

Highlights¹ - Parliamentary Web Dialogue

“From the Arctic to Global: The Political Role in Addressing Climate Change”

BACKGROUND

The Arctic is often referred to as “the world’s refrigerator” due to its important role in regulating temperatures all over the planet. Climate change effects are not an exclusive feature of the region, but simply happen more intensely and more quickly there. The trend is a global trend. Hence, the Arctic should serve as an eye opener of what the whole planet is facing: a climate crisis with profound impacts on the environment, on security, on the life of citizens and on society as a whole. For this reason, on 16 September 2020 the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly held the Parliamentary Web Dialogue “*From the Arctic to Global: the Political Role in Addressing Climate Change*”.

The webinar started with a focus on the Arctic and then developed into the broader issue of addressing climate change globally. The event, initiated and chaired by the OSCE PA Special Representative on Arctic Issues Ms. Torill Eidsheim (MP, Norway), and moderated by OSCE PA Advisor Mr. Guido Almerigogna, provided an informal platform for over 50 participants among Members of Parliament, parliamentary staff and relevant external guests, to discuss the effects of climate change in the Arctic and beyond, as well as ways in which Parliamentarians and international parliamentary fora such as the OSCE PA can enhance their support to the much needed global response.

KEY CONCLUSIONS FOR PARLIAMENTARY AND OSCE PA WORK

- Climate change should be considered and addressed as a *climate crisis*, with direct impact on people’s security. It is therefore relevant to address it within the OSCE.
- Parliamentarians should make the best use of their key assets, notably legislative, oversight and public awareness capacities, to support and provide long-term strategic political leadership to efforts aimed at building resilient, sustainable and climate-friendly societies. In particular, it is urgent to:
 - Adapt national legislation in order to implement commitments included in the COP21 Paris Agreement and other international agreements.
 - Mobilize adequate resources for the transition to a carbon-free, sustainable society.
 - Engage youth and work cooperatively with all stakeholders, de-politicizing the topic.
 - Consider joint responses to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change together.
- The OSCE PA, while maintaining a focus on the Arctic, should also explore ways to give more importance and coherence to the dossier of global climate change in its activities, including within the framework of the 2nd Committee.

¹ **DISCLAIMER:** The Highlights from the OSCE PA Web Dialogue are not intended to be official conclusions, nor an exhaustive list of all issues raised during the debate, but rather a collection of main points as analysed by the International Secretariat for possible future reference. As such, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly makes no claims nor warranties of any kind, expressed or implied, about their completeness and reliability.

THE KEYNOTE PANEL

Introducing the panel, **Ms. Torill Eidsheim, OSCE PA Special Representative on Arctic Issues (MP, Norway)**, noted the importance of raising awareness on the massive effects of the climate crisis in the Arctic and on how they are impacting lower latitudes too, and urged to convey a special attention to the effects on peoples' lives. She stressed the need to work cooperatively and urgently to address them, in a spirit of solidarity and responsibility, also calling for political leadership and courage. In this context, she encouraged a debate about the role of parliamentarians, both at national level and within the OSCE PA, voicing the need to put forward concrete measures to address climate change consequences in the political, social and economic spheres as well as to support governments to achieve the goals inclined in fundamental deals such as the 2015 COP Paris Agreement. **OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella** emphasized that global problems require global responses and pointed out to the capacity of Parliamentarians to act as watchdogs for the needs of the people and take prompt action. He offered the engagement of the OSCE PA Secretariat to support the work of Parliamentarians in the critical domain of addressing climate change.

1. Climate Change effects in the Arctic – scientific perspective.

Prof. Tore Furevik, *Director of the [Bjerknes Centre](#) for Climate Research and Professor at the University of Bergen, Norway*

- Human activity, through pollution and high energy consumption, is leading to 1300 tons of carbon dioxide to be released in the atmosphere every second, which results in the strongest greenhouse effect that the Earth has experienced for more than three millions years, generating the *global warming* phenomenon. This implies higher temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns, with consequent unprecedented droughts, flooding, wildfires, hurricanes and storms.
- Sea ice, glaciers and permafrost are naturally very sensitive to climate change, and the Arctic is the place in the world that is warming fastest. The thawing permafrost is leading to disruption of critical infrastructure and changes of flora and fauna, which are forcing communities to relocation and new hunting, herding, fishing patterns.
- The melting arctic ice (around two million square km in less than 40 years - and a record 532 million tons ice loss only in Greenland in 2019) has dramatic effects at lower latitudes. The melting of sea ice causes changes in weather patterns globally, especially by mutating the ocean flows. Moreover, different sea water characteristics affect sea life, hence also our fishing-related nutrition and economy. The loss of Arctic sea ice is also opening up the Northern shipping route, increasing trade competition. The melting of land ice instead causes a general rise of the sea level that threatens to submerge low-laying islands and swallow entire nations (1cm rise of sea level can result in 1 million people to be displaced).
- More research funding and cross-border research cooperation is urgently needed, and the scientific community calls for stronger interaction and coordination with political leaders. More accurate climate analysis will help policymakers produce frameworks for sustainable management of resources, indispensable for the economy, and the ability to both *adapt* to and *mitigate* climate change by an optimal use of wind-, hydro- and solar renewable energy.

2. The Arctic - Institutional Perspective

Ms. Adalheidur Thorsteinsdottir, *Deputy Senior Arctic Official of Iceland - Icelandic Chairmanship-in-Office of the [Arctic Council](#)*

- Provided an overview of the key features of the Arctic Council, the leading high-level intergovernmental forum for cooperation in the Arctic, comprising 8 countries, 6 permanent participants (representing indigenous communities), as well as a number of governmental and civil society observers. As in the OSCE, decisions are taken by consensus, but the mandate of the Council excludes military security.

- Emphasized that the Council is a crucial body for cooperation on sustainable development and environmental protection, which are among the overarching priorities of its Members, fully committed to an effective cooperation in this domain. Relevant current projects of the Arctic Council focus on preventing pollution, wildfires, managing biodiversity and marine ecosystems, monitoring climate change and its impact on communities.
- Stressed that the initiatives of the Arctic Council, which include scientific research, are primarily aimed at turning knowledge into policy recommendations for informed decision making. In this context, she voiced the need to bring this from the Arctic to the global arena and welcomed cooperation with the OSCE PA as a tool to exchange good practices also with non-Arctic countries and raise awareness, as it is now key and urgent for scientific evidence on climate change to feed global policy. Noted that Arctic Council assessments have often contributed to a number of international conventions and legally binding agreements.
- Informed that the Arctic Council Chairmanship has identified *resilience* as a cross-cutting priority issue for this year, and that it will publish a comprehensive climate change update at Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in spring 2021, when Iceland will hand over the Chairmanship to the Russian Federation.

3. Addressing Climate Change at the global level

Mr. Daniele Violetti, *Director of the Means of Implementation Division in the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat \(UNFCCC\)](#)*

- Emphasized that the climate crisis remains humanity’s greatest long-term threat to its survival on the planet, with the point of non-return getting closer.
- The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic forced to postpone COP26² to 2021. However, the much-needed coordinated global recovery plan from COVID could play a contributing role to climate change mitigation if it follows the COP Paris Agreement and the UN 2030 Agenda. The two processes should be considered together.
- Presented the key features of the work of the UNFCCC Secretariat in supporting the COP multilateral negotiation process and the implementation of commitments by States, especially throughout legal instruments and technical expertise aimed at capacity building. It also monitors national progresses, brings together Party and non-Party stakeholders to foster discussions and support engagement areas through different initiatives.
- However, he emphasized that to make all UNFCCC efforts effective, it is crucial for States to raise ambition on climate, specifically on mitigation and adaptation measures. In particular, Parties need to accelerate work towards fulfilling existing commitments, especially those included in the COP21 Paris Agreement on emission reductions. Also highlighted the key importance of adequate resources and financing, with new or revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), rules for markets and other financial long-term requirements.
- While 121 countries have committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, and 114 have announced the intention to enhance their NDCs to this aim, so far only 7 have formally submitted their revised NDCs. This is an example of how implementation of the agreement is still insufficient.
- The role of Parliamentarians in this process is a crucial, as they have the power of generating political will and advancing the agenda at the national level by crafting relevant legislation and providing effective oversight. In this regard, he welcomed the opportunity to engage with the OSCE PA and called for strong parliamentary action, also to revive multilateralism and show leadership in working as a real “international community”.

² COP26 is the upcoming Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC: <https://www.ukcop26.org/>

THE DEBATE

Several OSCE PA Members, from both non-Arctic and Arctic countries, intervened to ask questions to the experts and to outline main priorities in addressing the climate crisis, with specific reference to the role of Parliaments. Among the main points raised were the following:

- Addressing climate change at parliamentary level is a key priority, as it is a matter directly affecting the lives of citizens. Failing to do so would undermine the trust in democratic institutions.
- Stronger commitment is needed to put forward new legislation in line with international agreements and to provide parliamentary oversight on the implementation of existing national action plans. In general, legislative efforts for a transition to a decarbonized, resilient and climate friendly society must be strengthened and prioritized.
- While parliamentary action is primarily needed at national level, the OSCE PA could serve as a platform to share best practices and as a catalyser of efforts, also with the aim of raising awareness with those countries which are failing to implement environmental commitments or are not acknowledging their importance.
- Climate change is a global issue that requires a global response, otherwise efforts will be void. An example was made on Denmark, which adopted an important action plan to reduce 70% of its CO2 emissions, but this results in only 0,1% of world emission reductions.
- There is a need for a better understanding of the phenomenon: science and politics should work more together, and more effective educational programmes should be launched. Too often climate change is considered as a merely environmental issue and its direct effects on people are ignored or minimized.
- Building resilient and climate friendly societies implies a strong budget mobilization. Parliamentarians, who can oversee budgetary functions, should think strategically and long-term. It is crucial to spend now, and pay less, rather than postpone action to the future and pay more with an unsustainable burden on future generations.
- The importance of involving youth in debates on climate policies was repeatedly stressed. Policy makers have a duty to take on board youth's growing calls and prove that the fight for climate should not be something opposed to politics but a joint whole-of-society effort.
- It is crucial to mainstream climate friendly policies in all areas of national planning and adapt all legislation to be in line with sustainable development goals. National best practices on this were shared. It was noted that virtuous countries should be more ambitious, raise COP21 goals nationally, and take the lead internationally.
- The debate on climate change should be depoliticized.
- Decision makers should show the same responsibility and leadership they are displaying to fight the COVID-19 pandemic also to fight climate change, acknowledging that its effects, together with the general deterioration of the environment, are even more dangerous.

In her concluding remarks, **Ms. Elona Gjebrea Hoxha, Rapporteur of the OSCE PA General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment**, reiterated that only global answers, taken in a spirit of joint responsibility, can address a phenomenon such as climate change. She linked it to the broader topic of the protection of the environment, which the Committee is prioritizing, including through a special debate at the PA Winter Meeting and a webinar on "*COVID-19: a turning point for environmental protection*"³. She recalled that 13% of deaths in Europe are linked to pollution and urged for environmental issues to be placed at the top of governmental and parliamentary agendas. She referred to the crucial role of national parliaments to advance sustainable development and advocated a strong response by the OSCE PA in this field.

³ See: [Highlights of the OSCE PA Webinar: "COVID-19: a turning point for environmental protection?"](#)