



Opening Remarks by OSCE PA Special Representative on Arctic Issues

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Informal Meeting of OSCE PA Delegations from Arctic Countries

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Dear Colleagues, dear friends,

First of all, thank you very much for being here today, despite this very busy period – full of commitments both in our Parliaments and in the OSCE PA. It is a pleasure to see you, even if, once again, online.

First, in light of yesterday's Arctic Council Ministerial, I would like to use the opportunity to applaud our Icelandic colleagues with an excellent job in their chairmanship-period and hosting a good, mood setting hand-over-meeting as well. I also wish to congratulate the Russian Federation on assuming the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council – wishing the very best, on behalf of the whole OSCE PA, on this important endeavor.

Especially as we are now approaching the Annual Session and the end of my mandate in the PA – as I will not be running for elections in the Norwegian Parliament in September – I find it particularly important to have an informal meeting with you, almost a brainstorming session, on the work conducted so far and on what legacy there can be for the future. Exchanging views with you will also be instrumental for the final comprehensive report that I am drafting on my activities as Special Representative.

As you know, since my appointment by former President Tsereteli following the PA visit to the Svalbard Archipelago in 2019, my mandate has been primarily focused on raising awareness – actually ringing an alarm bell - on the effects of the climate crisis on the Arctic and on its direct impact on Arctic communities. In fact, too often the Arctic is confused for just a mass of ice, such as Antarctica, although there are more than 4 million inhabitants, whose lives are radically changing due to climate change. Moreover, I have also tried to tirelessly repeat my mantra, that “what happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic” – stressing that the High North is a litmus test to show what climate change is doing to the *whole* planet. Simply, effects are more visible at higher latitudes. Therefore, my activity in the OSCE PA also aims at raising awareness *beyond* the Arctic and at promoting a more effective role of Parliamentarians on this crucial portfolio. Hence, the Web Dialogue we organized last year “*From the Arctic to Global: the political role in addressing climate change*”.

In this regard, I was pleased that the proposal I made during the last PA Winter Meeting about developing a more structured portfolio on climate change in our Assembly was appreciated, and I hope that under the leadership of the new Bureau and Second Committee we can continue to move forward on this topic. I really wish to praise the efforts of the Second Committee in this regard and their increased work on environmental security. We have the honor of having both PA Presidential candidates with us today, so I take the opportunity to ask them: how do you see this portfolio in the future of the PA?

Dear Colleagues,

I will not bore you with a list of all the activities I implemented as Special Representative, since I circulated to you my work plan in written form. However, let me stress a few recent items which are of particular importance to me.

In April, I addressed the 14th Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians, an event that brought together more than 60 legislators from the whole high-North region. Taking the floor as an official observer, I informed them about my efforts in the OSCE PA and emphasized the importance of cooperating together to address interlinked challenges affecting all of us. I attached the conference's final statement in the background document for this meeting as further food-for-thought.

Also annexed to the document is the report from the bilateral meeting I held a few weeks ago with representatives of the Saami Council, one of the biggest organizations bringing together Arctic indigenous communities. I believe it is crucial to hear from them about the challenges they are facing and promote adequate and coordinated measures in their protection. We focused a lot on the effects of what they defined "climate disaster" on their livelihoods, and I wish to highlight one point I was told: *"While we are always listened to, we are rarely truly heard – our voice has very little weight"*. We can work better on this and I also exchanged notes on the meeting with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. Moreover, being the Saami a transnational community, multilateral cooperation becomes even more relevant.

Finally, I wish to congratulate Iceland for the great work chairing the Arctic Council and the Russian Federation on assuming the new Chairmanship – the Ministerial Meeting took place yesterday in Reykjavik – and I wish the very best, on behalf of the whole OSCE PA, on this important endeavor. I hope to be able to meet with a Chairmanship representative as soon as possible. I am also looking forward to meeting the new Special Envoy on Arctic Issues of the European Union. I believe it is important to join forces and promote the concept of sustainable development in the Arctic by working together, and building synergies where possible, based on each other's added values. The Arctic is and must remain an area of peace and cooperation.

Dear Colleagues,

To conclude, I wish to pay a word of appreciation for ongoing efforts in the OSCE PA to mainstream youth perspectives in our work. This is as important as ever, and as Parliamentarians we have large responsibilities towards our future generations. Unfortunately, time will not probably allow me to organize a roundtable with youth on climate change, as I was hoping for. But I plead the next President to bring forward this project. As you may have seen, I circulated to you an interesting paper prepared by the Norwegian youth panel on their Arctic policy involvement – there are many ideas – and I look forward to your comments on this matter: how to bring on board youth more effectively.

Enough from my side, I touched upon many points and now it is your turn! I will take due note of all your precious inputs. In the background document, we prepared a few possible questions for discussion, but of course feel free to raise any issue you consider important.

Thank you!