



Report of the OSCE PA Special Representative on Central Asia

Farah KARIMI

Head of the Delegation of The Netherlands to the OSCE PA

to the 21st OSCE PA Autumn Meeting

(Yerevan, 18-20 November 2023)

Dear President,

Dear Colleagues,

It is an honour to have been asked to take over the important mandate of Special Representative on Central Asia from President Pia Kauma. This is a region which I hold close to my heart. I very much look forward to finding ways to further encourage the active participation by parliamentarians from the five Central Asian OSCE participating States as well as Mongolia in the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, to promote cooperation between these delegations on issues of common interest and to strengthen parliamentarism and parliamentary democracy in the region.

Work Plan for 2023/2024

I have started off by engaging in online discussions with each of the six delegations under my mandate in order to listen to their concerns and their expectations from me as Special Representative on Central Asia and to find common issues which can bring them closer together. This has been a highly-rewarding process, during which we confirmed the willingness of these delegations to continue to engage with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly even as we, together with the OSCE and other international organizations, struggle to remain relevant and seek to redefine our role against the changing international environment and attacks against the founding values of our organization.

From 5-6 October I was in Vienna to meet with the Heads of Permanent Missions to the OSCE to discuss the engagement of Central Asian participating States and Mongolia with the OSCE, priority areas for regional cooperation and key challenges that their countries are facing. This visit to Vienna also provided an opportunity to meet with the experts of the Central Asia desk of the Conflict Prevention Centre at the OSCE Secretariat to discuss upcoming activities and how we can strengthen inter-parliamentary relations in Central Asia and beyond.

My discussions with stakeholders from Central Asia outlined a number of areas of significant common interest to Central Asian countries and Mongolia. Reinforcing the efficacy of parliamentary systems was one of the main issues raised by delegations. There was a shared interest in enhancing transparency, oversight, and accountability within the legislative processes of Central Asian states and Mongolia.

Another important area for regional cooperation mentioned by all delegations was environmental crises, especially the topic of water management and also the Aral Sea. The delegations emphasized the importance of developing collaborative strategies to combat climate change and devise sustainable water management solutions tailored to the region's needs.

Impact of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and spillover effects on regional security was also one of the key points of my discussions with stakeholders. Stabilization of border security, refugees, humanitarian assistance, fight against trafficking of drugs and illicit weapons, and prospects for relations with the Taliban are high on the regional political agenda.

The importance of inclusive governance was also highlighted, particularly in ensuring the active involvement of women and youth in the public and political spheres. Strategies were discussed to create an enabling environment for their meaningful participation and representation. Considerable attention was also given to nurturing the next generation of leaders. Discussions revolved around educational initiatives aimed at equipping young parliamentarians with essential skills in budget management, anti-corruption measures, and promoting gender equality, to name a few.

As the PA's former Special Representative on Youth Engagement, I would like to stress the importance of further promoting the participation of youth in political processes. In Central Asia as in the rest of the OSCE region – youth has a key role to play in building peace and in addressing security challenges such as climate change. Our OSCE PA Network of Young Parliamentarians is a good platform in representing voices of youth in the Assembly. Young people make up a significant demographic group in Central Asia averaging 30 per cent of the total population of the region.

On 21 November, members of the Network will virtually address the Central Asia Regional Conference “The Role of Youth in Addressing Climate Change” hosted by the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat and the Government of Turkmenistan. Our young members will share national and PA initiatives in promoting the role of youth in the climate agenda.

Last July, young Members of the Assembly held an online meeting with participants of the “Open Parliament” project implemented by the Public Foundation Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan with the support of the OSCE Programme Office in Astana. Young parliamentarians shared their parliamentary experience, discussed their current activities and work in their respective parliaments and committees, described how legislators co-operate with the expert community and civil society, and discussed the impact of the OSCE PA's work on national parliaments.

I also had the great pleasure to contribute to the Model OSCE event organized by all OSCE Central Asian Field Missions and the Secretariat for young people from the region on 25-29 September in Istanbul. The event brought together 12 women and 13 men from diverse backgrounds who all shared a strong interest in multilateralism and security. I

was very inspired by the energy and belief in multilateralism of these young leaders who are already a driving force for positive changes in the region. In my work I will encourage greater attention in our Assembly to young people and their effective political participation.

I also encourage Members from the Central Asian delegations to consider participating in the informal gender network established by the PA Special Representative on Gender Issues Dr. Hedy Fry and encourage all Members to learn more about the guidelines which Dr. Fry, together with ODIHR, has developed on 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.

Upcoming activities and visits

During this Autumn Meeting in Yerevan I will facilitate a meeting of the delegations of Central Asia, following the positive feedback regarding similar initiatives by my predecessor in the past.

I also look forward to learning more about the activities of the five OSCE Field Operations in support of host countries, notably those involving members of parliament, through online meetings at the end of November. This will enable me to better understand how the OSCE PA and its individual Members can better support capacity-building initiatives for Central Asian parliaments and how we can further strengthen parliamentary transparency and openness through greater interactions with civil society and constituencies.

On 30 November I will address remotely the Second Global Forum of interparliamentary cooperation in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, organized by the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan together with UN agencies in Uzbekistan and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) with the support of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan. In my remarks I will seek to highlight OSCE PA initiatives which seek to promote the inclusion of women and youth in implementation of the SDGs, including some of those already mentioned above. In doing so I will also seek to highlight the important contribution of former OSCE PA Vice-President and Special Representative for Sustainable Development Goals Senator Askar Shakirov (Kazakhstan), as well as our Special Representatives on Gender Issues, Dr Hedy Fry (Canada) and on Youth Engagement, Ms Monika Zajkova (North Macedonia).

I have already visited four of the six countries in various capacities, and I hope to return to some of them. I will also continue to advocate for the excellent work which the OSCE Field Operations are carrying out in Central Asia and hope to visit at least one of them in the coming months, potentially with other Members of Parliament from Central Asia. I would like also to support President's initiative to launch a series of visits by small groups of OSCE PA Members to interact with and learn about OSCE Field Operations and the countries in which they work and would be glad to closely work with her in arrangement of a such visit to one of the Missions in Central Asia.

The OSCE PA greatly values Turkmenistan's efforts to engage with the OSCE PA, hosting an international conference in May 2023 on "The Role of Neutral States in Strengthening Security, Stability and Dialogue in the OSCE Area". Turkmenistan is proud of its status of

neutral state which it has managed to retain despite the current polarized geopolitical context. It has offered to host a similar event in Spring 2024, bringing together representatives and parliamentarians from all five Central Asian countries.

Last but not least, there are at least two elections coming up: in Uzbekistan (parliamentary elections due by December 2024) and in Mongolia (parliamentary elections expected in June 2024). We have enjoyed excellent cooperation with Uzbekistan and Mongolia in the past and I hope that the PA will be able to deploy strong missions to observe these elections.

I similarly encourage Members of the Delegations of Central Asia and Mongolia to join upcoming PA election observation missions. Election observation is one of our flagship activities that allows parliamentarians to not only contribute to the important democratic processes with their unique political experience, but also learn about electoral systems and international standards in the OSCE area.

Concluding Remarks

The OSCE region is facing a number of major security challenges and armed conflicts. The organization itself is going through a very big institutional crisis. All these challenges have a significant impact on Central Asia states, and I would like to stress out the importance of high political attention to the region. We should not lose sight of the specific concerns and challenges faced by our colleagues in Central Asia. We should continue to listen to them and support them 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

OSCE PA Special Representative on Central Asia



FARAH KARIMI (NETHERLANDS)

Farah Karimi (Netherlands) was appointed as the Special Representative on Central Asia by OSCE PA President Pia Kauma in September 2023.

Karimi is the Head of the Netherlands delegation and has previously served as the Special Representative on Youth Engagement.

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.

Annex II

Implemented and Upcoming Activities

A. Implemented Activities

1. Bilateral meetings with the PA Delegations from Central Asia and Mongolia

- Uzbekistan (*online, 25 September 2023*):
 - Mr. Sadik SAFOEV, Head of Delegation
 - Mr. Ravshanbek ALIMOV, Member of Delegation
 - Ms. Dilorom FAYZIEVA, Member of Delegation
 - Mr. Nodir JUMAEV, Member of Delegation
 - Ms. Malika KADIRXANOVA, Member of Delegation
- Mongolia (*online, 25 September 2023*):
 - Mr. Tsogtbaatar DAMDIN, Head of Delegation (*online, 25 September 2023*)
- Turkmenistan (*online, 25 October 2023*):
 - Ms. Dunyagozel GULMANOVA, Speaker of the Mejlis and Head of Delegation
 - Mr. Begmurat MUHAMEDOV, Member of Delegation
- Tajikistan (*online, 25 October 2023*):
 - Mr. Saidmurod FATTOHZODA, Head of Delegation

2. Bilateral meetings with the Heads of Permanent Missions from Central Asia and Mongolia to the OSCE (in person, Vienna, 5-6 October 2023)

- Mr. Mukhtar TILEUBERDI, Head of the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan
- Mr. Tolendy MAKEYEV, Mr. Abat FAYZULLAEV, Head of the Permanent Mission of Kyrgyzstan
- Mr. Idibek KALANDAR, Head of the Permanent Mission of Tajikistan
- Mr. Hemra AMANNAZAROV, Head of the Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan
- Mr. Abat FAYZULLAEV, Head of the Permanent Mission of Uzbekistan
- Mr. Munkhbaatar DAVAASAMBUU, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Mongolia

3. Meeting with the Conflict Prevention Centre - Central Asia Desk, OSCE Secretariat (6 October)

- Kristin Höltge, Head of the Central Asia desk
- Dzhaliil Kekbayev, Policy Support Officer
- Seraina Petersen, Policy Support Officer
- Lillian Langford, Policy Support Officer
- Elizabeth Garrett, Policy Support Assistant

4. Conferences, Seminars

- 2023 Central Asian Model OSCE (Istanbul, 25-29 September 2023)

B. Upcoming Activities

1. Joint meeting with PA Delegations from Central Asia (*Yerevan, 19 November 2023, 08:30-09:30*)

2. Bilateral meetings with Field Operations in Central Asia (*online, 23 & 24 November 2023 - tbc*)

3. Conferences, Seminars

- Presentation “*Bridging the Gap: OSCE PA Initiatives for Gender and Youth Inclusivity SDG Implementation*”, Second Global Forum of interparliamentary cooperation in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, organized by the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Parliamentary Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of National SDGs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, UN agencies in Uzbekistan and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (*online, 30 November 2023*)
- Central Asian Conference at the level of Speakers of Parliaments (Spring 2024 – tbc)

4. Field Visits

- Visit to a Field Operation in Central Asia together with Members of the PA delegations from Central Asia (*March, tbc*)

5. Election Observation

- Parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan (tbc)
- Parliamentary elections in Mongolia (June 2024 – tbc)