Armenia to share landmine maps in the Aghdam region in exchange for the delivery of 15 detainees. This is paramount, first and foremost, for the safety of the local population. I wish to express our gratitude to Georgia, the United States, and the European Union for their successful mediation on this particular exchange, and to encourage both Azerbaijan and Armenia to continue working in the same constructive vein.

The trilateral statement of 9 November 2020 ended the active phase of hostilities, but not the conflict itself. Any lasting political solution to it is only possible with through the constructive engagement of both parties and the full participation of the OSCE Minsk Group. I wish to extend our full support to the OSCE Minsk Group and its Co-Chairs.

### **3.3. Conflict in Georgia**

At the 2019 Annual Session in Luxembourg, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly appealed to “the Russian Federation as the power exercising effective control in Georgia’s occupied territories, to immediately cease its illegal actions and human rights violations, including deprivation of life, abductions, detentions, torture, and ill treatment, harassment, politically motivated prosecutions ... and ethnic discrimination against people residing [there].”<sup>10</sup>

Instead, we have witnessed a fortification of internal boundary lines. The impossibility to go from non-governmentally controlled areas to those under the jurisdiction of the central authority has worsened the suffering of individuals cut off from the rest of the country and forced individuals to take ever more dangerous pathways to reach their destination.

Therefore, it is timely that after a year-long interruption, the Geneva International Discussions resumed in December 2020. Within this framework, representatives addressed security, human rights, and health related matters, but were regrettably unable to agree on other key issues.<sup>11</sup>

A seminal verdict was published by the European Court of Human Rights in January 2021,<sup>12</sup> which underlines Russia’s responsibility for the gross human rights violations during and after its war with Georgia. It also legally confirms that Georgia’s territories are under Russia’s occupation. We call on Russia to implement this ECHR decision without further delay and in good faith. I also repeat our long-standing call for Russia to implement its commitments under the EU-mediated ceasefire agreement of August 2008.

### **3.4. Transdniestria**

Likewise, the partition of Moldova persists. Whereas the situation in the field has been rather stable, further negotiations are plainly needed to undo some of the recent quarantine regime’s most controversial ramifications and help overcome divisions between the left and the right banks of the Dniestr. At the 27<sup>th</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council, dignitaries again expressed their

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<sup>10</sup> OSCE PA, Resolution on the security and human rights situation in Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia (2019).

<sup>11</sup> OSCE, Press Communiqué of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions (11 December 2021) available [here](#). The first in person meeting took place at the Palace des Nations on 25 and 26 March 2021.

<sup>12</sup> ECtHR, *Georgia v Russian Federation (II)*, Application no 38264/08 (21 January 2021)

support for existing mediation efforts,<sup>13</sup> albeit the outbreak of COVID-19 meant that no talks in the 5+2 format were held in the entirety of 2020.

The above-mentioned protracted conflicts are far from the only ones to have occurred in the OSCE area in the past year. Clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan this May would be one of the most evident examples. As such, the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security must condemn the increasing tendency by our governments to resort to violence in the settlement of disputes.

#### **4. Emerging Cyber/ICT Security Challenges**

At the same time, the digital domain is becoming more and more critical in all types of warfare.

It would be wrong to ignore the immense benefits for human advancement and connectivity facilitated by modern technologies. Yet as we, as a society, have become more reliant on the cyber/ICT sphere during the pandemic, so have our military and intelligence agencies, exposing serious vulnerabilities and the risk of devastation in case of attack. One simply has to imagine the manipulation of elections, theft of confidential government data, or the incapacitation of healthcare in order to comprehend the severity of this danger.

Alarming, the perpetrators of malicious cyber/ICT offensives have gained in diversity and sophistication, which complicates matters surrounding proper attribution.

The potential cross-border consequences of any such incident obviously necessitate harmonized international regulation. Accordingly, the publication of a final report containing numerous recommendations as the outcome of broad and consensual deliberations on pertinent norms at the UN should be celebrated as a momentous achievement.<sup>14</sup>

The OSCE does important work in adapting such guidelines to regional particularities. Indeed, the OSCE already boasts one of the most robust and sophisticated sets of confidence-building measures available, whose implementation is scrutinised by a specifically established Informal Working Group under the auspices of the Forum for Security Co-operation.<sup>15</sup> The 16 voluntary proposals aim to improve openness and predictability, promote contact between competent bodies or persons, and enhance national readiness and resilience.<sup>16</sup> Through the OSCE Communications Network, representatives have a complementary and direct method of interacting.<sup>17</sup>

By 2020, almost all participating States had adopted at least one of these confidence-building measures. But with more to be done, members of the General Committee on Political Affairs

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<sup>13</sup> OSCE, Ministerial Statement on the negotiations on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process in the 5+2 format (4 December 2020) MC Doc 3/20

<sup>14</sup> UNGA, Final Substantive Report of the Open-ended working group on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security (10 March 2021) A/AC.290/2021/CRP2

<sup>15</sup> OSCE, Development of Confidence Building Measures to reduce the risk of conflict stemming from the use of information and communication technology (26 April 2021) PC/DEC1039

<sup>16</sup> Contained in OSCE, Initial Set of OSCE Confidence Building Measures to Reduce the Risk of Conflict Stemming from the Use of Information and Communications Technologies (3 December 2021) PC.DEC/1106 and OSCE, Confidence Building Measures to reduce the risk of conflict stemming from the use of information and communication technology (10 March 2016) PC.DEC/1202

<sup>17</sup> OSCE, Use of the OSCE Communications Network to Support Implementation of Permanent Council Decisions No 1039, 1106 and 1202 (19 July 2017) FSC.DEC5/17

and Security must advocate for their more general operationalization. It is important for all countries within and outside the OSCE area to possess the requisite expertise and skill to maintain appropriate cyber/ICT hygiene.

However, one must not forget that cyber/ICT security is not just a new factor in the relations between participating States, but also between governments and their citizens. The endorsement of a humancentric approach to cyber/ICT security has been one of the principal objectives of the Swedish Chairpersonship, highlighting the role of the individual in this dimension.<sup>18</sup> As parliamentarians, it falls to us to guarantee the democratic oversight of the cyber/ICT sphere and that our constituents' rights therein are not encroached upon.

## **5. Impact of the Pandemic on Transnational Threats**

While COVID-19 may have brought the rest of the world to a grinding halt, it did not stop organized criminal networks from the pursuit of their illicit ambitions.

The trafficking of arms, drugs, and people represents a lucrative enterprise, whose yearly revenue is steadily growing. In some instances, as noted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, the demand for such services has risen exponentially due to the stricter controls imposed amid the pandemic. At the 27<sup>th</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council, Foreign Ministers from across the OSCE area thus reiterated “their grave concern about the negative effects of transnational organized crime” and stressed that its elimination “requires effective and democratic institutions accountable to citizens.”<sup>19</sup>

Since the outbreak of the virus, terrorist groups have turned to social media to propagate their harmful ideology and rally their followers. The heinous series of shootings mere streets away from the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna in November 2020 shows us that no country is immune to this menace. Right-wing extremists especially have exploited the internet to disseminate misleading information and perpetuate racist conspiracy theories. The economic hardship caused by the pandemic has left many susceptible to recruitment.

Hence, the fight against terrorism remains one of the priorities of the OSCE Chairmanship.<sup>20</sup> Within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism has hosted several meetings at which members examined COVID-19-induced changes in radicalization trends.<sup>21</sup> The collaboration with key partners like UNOCT or other inter-parliamentary platforms at many of these events has provided valuable opportunities to share lessons learned and best practices. Together, we must lead by example and seek the passage of model legislation on the prosecution of terrorists and assistance to victims, in compliance with international law.

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<sup>18</sup> Consider e.g. Government Offices of Sweden, Programme of the 2021 Swedish OSCE Chairmanship (21 January 2021) available [here](#). The 2021 OSCE-Wide Cyber/ICT Security Conference 2021 on Building Confidence and Trust in an Interconnected Cyberspace took place on 4 May 2021.

<sup>19</sup> OSCE, Declaration on Strengthening Co-operation in Countering Transnational Organized Crime (4 December 2020) MC.DOC/1/20

<sup>20</sup> Consider e.g. Government Offices of Sweden, Programme of the 2021 Swedish OSCE Chairmanship (21 January 2021) available [here](#). The 2021 OSCE-wide Conference on Reinforcing a Comprehensive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism and VERLT in a Changing Landscape took place on 20 and 21 April 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Most recently, the High-Level International Parliamentary Conference on Global Challenges and Threats in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Terrorism and Violent Extremism that was co-organised by the OSCE PA, IPA CIS, PAM and PACE on 15 April 2021.

## **6. Repressions Against Political Opponents, Independent Media, and Human Rights Defenders**

Besides unresolved conflicts, we also saw unprecedented repression against political opponents, independent media, human rights defenders and peaceful protesters in some OSCE participating States.

In this regard, the most vivid example is Belarus. We again express our concern at the findings of Professor Wolfgang Benedek's report, prepared in response to grave human rights violations related to the forged Presidential elections on 9 August 2020.<sup>22</sup> We call on Belarusian authorities to implement all recommendations of this report, and to comply with its OSCE commitments, and international human rights standards. The solution to this crisis is only possible through inclusive national dialogue.

In this context, we should draw attention to the most recent incident on 23 May 2021, when the civilian Ryanair aircraft FR4978 was landed forcefully by Belarusian authorities in order to detain Roman Pratasevich, a leading Belarusian blogger and one of the founders of online news platform "Nexta." We call for the immediate release of Mr. Pratasevich and his partner, Sofia Sapega, as well as all other Belarusian political prisoners, the total number of which has recently passed 400. The forced landing of a civilian plane was an unprecedented attack against civilian aviation. We look forward to receiving the conclusions of the investigation by ICAO, and we join the calls by international community to ensure the strictest possible accountability for all those responsible, so that nothing similar happens again.

We also condemn in strongest possible terms the poisoning, subsequent detention, and sentencing of Alexei Navalny, similar attacks against other leaders of opposition, as well as the brutal attacks against the peaceful protesters in many cities of Russia. We join our international partners in their call to immediately release Alexei Navalny and other political prisoners and to ensure the right of peaceful assembly, as well as the right of opinion and media freedom in Russia.

## **7. Conclusion**

What all of the above demonstrates is the need to strengthen and uphold the international system in the face of an unprecedented assault on multilateralism. The Europe we live in today is a completely different one from that envisaged in the 1990 Charter of Paris.

Millions of people must still endure the displacement or bloodshed that accompanies the protraction of conflicts. The advent of cyber/ICT warfare and proliferation of non-state actors has further redefined our modern security landscape. Perhaps most disconcerting has been the attempts by certain political factions to destroy the innermost workings of our democracies in the wake of COVID-19.

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<sup>22</sup> OSCE, "Moscow Mechanism rapporteur reports to OSCE Permanent Council on alleged human rights violations in Belarus" (5 November 2020): <https://www.osce.org/permanent-council/469575>

In times like these, when our common values are increasingly being called into question, we as parliamentarians must be bold and decisive in our response. COVID-19 will be far from the last unexpected challenge that we will have to face in the years to come. It is only if all of us defend the spirit of Helsinki that we can ever jointly and soundly weather future crises and ensure the comprehensive security of our constituents.