



**Address by OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
President Margareta Cederfelt (MP, Sweden)**

Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

16 September 2021 | Vienna, Austria

As delivered.

Thank you, Madam Chair,
Madam Secretary General,
Your Excellencies,

It is a great privilege to join you this morning.

Since our hybrid Annual Session here in Vienna, our Assembly has evolved, notably through the election of a new leadership and Bureau, the nomination of regional and thematic Special Representatives, and changes involving our Vienna Office.

Although many hurdles remain, I see my presence with you today as a sign that we can soon return to working practices as normal as possible.

As highlighted during the Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament, last week here in Vienna, women have played a central role in combating COVID-19.

And while we should strive to consolidate these achievements, let me also take note of the symbolism of the head table this morning:

Three women representing the OSCE Chair, the OSCE Secretariat, and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Our presence together today is a reminder of the contribution of many other women – at the Secretariat, in our institutions, in our field operations, with other international or non-governmental organizations – to peace and security in the OSCE region and beyond.

Madam Chair,

I am glad that implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda has been a top priority of Sweden's OSCE Chair in 2021.

You can rest assured that, building on the pioneering work of our Special Representative on Gender Issues, Dr. Hedy Fry, the Parliamentary Assembly will carry on supporting this initiative in the final stretch of Sweden's Chair of our Organization and in the years to come.

In Sweden, as in many other OSCE participating States, support for the WPS agenda has translated into increased funding for women's organizations working for peace and development.

Madam Chair,

As a parliamentarian, I see the work of civil society as essential in a truly representative democracy.

Through my longstanding involvement in the Swedish Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I have witnessed the invaluable work that civil society undertakes in every single country of the OSCE to advance the security of our citizens.

They work with limited means but unlimited dedication.

For instance, as Chair of the PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, I have learned about the good things many organizations do working with migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, thereby facilitating their integration in our societies.

In the Swedish city of Malmö, for instance, local government agencies and NGOs work together to assist newly arrived female entrepreneurs create successful businesses and contribute to society.

When civil society representatives criticize national authorities – and that is the case in every single country of the OSCE – they do so to remind them of their own commitments, not to accuse them without cause.

They also remind us, parliamentarians, of our duty to hold our governments to account and to implement these commitments.

I am therefore saddened that this year again, a Human Dimension Implementation Meeting will not be held.

This will further undermine our ability to craft collective, comprehensive, and durable solutions to old and emerging challenges.

I look forward to working closely with the Polish Chair of the OSCE in 2022 as hosts of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, in order to find ways to guarantee the contribution of civil society to all our activities.

Civil society is the first to suffer when governments abuse their power.

The continued violations of human rights and democratic principles in Belarus has dramatic consequences for the lives of those who show genuine and good faith engagement.

As an example, I am deeply troubled by the lengthy sentencing of Maria Kolesnikova and Maxim Znak, members of the Coordination Council, last week.

I am also concerned that migrants are being used to manufacture a crisis at the border between Belarus and the European Union.

The OSCE PA's position regarding developments in Belarus were clearly expressed in a text adopted at our Remote Session in July.

Although exchanges with the Parliamentary Assembly have in the past yielded some positive results, not least the hosting of our 2017 Annual Session, I regret that the authorities in Minsk have not accepted our reiterated offers to facilitate inclusive dialogue.

In spite of this, our Special Representative on Eastern Europe, Dr. Daniela De Ridder from Germany, will continue to keep the question of Belarus high on our agenda.

But not only the human dimension is under pressure.

We have regularly repeated our condemnation of the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation and its aggression in Donbas and expressed our concern over the recent military build-up in and around Ukraine.

Against this backdrop, I find the announced closure of the OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk troubling.

While this has been a very limited operation facing many obstacles, it has still been a sign of hope for greater co-operation within this organization.

More than ever, this latest development demonstrates the necessity for the Special Monitoring Mission to be able to work unhindered and in accordance with its mandate, and to be present along the entire border between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

After all, the SMM mandate covers all of the internationally recognized territory of Ukraine, which includes the Crimean Peninsula.

We continue to monitor developments in the South Caucasus, where I remain concerned over limited progress on a number of issues dividing communities.

Last month, I appointed a new Special Representative on the South Caucasus, Ms. Kari Henriksen from Norway.

She will ensure that any PA initiative complements the work of the Chair-in-Office and the OSCE executive structures.

Thirteen years after the August conflict in Georgia, there has been no significant progress towards the implementation of the six-point ceasefire agreement.

I call on all the parties to secure its application, in letter and spirit, in particular by granting access to humanitarian aid.

Despite the ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, much needs to be addressed to guarantee a durable peace to ease the suffering of civilians on the ground.

Building on our good co-operation with the parliaments of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the OSCE PA remains ready to foster interparliamentary dialogue to support this peace process.

What the region's people need is sustainable peace and reconciliation, not a continuation of hostilities.

In Moldova, we hope that the clear mandate delivered by voters during the last presidential and parliamentary elections will unlock progress in the Transdniestrian settlement process.

I would encourage all actors to support the OSCE Chair's efforts to convene a 5+2 meeting in the coming months.

In Afghanistan, since the fall of Kabul a month ago, there have been growing concerns over a security spillover in Central Asia and beyond.

We will have to determine how we handle the Partnership with Afghanistan in the future.

It is important that the OSCE PA remains plugged in, as the situation develops on the ground.

I have already held online conversations with Delegations from OSCE countries bordering Afghanistan and plan to follow up on these through high-level visits to Central Asia.

Let me use this opportunity to thank the Conflict Prevention Centre and OSCE Field Operations for their precious assistance.

When meeting with our Central Asian Members, I will also highlight useful tools that the OSCE PA puts at the disposal of OSCE national parliaments.

I have appointed Ms. Pia Kauma, from Finland, as our new Special Representative on Central Asia, and she will join me on visits to Central Asia.

I also think of our Ad Hoc Committees on Migration and on Countering Terrorism, respectively chaired by Mr. Kristian Vigenin from Bulgaria and Mr. Reinhold Lopatka from Austria, which are particularly well suited to address new challenges stemming from Afghanistan.

Incidentally, next month, we will organize a first Regional Policy Dialogue on Foreign Terrorist Fighters with legislators from Southeast Europe, in co-ordination with the OSCE Secretariat and with the support of OSCE Field Operations.

We look forward to further exploring the potential of our flexible instruments.

Excellencies,

As we have done on numerous occasions over the past months – in Armenia, in Moldova, in Bulgaria – the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly would have deployed a delegation to observe the Russian parliamentary elections at the end of this week.

However, strong and credible election observation requires that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly – and ODIHR – be able to independently determine the number of observers we need, in accordance with our usual practice and methodology.

What is needed for a credible observation can only be determined by our experts.

It cannot be negotiated or decided unilaterally by the country holding the elections.

We therefore regret that Russia's decision left us and the ODIHR with no other choice than to cancel our observation.

In October and November, we will deploy strong delegations to observe the presidential election in Uzbekistan and the parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan.

This will again demonstrate our commitment to work closely with the ODIHR in this important area of OSCE competence.

Our profound concern over climate change has also compelled us to boost co-operation with the executive structures in the second dimension.

I have appointed Mr. Askar Shakirov as Special Representative on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our joint work will inform the Preparatory Parliamentary Meeting ahead of the COP 26 conference to identify ways OSCE parliaments can take action to respond to this global challenge.

Excellencies,

Over the past year, Members of the OSCE PA have participated actively alongside many of you, as well as former and current Heads of Institutions and Chairs-in-Office, in our “Call for Action” events, which aim at generating ideas to make the OSCE more effective.

We will also continue to channel our energy into debating OSCE issues within our national parliaments and with our governments.

We must make sure the OSCE gets the place it deserves on their agenda, and, with four years to go until 2025, we should build political support towards an OSCE Summit.

Your Excellencies,

As you begin engaging in the preparation of Ministerial decisions, I thank you in advance for recognizing the efforts of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in promoting international co-operation and engagement.

I would be happy to see some of the many recommendations our Assembly has made over the years be taken into account.

Our reinforced Vienna Office will continue to contribute to your precious work.

As I alluded to at the start of my remarks, our team here has grown considerably in recent years, and it is now located in new premises, thanks to the generous support of the Austrian Government.

We plan an official inauguration during our next Assembly meeting in Vienna, and we hope to see all of you there.

This will be in February 2022, which coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the office.

As you know, it has been built up and consistently led by our Special Representative to the governmental structures in Vienna, Ambassador Andreas Nothelle.

As he will retire from full-time active service next month, allow me to end by highlighting his extensive contribution to our joint work.

He will have dealt with five OSCE Secretaries General and twenty OSCE Chairs, representing the PA in the most challenging moments in our relationship with the OSCE's executive structures, and gathering an immense amount of OSCE experience.

I am glad that we are now on the best terms.

This is also owed to the work of Ambassador Nothelle and his highly qualified and dedicated team in Vienna, for which I express the Assembly's deepest gratitude.

I am very happy that Ambassador Nothelle has committed to continuing to give his valuable advice through independent consultancy work on legal, electoral, and political issues.

In his capacity as Special Representative, he will be succeeded on October 1st by Ambassador Miodrag Panceski, whom you are already familiar with.

I wish him success in this new mission!

Madam Chairperson,

I thank you very much and the Members for your attention.

I look forward to your comments and will try to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you.

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