



The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in a new era: Honoring commitments, building trust



By President Margareta Cederfelt
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As we approach fifty years since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, the OSCE region remains confronted by grave violations of our shared values and principles. For years, declining trust has deteriorated security to the point that war has returned to Europe. In this context, what role can the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly play to restore trust and uphold our shared commitments?

For the fortieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the OSCE PA launched a series of seminars (Helsinki +40 Project) with a view to strengthening the OSCE. These discussions formed the basis for a document entitled "Our common vision for the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly: Supporting OSCE principles and facilitating parliamentary dialogue", published in the spring of 2016 by our former President, the late Ilkka Kanerva. Further thoughts on ways to improve the working methods and overall impact of the OSCE PA were presented in September 2017 by the then-Chair of the Sub-Committee on Rules of Procedures and Working Practices, Peter Lord Bowness, in his "Need for a Change" paper.

Today, we face a radically changed environment. The unexpected shock of the COVID-19 pandemic prevented our Assembly from meeting fully in person for over two years, thereby diminishing the potential of parliamentary diplomacy. At the same time, it accelerated a technological transition that offers new ways to meet and debate online. Now, the unprovoked and unjustified aggression of Ukraine by the Russian Federation threatens to destroy

decades of East-West engagement. In this context, the time has come to propose a new vision for the future of the OSCE PA. By reinforcing our existing toolbox and reforming our working practices, we will be better equipped to face the challenges threatening the OSCE region and, thus, deliver concrete results to all our citizens.

Building on our decades-long history, my proposal is articulated around three main axes:

1. The OSCE PA must remain an open and inclusive forum for principles-based dialogue.
2. The OSCE PA must vigorously defend the work of the OSCE.
3. The OSCE PA must achieve concrete results for all OSCE citizens.

This paper will form the basis of recurring discussions within the OSCE PA Bureau on ways to enhance the effectiveness of our work, which, in turn, will task the International Secretariat with recommending concrete ways to apply the priorities outlined below, including through a review and modernization of our Rules of Procedure, our working practices, and our financial provisions.

Through this process, our political leadership will have an opportunity to steer this reform process and work towards strengthening our Parliamentary Assembly to better promote security, stability, and international co-operation throughout the OSCE region.

Margareta Cederfelt, OSCE PA President



Axis 1: Safeguarding a unique forum for principles-based parliamentary dialogue

Since its creation over three decades ago, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has served as a unique forum for parliamentary delegations from the OSCE's 57 participating States and Partners for Co-operation to support the advancement of comprehensive security. Today, we find ourselves at a crossroads. To meet this historical moment, the OSCE PA must fully embrace our mission to prevent and mediate conflicts and build trust within a diverse membership, through dialogue based on respect for shared values and commitments.

Priority 1.1: Standing up for the Helsinki Principles

The OSCE PA has repeatedly stood up for the Helsinki Final Act by vigorously denouncing all violations of our shared values and principles. In order to safeguard the European security architecture and to achieve lasting peace, we cannot afford to compromise on our founding documents and our key commitments. Our collective credibility requires from us that we stand firm on these principles: dialogue in itself is futile when participants do not keep

their word. The ongoing war waged by the Russian Federation in Ukraine is the most blatant and worrying violation not only of all ground rules governing relations among OSCE participating States but, more broadly, of the very notion of a European security order established as our common vision in Helsinki almost fifty years ago. We need to assess the longer-term consequences of these violations, their implications for the OSCE and, more importantly, for the future European security order.

Priority 1.2: Supporting new spaces for debate

Thanks to the new technological tools introduced by the International Secretariat during the COVID-19 pandemic, the OSCE PA has gained the ability to organize online parliamentary discussions. Although we have now largely resumed our pre-pandemic in-person activities, this capability remains. These additional spaces should be nurtured to allow for regular thematic debates feeding parliamentary input in the work of the OSCE.

Building on our acquis and our shared principles, we should note the role of informal bodies – including our youth or women's networks or any other groups of countries and/or political parties – as additional venues for international parliamentary co-operation and as useful instruments to promote inclusive debates and decision-making.



Priority 1.3: Focusing our statutory meetings on meaningful OSCE debates

To better channel the energy of our parliamentarians, we need to prioritize our debates by focusing on core areas where the OSCE is best placed to respond. This may require us to rule out discussions on matters that are not connected to the work of the OSCE.

We also need to pursue ongoing efforts to increase the time available for meaningful

debates during our statutory meetings in order to include all perspectives and strengthen our platform for dialogue. Technology has the potential to change how we handle some of our more tedious procedures related to the adoption of documents. The International Secretariat should continue to explore ways we can integrate these new tools in an inclusive, cost-efficient, and environmentally friendly manner.





Axis 2: Raising awareness of the OSCE and its work

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is a unique body within the OSCE family. This time of crisis calls on us to play a greater unifying role. With little room for consensus in Vienna, the OSCE is in survival mode. The OSCE PA must therefore exploit all the tools at its disposal to safeguard our Organization and ensure that, tomorrow, the OSCE can still deliver.

Priority 2.1: Strengthening our ability to follow-up

As a reflection of the collective voice of OSCE PA Members, our Annual Declaration embodies the will of the Assembly. Although it already forms the basis of our advocacy, more can be done to ensure that our collective decisions have an impact. We must explore ways to better exploit and disseminate this resource to inform debates in national parliaments, to guide policymaking, and to follow-up on our recommendations with governments.

By leveraging the expertise of our Members and their positions in their national parliaments, we must also put to use our

connections to promote the work of the OSCE in our capitals, contribute to the implementation of OSCE commitments, and generate the political will necessary to achieve the changes that we seek.

In a similar manner, we must fully reap the fruits of our collective work in the key area of election observation. Our efforts should not end after Election Day. We must therefore strengthen our capacity to follow up on our recommendations in our national parliaments and in our interaction with relevant election stakeholders.

Priority 2.2: Enhancing co-operation with all OSCE bodies

While maintaining our full autonomy within the OSCE family, we must continue to reinforce our internal co-operation to place the PA in the best position to support the work of the Organization. To achieve this, we must continue to connect our political leadership, our committees, and our special representatives with relevant counterparts in the OSCE executive structures. In order to maximize our impact, additional efforts should be made to disseminate knowledge about OSCE activities amongst our Members.

As the most effective and visible ways that the OSCE delivers concrete services to our citizens, we must remain vocal supporters of OSCE Field Operations. We must carry on demanding that these missions are empowered with adequate funding and effective mandates, and we must ensure that their staff is protected and well cared for. Increased support should be expressed through more regular interaction between Field Operations and our Members.



Priority 2.3: Promoting reform

In line with our parliamentary oversight role, we should redouble efforts to develop a long-term vision for the OSCE and to safeguard its work. This is all the more important when geopolitical divisions make it more difficult to adopt decisions by consensus. The Call for Action / Helsinki +50 initiative provides an opportunity to promote these conversations between OSCE parliamentarians, experts, and representatives from the executive structures. A relation of trust should ensure that these recommendations are indeed considered by the OSCE's governmental side, in a mutually reinforcing dynamic.

Likewise, we must carry on with our efforts to undergo a thorough revision of

the OSCE PA's Rules of Procedure to best reflect current practices and increase the effectiveness of our work. A more systematic assessment of the Assembly's impact, relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency should be introduced, in accordance with the standards and practice applicable to an international organization. With the OSCE's executive structures' budget and functioning regularly at the mercy of the consensus rule, we must ensure that OSCE PA processes enable operational flexibility and stability so that we can continue to contribute to the development of the OSCE. In this regard, it is vital that the International Secretariat is provided with adequate and timely financial resources commensurate with the assigned tasks.

Axis 3: Achieving concrete results through strong partnerships

With the executive structures of the OSCE under unprecedented stress, our Parliamentary Assembly will be called to play a greater role to safeguard our Organization and its acquis. Our greatest asset has always been the willingness of our MPs to spend time and energy advocating on behalf of the OSCE. This resource is precious. We must therefore ensure that it is used wisely.

Priority 3.1: Determining longer-term political priorities

In line with the practice established during the COVID-19 pandemic, the OSCE PA Bureau should meet more frequently, through the use of online platforms, to take on a role providing political direction and determining PA priorities. A stronger role for the elected leadership of our Assembly

must also ensure continuity of action beyond one-year presidential terms. In the present circumstances, this must help us support a long-term strategy to assist Ukraine and have a greater impact in all dimensions in the OSCE. This should go hand-in-hand with greater stability for the work of our International Secretariat.

Priority 3.2: Making full use of the OSCE PA toolbox

Thanks to our political autonomy and the independent financial backing from national parliaments, our Parliamentary Assembly has developed over the years a comprehensive toolbox to better support our mission. Our Special Representatives, Special Rapporteurs, and Ad Hoc Committees supplement the activities undertaken by our three General Committees to bring a distinct parliamentary contribution to the work of

the OSCE. Streamlined appointments and complementary mandates must continue to ensure long-term impact. Enhanced co-operation with the governmental structures should provide a better opportunity for the OSCE, as a whole, to benefit from the various instruments which we put at the disposal of all participating States. These also include the robust delegations deployed to observe elections throughout the OSCE region.



Priority 3.3: Leveraging partnerships to achieve greater complementarity

In order to maximize the use of our time, we must also avoid duplication of efforts across all available multilateral formats. There is much to gain in leveraging partnerships with other international institutions whose

work is complementary to ours. This requires reinforcing adequate coordination mechanisms with our international partners, at the political and at the administrative levels.

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