

**Report of the OSCE PA Special Representative on Central Asia  
Vice-President Pia Kauma  
to the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the OSCE PA  
on her activities in the period covering August 2022-June 2023  
(Vancouver, 30 June - 4 July 2023)**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Dear President,

Dear Colleagues,

It is an honour for me to have served as the President's entrusted representative on Central Asia since August 2021 with the mandate to encourage the active participation by parliamentarians from the five Central Asian OSCE participating States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) as well as Mongolia in the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and to strengthen parliamentarism in the region.

**Implemented Activities**

I would like to use this opportunity to share a few observations from my visit to Turkmenistan last May on the occasion of the Helsinki + 50 Seminar "The Role of Neutral States in Strengthening Security, Stability and Dialogue in the OSCE Area" (16 May 2023). The aim of the seminar was to bring together Members from across the OSCE area, including in particular the Central Asian region, as well as local and international experts to reflect on the role of neutral states in a polarized geopolitical context.

I wish to thank the Parliament of Turkmenistan and in particular its Chair, Ms. Dunyagozel Gulmanova, for hosting this important event. It has been truly an enriching experience to discover your country and to learn more about the special status of neutrality which guides the formulation of Turkmenistan's foreign policy agenda.

The OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, under the leadership of Ambassador John MacGregor, also played a great role in making this event a success and in facilitating the participation of MPs from across Central Asia.

As was highlighted during the seminar, neutrality can be an asset in an increasingly divided international scene. It can help build bridges among States and contribute to addressing global conflicts as well as other challenges such as climate change and transnational threats. Looking at neighbouring Afghanistan, for example, Turkmenistan's positive neutrality has served as a significant factor in maintaining regional security and co-operation and has positively contributed to the reconciliation process there.

The seminar participants also underlined Turkmenistan's role in mediation and encouraged it to utilize its neutral status for reconciliation purposes with respect to regional border disputes which Central Asian countries are experiencing as well as challenges related to Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine.

We also noted the positive trend of increased intra-regional co-operation which is developing into a strategic partnership, as exemplified by the annual meetings of Central Asian Heads of State.

I hope that similar events will be held in the future to maintain inter-parliamentary dialogue in the interest of common security and stability both at the regional and at the broader OSCE-wide level.

On the margins of the seminar, I also participated in a number of high-level bilateral meetings alongside OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt and High-Level OSCE PA Expert Lamberto Zannier. We met with the Chairperson of the Mejlis Ms. Dunyagozel Gulmanova and members of parliament, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan Mr. Vepa Hajiyev, as well as representatives of civil society organizations. Topics touched upon was the good cooperation with the OSCE and the OSCE PA, the increased engagement of the delegation of Turkmenistan since 2014 and potential participation in ad hoc committees.

Ms. Gulmanova, whom I had the pleasure of meeting already last year in Birmingham in her capacity as a Member of the Delegation of Turkmenistan, and who was appointed Chairperson of the Mejlis in April 2023, is currently the youngest speaker of parliament in the world. Chairperson Gulmanova also emphasized that the empowerment of women and youth are laid out as priority areas in the National Human Rights plan.

As I mentioned in my remarks, women in politics play an instrumental role in shaping inclusive and sustainable policies. As highlighted by UN Women, women's participation increases by 35 percent the probability of a peace agreement lasting 15 years. While my country Finland is leading in terms of the share of women in parliament, I also realize that gender equality takes time. A number of countries (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan) have introduced 30 per cent gender quotas with the aim to increase the number of women in parliament. However, such measures in isolation are not sufficient. As we saw in Kazakhstan, the share of women in parliament has actually decreased, as there are no gender requirements for the candidates in the new single mandate districts. Furthermore, the quota also includes youth and persons with disabilities. I would also encourage colleagues to draw inspiration from the work of the PA Special Representative on Gender Issues Dr. Hedy Fry who, together with ODIHR, has developed guidelines to implementing participatory gender audits of parliaments so that they can capitalize on their potential to implement a gender-sensitive and intersectional approach to legislative processes.

In Central Asia as in elsewhere in the OSCE region, we also need to further promote the engagement of youth. Youth has a key role to play in building peace and in addressing security challenges.

I hope that Members from the Central Asian delegations will consider participating in the informal gender network established by Dr. Fry as well as the PA Network of Young Parliamentarians.

### **Upcoming Activities**

Following up on the successful meeting of Central Asian delegations and Mongolia on the sidelines of the Annual Session in Birmingham last year, I hope to convene a similar event in the coming months.

During my tenure as Special Representative I managed to visit all five Central Asian countries. I very much regret that I have not yet been to Mongolia and hope that I will have the opportunity to do so in the near future. In the meantime, I look forward to further engaging with my colleague Mr. Damdin Tsogtbaatar, Head of the Delegation of Mongolia to the OSCE PA, within the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism of which we are both members.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The fact that all five delegations are represented here in Vancouver, despite the great distance and costs involved, is a clear testimony to their strong commitment to the values of the OSCE, and their trust in the OSCE PA and in inter-parliamentary dialogue. In the context of multiple global and regional crises that the region is facing nowadays, countries of Central Asia are furthermore going through important reform processes.

While the ongoing war in Ukraine has understandably been the focus of the Assembly's attention, we should not lose sight of the specific concerns and challenges faced by our colleagues in Central Asia. We should continue to listen to the experiences and the concerns of our Central Asian friends and to support them in their reform agendas through inter-parliamentary diplomacy in line with OSCE commitments and in the interest of regional co-operation and security.

Thank you for your attention.

## Annex I



Ms. Pia Kauma (Finland), Vice-President of the OSCE PA and Member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism, was appointed Special Representative on Central Asia on 16 August 2021 by OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt. Her mandate expires at the next Annual Session in Birmingham in July 2022. Vice-President Kauma previously served as Special Representative on Civil Society Engagement from August 2019 until July 2021.

### ***Mandate:***

- Encourage active participation by parliamentarians from Central Asian OSCE participating States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and Mongolia in the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to strengthen parliamentarism in the region;
- Liaise and support the work of the OSCE field missions in the region, as well as relevant OSCE institutions, international and regional organizations and diplomatic missions;
- Encourage closer contacts between the parliaments in the region to promote greater intra-regional cooperation in all three OSCE dimensions;
- Report to the President of the Assembly on developments in the region, including opportunities for enhanced parliamentary dialogue and further inter-parliamentary co-operation among the Central Asian OSCE participating States and Mongolia.