

OSCE parliamentarians express opposition to invasion of Ukraine at Winter Meeting



Margareta Cederfelt addresses the Standing Committee, 24 Feb.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was the focus of the OSCE PA's 21st Winter Meeting, held in a blended format on 24-25 February. In an open debate during the plenary session on 24 February, the morning of the news breaking of the Russian invasion, 28 parliamentarians took the floor, with the vast majority expressing strong opposition to the incursion and concern for the lives of civilians in Ukraine. Parliamentarians called the Russian military operation in Ukraine "indefensible" and a "gross violation of international law," urging an immediate end to the hostilities and a return to diplomacy.

Opening the discussion, OSCE Chairman-in-Office and Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau, OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt, and President of the Austrian Parliament Wolfgang Sobotka reiterated the role of the OSCE in facilitating dialogue and building confidence. President

Sobotka said that OSCE principles are being violated on a broad spectrum, and expressed hope that diplomatic relations could be reopened. Foreign Minister Rau said that Russia's actions constitute "a fundamental breach of the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act." President Cederfelt stressed the OSCE PA's steadfast support for the resolution of the conflict based on core OSCE principles such as the inviolability of frontiers and the indivisibility of security.

Ukrainian Head of Delegation Mykyta Poturaiev described the dire situation that his country faces, with large-scale military operations in Ukraine's biggest cities. Several parliamentarians remarked that the recent developments represent a major threat to peace not only in Ukraine but the whole of Europe.

The crisis was also debated in the Standing Committee, where OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid noted that dialogue had been offered by the OSCE and the Polish Chairmanship, but regretted that "Russia chose force over dialogue."

The PA's General Committees focused their attention on the issue, with discussions touching on the impacts on the OSCE's three dimensions of security, informing the preparation of reports and resolutions to be presented at the Birmingham Annual Session in July 2022. Committee members also heard from representatives of the OSCE's executive structures who briefed the parliamentarians on the work of their offices.

OSCE PA Special Representatives, Chairs of Ad Hoc Committees and leaders of recent election observation missions reported to the Standing Committee on their activities.

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly responds to the Ukraine crisis



Wolfgang Sobotka, Roberto Montella and Mykyta Poturaiev, 24 Feb.

OSCE PA members have been seized on the Ukraine crisis for the past week, holding debates at the Winter Meeting and direct discussions with Ukrainian parliamentarians. In a joint statement on 21 February with OSCE Chairman-in-Office Zbigniew Rau and OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid, OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt (Sweden) and Secretary General Roberto Montella condemned the decision by Russia to recognize Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, calling it a "breach of international law and fundamental OSCE principles." On 23 February, the eve of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt convened an impromptu, informal meeting with several members of the Bureau who were in Vienna for the Winter Meeting. The PA leaders explored possible areas for the PA to contribute towards resolving the crisis.

Upon learning of the Russian military action the following morning, the Bureau, together with Secretary General Roberto Montella, issued a joint statement which "condemn[ed]

in the strongest terms the advancement of Russian military in the territory of Ukraine." In subsequent days, the Bureau issued joint statements supporting Ukraine, and has urged an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, as well as the opening of secure humanitarian land and air corridors.

OSCE parliamentarians have been in touch directly with members of the Ukrainian Delegation to the PA. Cederfelt and Montella held discussions with Head of Delegation Mykyta Poturaiev, and have also been in contact with Second Committee Vice-Chair Artur Gerasymov, for talks that have focused on ways the PA can support Ukraine's sovereignty and help end the hostilities.

On the staff level, members of the Secretariat are helping to organize donation shipments for Ukrainians suffering from the Russian invasion. Initiated by Elections Administration Officer Iryna Sabashuk, a Ukrainian citizen, in close co-operation with the Embassy of Ukraine to Denmark, humanitarian organizations and Danish private companies, a volunteer network in Denmark is collecting essentials for civilians such as food and medical supplies and sending them to Ukraine.



Processing humanitarian aid in Copenhagen, 1 March 2022