



Report of the OSCE PA Special Representative on Central Asia

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Head of the Delegation of The Netherlands to the OSCE PA

to the 31st OSCE PA Annual Session

(Bucharest, 29 June - 3 July 2024)

I started off my mandate in Autumn 2023 by engaging in discussions – both online and in person – with the five Central Asian OSCE PA delegations and the delegation of Mongolia in order to listen to their expectations from me as Special Representative on Central Asia and to find common issues which can bring them closer together. This was a highly-rewarding process, during which they reaffirmed their interest to continue to engage with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, to use this as a forum to promote inter-parliamentary dialogue and co-operation, and to share their perspectives on recent geopolitical developments as well as global challenges.

I travelled to Vienna to meet with the representatives of the six Permanent Missions of Central Asia and Mongolia as well as experts of the Central Asia desk of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre at the OSCE Secretariat. I also held online meetings with the heads of three of the five Field Operations in Dushanbe, Astana and Bishkek to learn more about their activities in support of host countries and parliaments. A meeting of members of Central Asian PA delegations was also convened on the sidelines of the Autumn Meeting in Yerevan in November 2023. These discussions enabled me to better understand how the OSCE PA 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.

In my discussions with Central Asian stakeholders, a few areas of special interest to Central Asian countries and Mongolia were highlighted. Reinforcing the efficacy of parliamentary systems was one of the main issues raised. There was a shared interest in enhancing transparency, oversight, and accountability within the legislative processes of Central Asian states and Mongolia, including electoral legislation reform with the input of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Climate change and environmental crises were

identified as important issues where enhanced regional co-operation was needed. The topic of the management of joint water resources and mitigating the impact of the Aral Sea disaster in particular were key topics of interest. The delegations emphasized the importance of developing collaborative strategies to combat climate change and devising sustainable water management solutions tailored to the region's needs.

The importance of inclusive governance was also highlighted, particularly through the development of strategies and policies to ensure the active involvement and representation of women and youth in public and political spheres.

At our joint meeting on the sidelines of Winter Meeting in Vienna in February 2024, the Central Asian Members underlined the new atmosphere of co-operation prevailing in the region which is making it possible to discuss complex and controversial topics such as the issue of water resource management where there is a shared interest to find solutions. They also welcomed my proposal to carry out a visit to the region in April focusing on climate change and water management.

Field Visits to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (April 2024)

Following consultations with all five Central Asian delegations, I decided to visit Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in April with a focus on enhancing regional cooperation in the areas of:

- addressing the multifaceted impacts of climate change;
- enhancing the joint management of water and the use of water resources of transboundary rivers;
- and promoting accessible clean energy resources.

I also suggested addressing the intend to discuss issues of promotion of the effective participation of women and youth in political life during the visit.

While I carried out the visit to Turkmenistan on my own, for the Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan visits I invited each of the Central Asian delegations to nominate one Member to join me in order to strengthen dialogue and the mutual exchange of best practice. Furthermore, in order to streamline the outcomes of this initiative in the work of our Assembly, the Rapporteur of the OSCE PA General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology, and Environment, Ms. Gudrun Kugler (Austria), and OSCE PA Vice-President and Special Representative on Climate Change, Mr. Pere Joan Pons (Spain), were also invited to join our delegation.

Turkmenistan (5-6 April 2024)

The visit to Turkmenistan provided a valuable opportunity to enhance our co-operation and discuss critical issues affecting the region. I met with several high-ranking officials and representatives from various sectors, including the Speaker

of the Parliament, representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Environmental Protection, the State Water Resources Committee, the Women's Union, as well as the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) and Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat Amb. John MacGregor.

Turkmenistan has shown commendable dedication to addressing climate change, as evidenced by its commitments at COP28 in Dubai. The country aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent by 2030 and has joined the Global Methane Pledge. I emphasized the importance of implementing these commitments and shared insights from other countries' experiences, highlighting the role of youth and the need for a change in behaviours to support the green transition.

Our discussions on climate change highlighted the pressing challenges Turkmenistan faces, including extreme temperatures, desertification, and water scarcity. Turkmenistan's efforts to modernize its industrial infrastructure and national legislation to meet international environmental standards were particularly noteworthy. I learned about their National Climate Change Strategy and their commitment to adhering to the Paris Agreement. The country is also investing in renewable energy, with a focus on solar and wind power, leveraging its natural advantages to reduce emissions and promote sustainable development.

While Turkmenistan's ambitious green agenda is commendable and crucial for regional and global environmental health, the key to achieving a successful green transition lies in effective implementation. Both Turkmen authorities and international development partners must prioritize and focus on the practical steps needed to realize these commitments. The broad participation of people in the process of transition is key for effective implementation.

Water management emerged as another critical area of focus. As with other countries in the region, Turkmenistan faces challenges related to water, exacerbated not only by climate change, but also with complicated regional water management also influenced by developments in neighbouring Afghanistan. I had interesting discussions with my counterparts about the necessity of effective water management and transboundary co-operation. There was a shared understanding of the need to modernize water infrastructure and to leverage international expertise to enhance water resources management.

The importance of regional co-operation in addressing climate-related challenges was also emphasized during my visit. The recent high-level meeting of Central Asian Environmental Ministers in Ashgabat with OSCE Secretary-General Helga Maria Schmid was a significant step forward. We discussed the potential establishment of a Regional Centre on Climate Change Technologies in Ashgabat, which could serve as a hub for innovation and collaboration in tackling climate

issues. Turkmenistan's leadership in this area is crucial, and I reaffirmed our continued support in facilitating regional dialogue and co-operation.

The promotion of women's rights and youth empowerment were also prominent topics during my visit. I had a chance to discuss Turkmenistan's achievements in this area, including the adoption of a National Action Plan on Gender Equality and active involvement in regional initiatives. I encouraged authorities to consider the establishment of Women's Resource Centres, akin to those which already exist in other Central Asian countries and are supported by OSCE, to further support victims of domestic and gender-based violence and promote women's economic empowerment.

The importance of regional co-operation and dialogue was a recurring theme during this visit. Turkmenistan's role in promoting regional stability and its commitment to neutrality were highlighted as significant assets. The discussions underscored the potential for increased co-operation within the framework of the OSCE PA, particularly in addressing shared challenges such as climate change and water management.

This visit reaffirmed the strong foundation of the co-operation between Turkmenistan and the PA. I am confident that our discussions will pave the way for more targeted and effective collaboration with a view to addressing the needs of Central Asian states and enhancing regional security and co-operation. During my meeting with the Speaker of the Parliament, H.E. Ms. Dunyagozel Gulmanova, who expressed very strong support for the work of the OSCE PA, agreed on further joint initiatives. These included the preparation of a joint Supplementary Item on Climate Change in Central Asia, a Central Asia focused side-event during the OSCE PA Annual Session in Bucharest and a joint conference in Ashgabat in November 2024, that will provide a further platform to advance these important issues, focusing on the theme of future generations and climate change. I look forward to continuing our work together and supporting Turkmenistan in its efforts to achieve sustainable development and regional stability.

Kazakhstan (8-10 April 2024)

In Kazakhstan, I was joined by Ms. Ainur Argynbekova (Kazakhstan), Ms. Dilorom Fayzieva (Uzbekistan) and Ms. Mirgul Temirbaeva (Kyrgyz Republic) as well as Vice-President Pons. The Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan had put together a very comprehensive programme in Astana and Almaty for which we were very grateful including with Chairperson of the Senate and head of the PA delegation H.E. Maulen Ashimbayev and additional representatives of both chambers of Kazakhstan's parliament, officials from the ministries of foreign affairs; water resources and irrigation; energy; ecology and natural resources; culture; and the national commission on women, family and demographic affairs.

Our delegation also met with the Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Astana, Dr. Volker Frobarth, and representatives of the international community.

In our discussions in Astana and Almaty, we learned about the severe impacts of the Aral Sea disaster on the health of the local populations (8-9 million people are affected) and the environment. Ms. Akmaral Alnazarova, Minister of Healthcare and former PA Member, underlined the regional nature of the Aral Sea crisis which Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have committed to addressing together, and shared some of the initiatives planned by Kazakhstan under its three-year presidency of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) until 2026. She expressed the willingness of the Kazakh authorities to co-operate with the OSCE PA in countering the negative effects of this disaster and finding solutions. One particular area where more support is needed is further research and monitoring of the effects on the health of local populations to enable authorities to develop adapted responses including socially supportive measures.

We also learned that the Caspian Sea, too, is shrinking and could suffer the same fate as the Aral Sea, threatening the livelihoods and food security of millions of people, if urgent actions are not taken.

Kazakhstan has also developed an ambitious plan to tackle greenhouse gas emissions, joining the global methane pledge and planning to become carbon neutral by 2060. The new environmental code adopted in 2021, which contains goals for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, is an important step in the right direction. It is also investing in solar and wind power and is also looking into green hydrogen. However, it has yet to overcome reliance on fossil fuels: indeed, coal power generation currently accounts for 70 per cent of the electricity generated. The ageing energy infrastructure of the country and the availability of cheap fuel represents important obstacles, as we heard during our discussions with the Vice-Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources.

Kazakhstan has recently created a new Ministry on Water Resources and Irrigation, and is also planning to adopt a new Water Code to encourage the use of water saving technologies. It is also drawing on the know-how of other countries in the area of new irrigation technologies in the field of agriculture. The Ministry also plans to introduce differential water usage tariffs in agriculture to encourage a more efficient use of water resources.

Our interlocutors stressed the need to engage in dialogue with Afghanistan over the Qosh Tepa Canal currently being built on the Amu Darya river. While the importance of this project for Afghanistan is recognized, there is great concern due to significant water losses because of the primitive technology and the expected significant negative impact on water flow for Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan especially.

The leadership of Kazakhstan is promoting regional co-operation in the areas of climate change and water resource management is commendable. Kazakhstan is planning two major initiatives in the area of climate change and water management: the “One Water Summit” (New York, September 2024) under UN auspices together with French President Macron, and a regional climate summit in 2026, also under UN auspices.

Kazakhstan has made significant strides in the area of gender equality. The good level of co-operation between Kazakhstan and the OSCE for over 30 years in the area of gender issues, the political participation of women and combating domestic violence was underlined by our interlocutors at the National Commission on Women and Demographics. We were informed of an upcoming debate in the Senate on a law on the criminalization of domestic violence, women’s rights and violence against children. We agreed that while the adoption of legislation was an important step, more complex measures are needed to tackle this serious issue which affects many of our countries as well.

Kazakhstan is also actively promoting the participation of youth, who account for 30 per cent of the country’s population. Kazakhstan has introduced a Youth Development Index and in 2022 established a Council on Youth Policy with the mandate to develop recommendations.

Uzbekistan (11-12 April 2024)

After Kazakhstan, our delegation travelled to Tashkent where we were joined by Ms. Gudrun Kugler, Rapporteur of the OSCE PA General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology, and Environment. We met with the First Deputy Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of Uzbekistan and Head of the PA Delegation Mr. Sadik Safoev, and additional Members of Parliament, as well as with officials from the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change; and the Ministry of Water Resources.

Mr. Safoev confirmed his country’s commitment to inter-parliamentary dialogue and to engage in the activities of the OSCE PA and invited the PA to observe the upcoming parliamentary elections. He furthermore expressed his appreciation for the topics selected for this visit, underlining the importance of ecology and the need to jointly address transboundary issues such as the Aral Sea disaster. Mr. Boriy Alikhanov, Chair of the Committee on Development and Ecology of the Aral Sea region of the Senate and a Chair of the ecological party, provided an in-depth and sobering presentation on the challenges related to climate change with a focus on the Aral Sea and how the drastic decrease in water levels has led to dramatic change in the region’s climate. Once the fourth largest lake in the world, the Aral Sea started shrinking in the 1960s after the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers that fed it were diverted as part of Soviet irrigation projects. Each year, the

Aral Sea basin generates 100 million tons of sand and dust as well as pollutants such as fertilizers and pesticides as well as salt rain. The declaration in May 2021 of the Aral Sea region as a “zone of ecological innovations and technologies” by the UN General Assembly paved the way for the development of innovative projects to mitigate the impacts of this disaster. We also discussed how Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are working together to rehabilitate the Aral Sea region, including at the parliamentary level through a joint committee of the senates of the two countries.

Another impact of climate change which we discussed was the melting of glaciers as a result of climate change which is also affecting water scarcity in Uzbekistan and the Central Asia region as a whole.

Mr. Alikhanov also drew attention to the issue of climate refugees: indeed, by 2050, there are expected to be more than 220 million climate migrants globally.

On a more positive note, we also discussed the power of parliamentarians to have a positive impact on reducing air pollution by enacting legislation and to share public opinion on environmental causes. The importance of parliamentary oversight in the area of SDG implementation was also emphasized.

As a testament to the importance which Uzbekistan attaches to these pressing issues, a new Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change was established in 2023. Uzbekistan, too, is taking a number of important initiatives with the support of parliament, to advance the environmental agenda in the region. As underlined by Vice-Minister Kazbekov, the environment does not recognize borders. Uzbekistan is making efforts to transition to a green economy, with the ambition to increase its share of green energy from 10 per cent to 30 per cent by 2030. Uzbekistan is also increasing the share of protected areas and implementing a vast project to plant 200 million trees as part of the President’s Green Nation initiative. The good level of co-operation with its neighbours including Kazakhstan, for example in the area of water quality monitoring was also highlighted.

The issue of the Qosh Tepa canal in Afghanistan was raised too, with interlocutors noting that Uzbekistan was under pressure to increase water efficiency through the use of water saving technologies in agriculture.

We were able to learn more about reforms in the water sector and the development of water saving technologies such as the drip irrigation system and smart water devices during our meeting with officials of the Ministry of Water Resources. One challenge is the lack of qualified personnel in the area of water management which Uzbekistan is addressing by training staff and opening schools for water specialists.

In the area of legislation, as part of the 2023 amendments to the Constitution of Uzbekistan, according to Article 49, everyone has the “right to a favorable

environment, reliable information about its condition”. The State also undertakes to implement measures to improve, restore and protect the environment, and to restore and protect the ecological system, social and economic development of the Aral Sea region. I also encouraged Uzbekistan to accede to the Aarhus Convention in order to strengthen citizens’ access to information. This would require further capacity-building of institutions to handle requests we were told.

Uzbekistan is currently upgrading its law on environmental impact assessments. It is also considering adopting a water code and an environmental code, with the input of the OSCE and also by drawing on the experience of Kazakhstan and other countries.

We also visited a new think-tank established following an initiative of Uzbekistan President Mirziyoyev – the International Institute of Central Asia (IICA) to discuss how the Central Asian countries are addressing climate change and jointly promoting a green agenda. IICA Deputy Director Fayziev remarked that external challenges such as climate change have encouraged the Central Asian countries to unite and resolve their bilateral issues. He singled out the Central Asia Plus initiative as a strong, multilateral platform which can act as a tool for mitigating regional conflicts.

The programme in Tashkent came to a close with a visit to the Office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan where Amb. Antti Karttunen and his staff briefed us on the activities of his office in all three dimensions, with a focus on the second environmental dimension and highlighted areas for further engagement of the OSCE and the OSCE PA.

On 12 April we flew to Nukus and travelled onwards to Moynaq, in Northern Karakalpakstan – an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan. Once a thriving fishing community and Uzbekistan’s only port on the Aral Sea, it is now 150 km from the water in the Aralkum desert. We visited a museum dedicated to Moynaq’s past, and discussed rehabilitation with the Member of the Council of Karakalpakstan responsible for tourism. Standing in the middle of a desert contemplating the rusting fishing ships stuck in the sand and bracing against the sandstorm was a stark contrast to the images of the city’s former glorious past captured in the photographs in the museum. It also created a very strong impact on all the members of our delegation. The fate of the Aral Sea should serve as a cautionary tale to the whole world about the tragic consequences of policies implemented with complete disregard for the potentially catastrophic and irreversible consequences which they may have not only on the environment but also on the people which they were meant to benefit. During our exchanges I emphasized how important it is to invest in educational programmes on this manmade disaster.

Resolution and Side Event on “Addressing the Multifaceted Impacts of Climate Change and Water Scarcity in the Central Asian Region through Enhanced Regional Co-operation and Parliamentary Dialogue”

Based on the discussions during this visit and the ideas put forth for enhancing regional co-operation on these matters, and together with the input of the Central Asian delegations, I elaborated a draft resolution on “Addressing the Multifaceted Impacts of Climate Change and Water Scarcity in the Central Asian Region through Enhanced Regional Co-operation and Parliamentary Dialogue”. I hope that this item will serve to raise awareness within the Assembly about the challenges which the region is facing as a result of climate change and water scarcity, and the catastrophic consequences of the human-made Aral Sea disaster for the populations and the environments of the region.

This resolution also aims to highlight some of the positive initiatives taken by Central Asian countries to address these challenges and to promote the green energy transition. It contains concrete recommendations on the steps which OSCE participating States should take to address these pressing problems which, if left unaddressed, will have severe consequences not only for Central Asia but for the OSCE region more broadly and the planet as a whole. It calls upon OSCE participating States to support initiatives in Central Asia aiming at the promotion of sustainable water management practices, restoring ecosystems, enhancing disaster preparedness and response mechanisms, and providing support for affected communities to build resilience and secure livelihoods in the face of ongoing environmental changes. It also urges the OSCE participating States, international financial institutions, the private sector, investors, donors, and other pertinent stakeholders to sustain efforts in mobilizing resources and offering capacity-building support and assistance to tackle effective, water-saving and climate-resilient infrastructure for the people as well as the environmental challenges in Central Asia.

Regional co-operation is key to addressing these challenges, as is awareness-raising of the populations of the region of the causes and consequences of climate change starting from primary school. OSCE parliamentarians also have an important role to play in spearheading initiatives to mitigate the impacts of climate change and addressing water scarcity.

I have also organized a side event on the margins of the Annual Session in Bucharest to discuss these topics further, together with the five Central Asian OSCE PA delegations and with the participation of Ambassador Bakyt Dzhusupov, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Ambassador Askhat Orazbay, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, Dr. Volker Frobarth, Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Astana, and OSCE PA Vice-President and Special Representative on Climate Change Pere Joan Pons.

Gender Equality and Youth Representation

Promoting gender equality and youth participation is also high on the political agenda in Central Asia.

In Kazakhstan, following legal amendments, political parties must now nominate at least 30 per cent of female and/or young candidates/and or persons with disabilities. This quota also applies to the distribution of seats. While these are very positive steps, women remain under-represented in parliament. In fact, their share went down from 26 per cent to 18 per cent following the March 2023 parliamentary elections which were held according to a new mixed-electoral system.

In Uzbekistan, the number of women in the parliament formed after the 2019 parliamentary elections doubled (32 per cent) thanks to a 30 per cent gender quota according to which at least thirty per cent of the total number of candidates nominated by a political party must be women. This quota does not apply to the allocation of seats.

Still, there is an underrepresentation of women in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan's public and political life. This highlights the need to better understand the obstacles to the participation of women in political life and to implement additional reforms to complement parliamentary quotas.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, similarly to Kazakhstan, the 30 per cent gender quota for candidates competing in the proportional race was insufficient to advance equal representation of women and men in parliament due to the recently re-introduced mixed electoral system and the low share of women candidates in the majoritarian races. The share of women in the parliament formed after the November 2021 elections was thus 21 per cent.

There are no quotas in Tajikistan or Turkmenistan to enhance the share of women or youth in parliament. Still, in the March 2020 elections to the *Majlisi Namoyandagon* (lower chamber) in Tajikistan, the share of women increased from 19 to 22 per cent. In Turkmenistan, the share of women in the unicameral *Mejlis* formed after the March 2023 parliamentary elections was 25.6 per cent.

Mongolia has recently introduced a 30 per cent gender quota for all candidates, gender parity on proportional lists, and financial incentives for increased women participation. It will be interesting to see what impact these measures will have on the parliament to be elected on 28 June.

I encourage Members from the Central Asian delegations and Mongolia 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.

As the PA's former Special Representative on Youth Engagement, I would like to also 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. In my discussions with the Members of the OSCE PA Central Asian delegations and other key stakeholders, the importance of nurturing the next generation of leaders was repeatedly emphasized. Proposals for concrete support included educational initiatives aimed at equipping young parliamentarians with essential skills in budget management and anti-corruption measures.

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.

In July 2023, 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 OSCE PA's work on national parliaments.

Members of the delegation of Turkmenistan to the OSCE PA are already part of this network. I would like to encourage other Central Asian delegations to encourage more young people to get involved in the work of OSCE PA.

This past year I participated in several events aimed at promoting the participation of women and youth in political life and in addressing a number of current challenges.

I had the great pleasure to contribute to the Model OSCE event organized by OSCE for young people from Central Asia on 25-29 September 2023. The five-day 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 of the positive changes in the region. In my work I will encourage greater attention in our Assembly to young people and their meaningful political participation.

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

That same day, I addressed 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 highlighted OSCE PA initiatives which seek to promote the inclusion of women and youth in implementation of the SDGs.

On 11 December 2023, Ashgabat hosted an international forum on 11 December on “Dialogue as a Guarantee of Peace” which I had the honour to address remotely. In my remarks I focused on preventive diplomacy as an instrument of conflict prevention, emphasizing that effective dialogue requires honest engagement, action and accountability, and called for bolstering dialogue, integrating it into a broader strategy encompassing diplomatic, economic, and legal tools to prevent conflict and promote peace. I also mentioned our OSCE PA Special Representatives who play an important role in facilitating inter-parliamentary dialogue on key regional or thematic priorities, for instance, our Special Representatives on Gender Issues and Youth Engagement who advance these agendas within national parliaments, advocating for direct participation of women and youth in peace processes. I also underlined that, in my capacity as the Special Representative on Central Asia, I focus on fostering parliamentary dialogue and co-operation among Central Asian states and Mongolia on addressing challenges such as climate change and environmental threats, and promoting peaceful solutions through dialogue.

Regional Co-operation

I am pleased to report positive developments in the area of parliamentary diplomacy and regional co-operation between parliaments of Central Asia. Effective regional co-operation is essential for addressing common challenges such as security threats, economic development, and environmental sustainability. The parliamentary dimension of this co-operation plays a crucial role in fostering dialogue, ensuring accountability, and promoting shared legislative frameworks that can enhance stability and prosperity in the region. Most of the challenges that Central Asian countries are facing today are of a transboundary nature. Only through enhanced co-operation and regional integration can countries develop sustainable and long-term solutions.

The notion of a common cultural and historical space which needs to unite in order to address common challenges is gaining ground. Regional co-operation and integration has indeed seen significant progress in recent years, marked by increasing collaboration among the countries in various domains. There have been annual consultative meetings of Heads of State since 2018. These have played a pivotal role in this development, providing a platform for dialogue and decision-making on critical regional issues. These meetings have brought together the leaders of the Central Asian countries to discuss and co-ordinate policies on security, economic development, environmental sustainability, and cultural exchange. The outcomes of these consultative gatherings include agreements on enhancing border security, facilitating trade and investment, and jointly managing water and energy resources. Such high-level engagements have fostered a spirit of co-operation and mutual trust, contributing to a more integrated and cohesive Central Asia. Despite ongoing challenges, these efforts reflect a strong commitment to regional solidarity and a shared vision for a prosperous future.

In recent years, the countries of Central Asia have increasingly developed joint positions and presented their policies as a cohesive region, a trend evident in the “Central Asia Plus” format. The “Central Asia Plus” meetings are a series of dialogues and co-operative frameworks that include Central Asian countries and external partners such as Japan, South Korea, the United States of America, the European Union, and China. These meetings aim to strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations, address regional challenges, and promote co-operation on economic, security, and cultural matters. They provide a platform for Central Asian countries to engage with major global powers, leverage foreign investment, act as a unified region and gain support for regional initiatives. A similar format is also developing in OSCE fora. OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid recently met with Environmental Ministers from Central Asian countries to discuss the implications of climate change for regional security and stability, focusing on issues such as transboundary water management, energy security, and disaster risk reduction. These discussions are the continuation of the meeting between Central Asia Foreign Ministers and the OSCE Secretary General in 2023 and part of the OSCE's broader efforts to support sustainable development and security in the region.

At the fourth consultative meeting of Heads of State in the Kyrgyz Republic in July 2022, a decision was made to hold an Inter-Parliamentary Forum of Central Asian states. The role of parliamentarians in maintaining good neighbourly relations and in promoting regional co-operation was underlined at this Forum held in Turkistan, Kazakhstan, in February 2023, and attended by parliamentarians from all five Central Asian states. Kazakhstan's Senate Chairman Maulen Ashimbayev, who also heads the OSCE PA Delegation, has advocated holding this forum annually outside of the capitals, in cities of historical and cultural significance. Uzbekistan agreed to host the next Forum in Samarkand.

I would like to highlight a number of areas where regional co-operation is strong and where mechanisms have been established, notably on gender, the environment, and trade.

There is indeed a consensus that the environment does not recognize any borders and that only through joint action can challenges such as climate change and transboundary environmental issues be effectively addressed. This was exemplified by the common Central Asian pavilion entitled “One Region – One Environment” at the UN Climate Change Conference held in December 2023 (COP28). A similar approach is expected for the upcoming COP29 in Baku in November 2024.

I have highlighted the work of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) above and hope that the side event in Bucharest on 2 July which will be attended by Ambassador Askhat Orazbay will serve to draw attention to the excellent work being done.

I would like to also mention another excellent and competent institution, the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) in Almaty, which we visited in April. This is an independent, non-profit international organization established in 2001 with the mandate to assist the governments of Central Asia, regional and international partners in solving problems of environmental protection and sustainable development in Central Asia and in Afghanistan. CAREC is the leading regional knowledge centre in this field and I encourage you to make use of their expertise, for example in the area of integrated water management and water education. CAREC is also involved in the Women in Water Diplomacy Forum in Vienna which is supported by the OSCE Secretariat.

Stronger ties are also being established between women parliamentarians in the region with the aim to advance women's economic, social, and political empowerment in Central Asia and across the Asian continent. There are also initiatives to connect women parliamentarians in preventing and countering violent extremism.

The OSCE PA needs to be more sensitive to the difficult geopolitical situation which the countries of Central Asia find themselves in. We need to pay more attention to the region and invest in regional integration which also respects sovereignty and various national interests.

I very much value the current spirit of openness, the good level of collaboration between the host authorities and OSCE Field Operations, as well as the readiness for constructive co-operation.

I will continue to advocate for the excellent work which the OSCE Field Operations are carrying out in Central Asia. In each of the countries of Central Asia which I have visited in my current or previous capacities, OSCE Field Operations are seen as crucial partners by host governments in strengthening democratic institutions

and building resilient societies. The Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities is also an important partner and source of expertise in the area of water management, disaster risk reduction, environmental governance, and gender issues, to name a few.

Upcoming Activities

I am pleased to share with you that Ashgabat will again host a parliamentary conference from 21-22 November 2024 focusing on our responsibility towards future generations. Climate change will be one of the topics addressed. I encourage you all to participate in this initiative.

As part of an initiative to enable PA Members to learn more about the important work of OSCE Field Operations, the OSCE PA is also planning a visit to one of the Field Operations in Central Asia during the first half of 2025.

While we unfortunately are not able to observe the 28 June 2024 parliamentary elections in Mongolia due to the clash with the Bucharest Annual Session, I welcome the decision to deploy an election observation mission to Uzbekistan for the parliamentary elections expected to be held on 27 October. We have enjoyed excellent co-operation with Uzbekistan in the past and I hope that there will be strong interest on the part of PA Members to participate in this mission.

I similarly encourage Members of the Delegations of Central Asia and Mongolia to join the many 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.

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 Activities

(as of 26 June 2024)

I. Engagement with PA Delegations and Other Stakeholders

A. Bilateral Meetings with 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

- Turkmenistan (*online, 25 October 2023*):
 - Ms. Dunyagozel GULMANOVA, Speaker of the Mejlis, Head of Delegation
 - Mr. Begmurat MUHAMEDOV, Member of Delegation

- Tajikistan (*online, 25 October 2023*):
 - Mr. Saidmurod FATTOHZODA, Head of Delegation

B. Joint Meetings of PA Delegations from Central Asia and Mongolia

1. OSCE PA Autumn Meeting (Yerevan, 19 November 2023)

- Kyrgyz Republic:
 - Mr. Temirlan MARISHOV, Secretary of Delegation
 - Ms. Guljamal TOKOMBAEVA, OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek

- Kazakhstan:
 - Mr. Zhanbolat ZHORGENBAYEV, Alternate Member of Delegation
 - Ms. Zhanna SAGINOVA, Secretary of Delegation

- Tajikistan:
 - Mr. Najibullo OKILZODA, Secretary of Delegation
 - Ms. Nigina ABDULLAEVA, OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe

- Turkmenistan:
 - Mr. Begmurat MUHAMEDOV, Member of Delegation, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee
 - Mr. Batyr BAYLYYEV, Member of Delegation
 - Ms Menli DIVANOVA, Member of Delegation

- Uzbekistan:
 - Ms. Malika KADIRXANOVA, Acting Head of Delegation (Member of Delegation)
 - Mr. Nodir TILAVOLDIEV, Member of Delegation
 - Mr. Ildar AZIZOV, Secretary of Delegation

2. OSCE PA Winter Meeting (Vienna, 22 February 2024)

- Kyrgyz Republic:
 - Mr. Daniyar TOLONOV, Member of Delegation
 - Ms. Aigul AIDAROVA, Alternate Member of Delegation
 - Mr. Zamirbek MAMASADYKOV, Alternate Member of Delegation
 - Mr. Temirlan MARISHOV, Secretary of Delegation
 - Ms. Guljamal TOKOMBAEVA, OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek
- Kazakhstan:
 - Ms. Ainur Argynbekova, Alternate Member of Delegation
- Tajikistan:
 - Ms. Nigina ABDULLAEVA, OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe
- Turkmenistan:
 - Mr. Yusupguly ESHAYEV, Member of Delegation
 - Mr. Gurbanmyrat GORMEKOV, Alternate Member of Delegation
- Uzbekistan:
 - Mr. Ravshanbek ALIMOV, Member of Delegation
 - Mr. Nodir JUMAEV, Member of Delegation
 - Mr. Ildar AZIZOV, Secretary of Delegation

C. Bilateral meetings with Heads of Permanent Missions to the OSCE

- Amb. Mukhtar TILEUBERDI, Head of the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan (Vienna, 5 October 2023)
- Amb. Hemra AMANNAZAROV, Head of the Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan (Vienna, 5 October 2023)
- Amb. Abat FAYZULLAEV, Head of the Permanent Mission of Uzbekistan (Vienna, 5 October 2023)
- Amb. Tolendy MAKEYEV, Mr. Abat FAYZULLAEV, Head of the Permanent Mission of Kyrgyzstan (Vienna, 6 October 2023)
- Amb. Idibek KALANDAR, Head of the Permanent Mission of Tajikistan (Vienna, 6 October 2023)
- Mr. Munkhbaatar DAVAASAMBUU, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Mongolia (Vienna, 6 October 2023)
- Amb. Bakhtior IBRAGIMOV, Head of the Permanent Mission of Uzbekistan (Vienna, 21 February 2024)

D. Meeting with the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre - Central Asia Desk *(Vienna, 6 October 2023)*

E. Bilateral meetings with Field Operations in Central Asia *(online, 24 November 2023)*

- Mr. Jukka TUONONEN, Acting Head of OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe
- Dr. Volker FROBARTH, Head of OSCE Programme Office in Astana
- Amb. Alexey ROGOV, Head of OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek

II. Field Visits

- Bilateral visit to **Turkmenistan** (5-7 April 2024)
- OSCE PA High-Level Visit to **Kazakhstan** (Astana, Almaty) and **Uzbekistan** (Tashkent, Nukus, Moynaq – Aral Sea) (8-12 April 2024)

Composition of the Delegation:

- Ms. Farah KARIMI (Netherlands), OSCE PA Special Representative on Central Asia
- Mr. Pere Joan PONS (Spain), OSCE PA Vice-President, OSCE PA Special Representative on Climate Change
- Ms. Gudrun KUGLER (Austria), Rapporteur of the General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment (*Uzbekistan only*)
- Ms. Ainur ARGYNBEKOVA, Deputy Head of the Delegation of Kazakhstan to the OSCE PA
- Ms. Dilorom FAYZIEVA, Member of the Delegation of Uzbekistan to the OSCE PA
- Ms. Mirgul TEMIRBAEVA, Member of the Delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic to the OSCE PA (*Kazakhstan only*)

III. Participation in Conferences, Seminars

- **2023 Central Asian Model OSCE** (*Istanbul, 25-29 September 2023*)
- 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/Tashkent, 30 November 2023*)
- Remarks at the **International Forum “Dialogue as a Guarantee of Peace”**, Thematic Session “Using dialogue as an Instrument of Preventive Diplomacy” (*online/Ashgabat, 11 December 2023*)

IV. Upcoming Activities

- Side-Event on “*Climate Change and Water Scarcity in Central Asia*” (Bucharest, 2 July 2024)
- Participation in the Election Observation Mission to Uzbekistan (27 October 2024)(tbc)
- Parliamentary Conference on Future Generations and Climate Change (Ashgabat, 20-21 November 2024)
- High-Level OSCE PA Visit to an OSCE Field Operation in Central Asia (first half of 2025)(tbc)