



REPORT OF OSCE PA SECRETARY GENERAL
ROBERTO MONTELLA
WINTER MEETING



21 February
2025

In the coming months, there will be many occasions in which we are called upon to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. At a time of significant instability for our region, I'm pleased that we have this opportunity to reflect on how our predecessors were able to overcome their differences and create a basis for improved understanding that lasted for several decades. **I believe that in this 50th anniversary year we should seriously reflect on the capacity of the OSCE to meet current and future challenges.**

I remain a strong believer in the OSCE and its traditional approach of inclusive dialogue and engagement. My belief in the organization comes from having seen this approach successful in action. In the Secretariat that I have been elected to lead, we will continue to support all opportunities for parliamentarians to make full use of the OSCE in the interests of our shared security in the vast region from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

PA Contributions to the OSCE and regional security

For the OSCE overall, the agreement reached to finally appoint a new Secretary General, and heads of the OSCE/ODIHR, High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative for Freedom of the Media has been a highlight of the recent months, as was agreement for Switzerland to serve as Chair-in-Office for 2026. **While significant challenges remain for the Organization in this difficult geopolitical situation, we can be pleased that solid and professional leadership is in place also on the executive side.** The OSCE PA's consistent voice of support in this process has been appreciated, and the Secretariat regularly offered support to colleagues at the working level during the interim period when no Heads of Institutions were in place. I'm pleased now to have established excellent working relationships with the new leadership. The Secretariat will continue to deepen these relationships particularly with a view to expanding opportunities for parliamentarians to increase engagement with OSCE experts.

In line with the Bucharest Declaration (paragraph 144) the International Secretariat has continued to engage in close co-operation with other offices of the OSCE, with a view to overall strengthening the Assembly's contributions to the Organization and security in the region. **The visit led by President Pia Kauma to Serbia**, soon after our last meeting in Dublin, was a clear manifestation of our efforts to collaborate even more closely

with other OSCE offices. 14 Members of Parliament from 12 countries were extensively briefed by the OSCE Mission to Serbia and its work, with the visit also serving as an opportunity for interaction with senior representatives of the Serbian government and parliament. **The Secretariat looks forward to supporting future parliamentary 'field mission visits' to other locations** where the OSCE has a presence, supporting both parliamentary dialogue and learning about the OSCE's work in the field.

More than any other field of work, **election observation occupied our Secretariat's time in the 2024 autumn months**, as we deployed Members of Parliament to observe five distinct electoral processes within one month, resulting in eight missions overall in 2024. **I sincerely thank the dedicated staff in the Secretariat, who worked diligently to support 45 observers in Moldova** (with 9 returning two weeks later for the 2nd round), **61 observers in Georgia, 54 observers in Uzbekistan, and the largest ever mission deployed by the OSCE PA, with 167 observers in the United States**. I applaud the hundreds of parliamentarians who took time out of their schedules to contribute to our efforts on these missions, and **particularly those who dedicated extra time and expertise to lead these missions: Pascal Allizard, Johan Buser, Azay Guliyev, President Pia Kauma, Sargis Khandanyan, Lucie Potuckova, and Pere Joan Pons**. Each of these missions presented unique challenges, but the strong leadership from the OSCE PA, in close co-operation with ODIHR colleagues, helped to ensure accurate and credible assessments.

Our election-related work has not stopped with the closure of our most recent observation mission, of course. This autumn presented a particularly rich set of experiences to learn from and I and my team have continued our contact with partner organizations as we seek to address noted challenges. **In November I travelled to Gdansk for a co-ordination meeting of international observer groups, and am in regular contact with partners in ODIHR, the Council of Europe PA, European Parliament and NATO PA regarding how we conduct our work**. The Secretariat has also taken good note of Members' suggestions to develop more post-election and follow-up activities related to elections. **During this Winter Meeting we are supporting a side-event being organized on media freedom and elections as part of these initiatives**. The Secretariat also made **significant preparations for the planned visit in January by President Pia Kauma and Special Representative Luis Graca to Georgia** intended to encourage robust improvements to the election

system there, before this visit was postponed.

President Pia Kauma has remained exceptionally active, working to ensure that the Assembly is well represented in major international fora, and reinforcing national efforts. By leading our contribution in the **Third Parliamentary Summit of the International Crimea Platform, in Riga, the President helped ensure that the PA continues to contribute to efforts in respect of Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity**. The President has also engaged at the highest level in OSCE capitals, including **recently meeting with Turkish governmental and parliamentary leaders**, and discussing the role of parliamentary diplomacy in addressing global conflicts with **His Holiness Pope Francis at the Vatican**. The Secretariat has been pleased to support all of these efforts which help to maintain the Assembly's role in high-level political dialogue, as well as the President's leadership of discussions among Bureau Members on the future priorities of the Assembly and how to best adapt our work.

A particular highlight of the past months has of course been our leadership's visit to Kyiv, and the Bureau meeting convened in the Ukrainian capital. I understand this may be the first time an international organization has met for its regular business in Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion three years ago. **This is a strong signal of solidarity with the Ukrainian people's collective defiance of Russia's aggression**. I applaud the Members that travelled to Kyiv to participate in this important event, but **particularly thank the Ukrainian parliament and its delegation headed by Vice-President Mykyta Poturaiev for hosting our meeting and visit**. The work of our Parliamentary Support Team has ensured that support for Ukraine remains at the top of our political agenda, and its Members' advocacy on behalf of OSCE staff illegally detained by Russia is also greatly appreciated within the OSCE community.

The commitment of so many Members of Parliament to the OSCE and Assembly work in recent months is remarkable. **More than 100 participants, including parliamentarians from 18 countries gathered in Ashgabat in November upon invitation of Turkmenistan's parliament to discuss the role of parliamentary diplomacy as a tool for building bridges**. Senior representatives have ensured that the Assembly's voice is heard on a wide range of topics, such as **Hedy Fry's vocal advocacy**

against gender-based violence; Irene Charalambides' continued anti-corruption efforts; Pere Joan Pons' important first-ever OSCE PA participation at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Baku; Kyriakos Hadjiyianni's active engagement throughout South Eastern Europe, and many more. **Our counter-terrorism committee, Chaired by Kamil Aydin, has also continued to play a leading role in international discussions** particularly related to communications and new technology tools in counter-terrorism. The Committee also concluded its Presidency of the Coordination Mechanism for Parliamentary Assemblies on Counter-Terrorism, having engaged more and more Assemblies globally, helping to create a truly global platform for co-operation and dialogue on equal footing among lawmakers on counter-terrorism. Similarly, **the migration committee Chaired by Daniela De Ridder has continued policy discussions on migration management** including through partnerships with countries of origin.

Budgetary and Secretariat administrative matters

The Secretariat continues to work effectively within our budget. This has been enabled by **our continued frugal approach to all activities, as well as the securing of new revenue sources which have helped to counteract the impact of Russia's continued withholding of 6% of our budget.** Strategic partnerships, for example in the field of countering terrorism, have also enabled cost-sharing mechanisms resulting in additional initiatives without additional costs. The fact that 56 out of 57 national delegations once again paid their financial dues in full during the last fiscal year is a strong show of commitment to our work and support to the management. In fact, **this year about a dozen countries will also voluntarily be providing additional support through extra finances, secondments, or hosting our offices.** In the Secretariat we are determined to ensure that Russia's efforts to block Assembly work through non-payment of their dues does not undermine our efforts. **However, a consistent shortfall in dues payments is not sustainable if the Assembly is to continue functioning,** particularly as Members of Parliament continue to voice **demands for additional activities** such as election observation work, ad hoc committee meetings and visits, field visits to OSCE missions, Special Representatives initiatives etc. **It is my hope that the political leadership of the Assembly will provide directional guidance on this topic** so that, together with the Treasurer,

we can prepare long-term planning for sustainable funding and work.

With the conclusion of the work by our external, independent auditors at Deloitte, **I was pleased to once again note the very positive assessment that the auditors have developed**, producing a report without qualifications or concerns. Their thorough assessment of our finances has also resulted in some useful suggestions for improved processes, which our team has already begun to implement.

I want to again thank our Treasurer Johan Buser for his initiative to secure in our financial rules and budget an expanded audit process that also covers management and performance aspects. The broad approach that the auditors took last year, the first time that a performance audit was conducted, was supplemented this year with more targeted scrutiny in specific areas that they identified, including employment contracts, employment benefits and procurement processes. As expected, the auditors concluded that the Secretariat works in accordance with sound public administration. **The external examination that the External Independent Auditors have brought to the Secretariat's work is very welcome and has resulted in some helpful suggestions** that can further improve our efficiency.

Our Secretariat team is also analyzing our internal processes and regulations to ensure that they meet the needs of the Assembly and of a **modern, flexible workforce that can continue to deliver. I want to thank all Secretariat colleagues for their consistent dedicated support to parliamentarians.** The professionals within this team regularly impress me with their ability to find innovative solutions to the challenges presented by our work, and their constant effort to further improve the services we collectively deliver.

Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Roberto Montella

Vienna, 21 February 2025

