

Bureau members hear from OSCE Secretary General and discuss PA work



OSCE PA President Peter Lord Bowness (United Kingdom) and OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid spoke at Tuesday's meeting of the Assembly leadership, held in an online format. OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella also addressed the Bureau, providing an overview of upcoming Assembly activities and ongoing work.

In her remarks, Secretary General Schmid welcomed the OSCE Call for Action issued by the PA on the margins of the Ministerial Council in December last year. She praised the Parliamentary Assembly as a valuable source of new ideas and proposals and stressed that as OSCE Secretary General, she wants to strengthen the cross-dimensional approach to security, noting that the PA has an important role to play in this regard.

President Bowness underlined the Assembly's support for the

work of the Organization as a whole, welcomed the addition of all Bureau members as signatories to the OSCE Call for Action, and mentioned the possibility of holding regular online dialogues with leaders of the OSCE's executive structures.

Montella reported to the Bureau that the International Secretariat is coping effectively with the COVID-related restrictions and informed members that next month's Winter Meeting, which is usually held in Vienna, will be fully online. Montella also reported on two recent election observation missions, to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, conducted earlier this month with 10 staff members deployed altogether.

Montella and OSCE PA High-Level Expert Lamberto Zannier discussed the PA's Helsinki +50 initiative, which is working on identifying the key issues to focus on and developing ideas for raising the OSCE's profile ahead of the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025.

In the discussion, parliamentarians noted that the past year has put to the test principles of multilateralism and democracy. Members raised issues that must remain in focus in the Organization's work, including the situation in Belarus, the crisis in and around Ukraine, developments in the Russian Federation, and climate change. Bureau members also discussed Assembly activities and priorities for 2021, including reforming the PA's Rules of Procedure and working practices, as well as upcoming meetings and projects.

Winter Meeting registration open, draft programme online

The 20th Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will take place on 24-26 February 2021 in a virtual format. The Winter Meeting will be comprised of meetings of the Standing Committee, each General Committee, and a joint session of the three General Committees. The draft programme and general information are available here: <http://bit.ly/3t36aIR>

President Bowness addresses OSCE Permanent Council for the first time

PA President Peter Lord Bowness (United Kingdom) addressed the OSCE Permanent Council on 21 January, stressing that co-operation is needed at all levels to build commitment to the Organization's values and that the PA is dedicated to working with all partners in advancing principles of multilateralism. He emphasized that building trust requires credibility and avoidance of any double standards, as well as mutual respect. "As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to strain all our societies, we must work together to choose dialogue over confrontation, and co-operation over unilateral action," the President said.

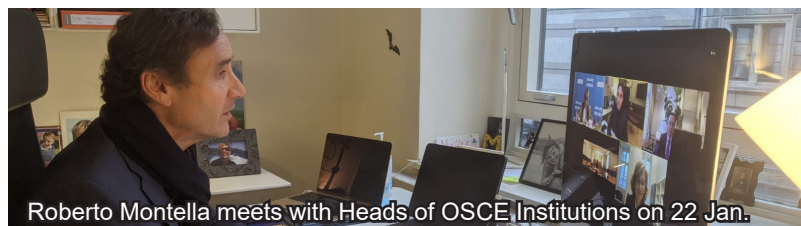
Bowness expressed support for the priorities that were outlined the previous week by the new OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde, in all three dimen-

sions of the OSCE's work, welcomed the new OSCE Secretary General, Helga Maria Schmid, and expressed the PA's appreciation for the leadership of the Albanian OSCE Chairpersonship during 2020, as well as for OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella who has just started his second five-year term.

More than a dozen OSCE ambassadors took the floor following President Bowness's remarks to offer feedback and ask questions. Delegations raised issues related to improving the level of dialogue in the OSCE, counter-terrorism, the crisis in and around Ukraine, and institutional co-operation within the OSCE. Bowness reiterated the OSCE PA's support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, full access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, and implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Secretary General Montella meets with counterparts in other OSCE Institutions

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella has held a series of online meetings the past week with leaders of the OSCE. On 22 January he met with the Heads of OSCE Institutions: Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid, ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci, HCNM Kairat Abdrakhmanov and Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro. Discussions focused on ways to increase inter-institutional co-operation with the aim of ensuring better communication and more visibility of the OSCE at the ministerial level and with key partners. Montella also met separately with Director Mecacci about future collaboration in the fields of election observation and democratization. On 25 January, Montella met with the Special



Envoy of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and former OSCE PA Vice-President Kent Harstedt to discuss the Swedish Chairmanship's priorities and the Assembly's support to strengthen the governance of the OSCE.