



## **NON-PAPER BY THE OSCE PA INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT**

### **BRAINSTORMING OF POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is eager to leverage on its main assets to provide a tangible contribution in the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The International Secretariat has developed a set of possible ideas which, after careful review and further conceptualization, could be consolidated in an *OSCE PA COVID19 Compact* and implemented through different projects. The Compact, in addition to specific initiatives, would lay out the strategic approach of our Assembly in response to the challenges the OSCE region will face in the coming months and years.

#### **OSCE PA COVID-19 RESPONSE - WHY?**

- COVID-19 Pandemic is much more than a health emergency: it will negatively impact on the security of our societies and citizens, which are at the core of the OSCE's focus. Moreover, the foreseeable economic crisis leading, in some countries, to a strong recession, and growing social discontent will also impact political systems with a prevailing climate of uncertainty affecting domestic policy as well as international relations.
- International cooperation and coordination at all levels, including the parliamentary one, are a key asset. Global problems require global responses. However, since it is much easier, and at first sight cheaper, to enter into blame-games and mistrust, it is to be feared that the current crisis will be followed by a period of even deeper divisions and a general failure to cooperate. International Organizations are instrumental to keep multilateralism alive and effective.
- In the current context, Parliaments are being, in some countries, significantly marginalized and democracy and rule of law are seldom under the severe stress of executive measures. It is key for Parliaments to be part of the decision-making process, to provide effective oversight and to ensure that the necessary discussions do not destroy the cohesion within their societies. Moreover, their role is instrumental in allocating extraordinary emergency budgets and in ensuring that citizens' necessities are well represented, especially during hardship periods.

## **OSCE PA COVID-19 RESPONSE - HOW?**

### *Possible ideas/ food-for-thought:*

- The aim of the PA's work would be primarily to:
  - Collect and share best practices.
  - Serve as a channel for cross-border requests for help/aid
  - Provide policy recommendations.
  - Engage in public messaging in various formats
- The three PA General Committees, as well as the Ad Hoc Committees and relevant Special Representatives, to focus on how the pandemic is affecting each respective field.
- Additionally, it could be considered to create either small working groups (perhaps led by Bureau members?) or a sort of special committee to focus on different aspects of the COVID-19 crisis (health, restrictive measures, economy, human rights, migrants and refugees, elections, travel and tourism, impact on specific geographic areas, etc.). They could complement and feed the work of the General Committees, Ad Hoc Committees and Special Representatives.
- The International Secretariat could prepare and regularly update a succinct overview of the main measures taken by OSCE participating States in response to the pandemic and it could share it regularly with Members.
- The International Secretariat could launch strategic Media messaging and Social Media Campaigns:
  - Regular Articles or Op-Eds, as well as podcasts or video interviews/video addresses on different aspects of the COVID-19 crisis (emergency measures, economic crisis and labor situation, migration, human rights, etc.)
  - Regular Articles or Op-Eds on topics of traditional PA focus (conflicts, human rights, climate change, etc.) to replace activities that are temporarily suspended.
  - Secretary General Montella already launched a video challenge by calling on OSCE parliamentarians to post videos with messages of support to their constituents and people of the OSCE area. Members can post the video on their favourite social media platform with the hashtag #WeAreOSCEPA and tagging @oscepa so that we can share your video on our networks as well.
- The International Secretariat could organize Webinars with Parliamentarians and experts to focus on specific aspects of the crisis, thereby creating an opportunity to learn from other's experience and exchange views on critical issues of the national decision-making agenda. Relevant policy guidance stemming from such debates could also inform future OSCE PA decision-making.

- The International Secretariat could gather information on new procedures being implemented by Parliaments, including related to remote voting, consultation processes, social distancing options, and analyze and distribute these to Delegations in an effort to exchange best-practices. Moreover, leveraging on the expertise of its Elections Department, it could study the practices and processes for elections in a scenario requiring social distancing, including options for campaigning, remote voting, e-voting systems, as well as how modern technologies could help in these times.
- The International Secretariat could engage in some analytical efforts on the impact of COVID-19 on, for instance, international/regional alliances, including the post-Brexit EU and NATO, on China as emerging player in the OSCE region, as well as on a comparison of potential effects (economic, commercial, financial, political, etc.) with effects of other global crises in the past.

#### *Adaptation of current activities/resources to the new circumstances*

- Stand ready to lend the PA's contribution to addressing the economic hardship which will inevitably follow the health emergency and principally affect the most vulnerable segments of society (i.e. precarious, autonomous and seasonal workers, low income families, migrants, minorities, etc.). Embody, through concrete and innovative actions, the foreseeable combination of economic recess and subsequent austerity policies by Governments and Parliaments. SG Montella has already announced that there will be no increases to the 2020/2021 budget, with a zero nominal growth rate.
- The 2020 Annual Session, the modalities of which are now necessarily under consideration, could take place in a shorter format and focus, besides procedural matters, on exchanging best practices and debating policy recommendations on the COVID-19 crisis as the overarching priority. It could be the occasion for a new format of the Final Declaration.
- The International Secretariat would continue to coordinate pro-actively with other Parliamentary Assemblies and relevant international organizations, first and foremost within the OSCE family and the World Health Organization (WHO), on how to add value without duplicating efforts.