



Keynote speech by OSCE PA Special Representative on Arctic Issues
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Developments in the Arctic region and opportunities for international co-operation

President Pasquier,
Deputy Speaker Haatainen,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

Let me start by thanking the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and its Sub-Committee on External Relations for organizing this meeting and bringing Arctic issues under focus. I also wish to thank you for inviting me to address you today, recognizing the new efforts the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is undertaking on the High North. It is a genuine honour to be here and I look forward to a fruitful debate.

In May this year, the Norwegian parliament – the Storting – invited the leadership of the OSCE PA to visit the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. The aim was to gain first-hand knowledge of the effects of climate change in the Arctic. As a follow up to this visit and acknowledging the importance and urgency of the issues at stake in the region, PA President George Tsereteli appointed me as a Special Representative on Arctic issues.

The challenges in the High North are complex. While the OSCE PA will strive to keep an eye on all of them, we decided, together with the President, to assign the majority of our efforts to the *effects of climate change*. The OSCE is indeed a security organization, but its focus ranges from military to so-called human security. The effects of climate change on society and development are a challenge within this comprehensive approach to security. They are of particular concern in the field of human security.

In the run up to this meeting here in Rovaniemi, I have been following closely the COP25 and the negotiations in Madrid. The Chilean chair has focused on climate action, since we are now entering the implementation phase of the Paris Agreement. The need for action is *urgent*. The temperature in the Arctic is rising rapidly. This is a true indicator of climate change.

At Svalbard, they are now experiencing the 108th month – in other words, nine whole years – of above-average temperatures. Throughout November this year, the temperature was three degrees above average. This has serious and very specific consequences. To name one, the permafrost is thawing, making the landscape more unstable and triggering landslides and avalanches. This also creates grave challenges for people in other parts of the Arctic, and is just one example of why climate change

is a priority of my mandate. What we are witnessing are serious environmental, security-related and social challenges, including special challenges for indigenous peoples.

Dear Colleagues,

The question now is how international organizations, and, in my case, parliamentarians can address such a crisis.

In this first phase of my mandate, I am striving to establish contacts and build partnerships with relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. I aim to identify activities and put forward policy recommendations in the near future. As parliamentarians, I would claim that we have three great assets:

1. we can propose legislation;
2. we can hold our governments to account for their actions and for the implementation of laws and international commitments;
3. we are the direct link between our people and institutions, which means that it is easier for us to raise awareness on key issues.

As a Special Representative of an international parliamentary assembly, my role is to ensure that these three assets are coordinated and amplified on a wider stage.

In fact, "*What happens in the Arctic does not remain in the Arctic*" has been the adopted motto from the very first moment of my assignment. The OSCE PA is a platform for no less than 57 States. As such, it also provides a unique opportunity to raise awareness on Arctic challenges and opportunities to non-Arctic countries. We need to raise awareness of each and everyone's impact on the world's "cooler". We

need an inclusive debate on the environmental mutations we are witnessing. Mutations that will sooner or later affect us all.

Of course, the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly have no specific expertise on the Arctic. This is why it is key for us to join forces and leverage on our comparative advantages based on our core values. In the case of the OSCE PA, the advantage is our outreach: I am here to offer you all of my support in bringing Arctic issues into the debate of my assembly and of its 57 members. It is my hope – and my wish - that this will inspire and promote relevant national initiatives and legislation. But to do this, we need networks to spread knowledge and information. That is why I really look forward to today's important event to strengthen our ties and exchange information and ideas.

In more concrete terms, we plan to organize a side event on the Arctic during our 2020 Annual Session in Vancouver. The Annual Session brings together more than 300 parliamentarians and has a total of almost 1000 participants including staff, officials, and the media. I am also working on a parliamentary resolution with specific policy recommendations, to be proposed for adoption next year.

Moreover, there are two additional concepts I would like to integrate in all of my efforts. The first is *the rejection of hopelessness*: too often we face rhetoric, aimed at attacking politicians for deliberately wanting to destroy the environment. What we need is to promote the idea of working together: Only with renewed hope will we manage to achieve results.

The second concept is *the sense of urgency*, which should be a factor that fosters and triggers cooperation and joint efforts. In this regard, I especially welcome the recent outcome of the bilateral meeting between the Foreign Ministers of Iceland (current

chair of the Arctic Council) and of the Russian Federation (incoming chair), where they agreed that, despite divergences in some fields, the Arctic is an area of common efforts and unity. This is the kind of commitment we should aim at.

I would also like to welcome the recent conclusions on Arctic policy of the EU Council, and in particular its acknowledgment *that many of the issues affecting the region are of a global nature and are more effectively addressed through regional or multilateral cooperation*. This is yet another example of how challenges relating to the High North are increasingly coming under the world's microscope, and of how we should make use of this momentum for concerted and determined action.

Dear Colleagues,

In conclusion, I believe that if we combine the capability and expertise of the Arctic organizations with the political influence and extent of the OSCE PA or PACE, we can truly make a difference. Please rest assured that, as OSCE PA Special Representative on Arctic Issues, I will spare no efforts in raising awareness and in identifying distinct and targeted parliamentary activities to further potential joint efforts for the Arctic.

Thank you!