

OSCE PA Special Representative on Youth Engagement
Ms. Farah Karimi
Report to the Standing Committee

21st OSCE PA Winter Meeting, Vienna, 25 February 2022

Dear President,

Dear Colleagues,

It was a big pleasure for me to be appointed as the OSCE PA's Special Representative on Youth Engagement in August 2021. My mandate includes advisory to the Assembly on ways to promote the role of youth in peace and security and inclusion of young people in decision-making processes, support of co-operation and promotion of parliamentary diplomacy on the Youth, Peace and Security agenda within the OSCE PA, particularly with young parliamentarians; facilitation with OSCE and non-OSCE counterparts, both national and international, on engagement of young people, participation and advocacy.

Since my appointment, I represented the Assembly at events dedicated to youth issues, while promoting the engagement with young people in the OSCE region.

We are living in a challenging time, with multiple crises such as climate change, shifting geopolitical power relations, and growing economic inequalities that particularly threaten youth and future generations. This is why I am very committed to encouraging young people to get more involved in decision-making processes.

After 6 months of my work, I can see that there are various great efforts within the OSCE region to promote the position of youth in the political sphere. After meetings with various parliamentarians and officials - this included meetings with the Group of Friends of Youth and Security, the OSCE Swedish and Polish CiOs' Special Representatives on Youth and Security, Office of OSCE Secretary General, ODIHR, and the US Helsinki Commission – I can conclude that there really is an enormous urgency to put youth engagement much higher on the agenda.

Following these meetings, four action points that guide my efforts to fulfill my mandate can be formulated:

1. Establishing high level political attention and strategy on youth inclusion, starting with good data on youth, reliable data analysis, and concrete and targeted policies.
2. Establishing improved coordination on youth issues with and between the Secretariat of the OSCE, ODIHR, RFoM, HCNM and OSCE Field Missions.

3. Establishing better accountability mechanisms, at least a transparent and impactful reporting of the work of OSCE on Youth to the Parliamentary Assembly.
4. Establishing a network of young parliamentarians across the OSCE region to represent youth in the assembly and promote integration of young people in decision-making processes.

I would like to strengthen and increase the dialogue on youth issues throughout the OSCE region. Within my mandate, I have worked in order to combine and coordinate these efforts through my dialogues with different bodies, in order to more fruitfully address the policy and implementation challenges in all relevant areas for youth, and create more opportunities for a better youth engagement.

In order to stimulate the conversation on youth and the interaction of young parliamentarians throughout the OSCE region, I have initiated the informal network of young parliamentarians of the OSCE PA. This provides young parliamentarians with a platform for discussion, where the interests of youth both within the Assembly and beyond can be represented. The first meeting of this network took place on December 13th, 2021. The second, in-person meeting, is scheduled to March 2022.

Furthermore, during the reporting period, I have visited Albania, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to meet with local officials and authorities working on youth issues. In Albania, I have participated in the OSCE South East Europe Media Conference: *Journalism in Times of Crisis* and moderated a session dedicated to youth and media, and young journalists. I also had a chance to meet with OSCE Presence in Albania and learn about their great efforts in youth domain. In Uzbekistan, I had meetings with Agency on Youth Affairs and “Yuksalish” Nationwide Movement and met with a group of great young activists in Tshkent. In Kyrgyzstan, I have met with various national authorities dealing with youth issues and learned about Kyrgyzstan’s concept of state youth policy. I have also visited the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek and the OSCE Academy, where I have met with the staff and students and delivered a guest lecture.

I can highlight two important takeaways from these country visits. First, youth policies are becoming more and more important on national agendas. Young people are facing a number of challenges in almost every country: unemployment, lack of opportunities, and violations of human and political rights. And it’s becoming more and more crucial for governments to address these challenges. It is important, however, that young people are also included in the decision-making processes and have a chance to make their voices count in the process of creating the societies they will live in. From experience of many countries, we learned how young people took leadership during very difficult and challenging historical moments, and managed to bring the change. The second takeaway of my visit is the important role that OSCE Field Missions play in support of young people in their respective countries. For the last several years, we can see how youth-oriented projects increased the OSCE activities and I hope this trend will continue. Therefore, I would like to express my full support to the work of OSCE Field Missions who are not only engaged in activities throughout the whole aspects of



OSCE comprehensive security dimensions, but also support young people and the creation of a space for them to engage in policy-making and helping them to build new skills that are needed for active citizens' participation and professional development.

Young people embody our future and therefore they carry the promise of perpetuating and improving the realization of our shared ideals and principles, such as the rule of law, human rights, and democracy. That is why it is crucial that young people are provided with the opportunity to live up to this promise, by involvement in decision making processes and policy development. Young people, however, are regularly confronted with obstacles, including age-based discrimination, structural and legislative barriers, prejudices, and a lack of political will or opportunities. That's why last week I have also initiated an OSCE PA Web parliamentary dialogue on the topic "Youth contribution to strengthening of rule of law, democracy and human rights in the OSCE area". We brought together OSCE PA members, young parliamentarians, OSCE officials and youth-led civil society organizations to discuss how young people can contribute to the strengthening of human rights and democratic institutions and to reflect on the role of parliamentarians in promoting the role of young people in decision-making processes and the strengthening of democratic institutions. The webinar raised a lot of important topics and triggered very fruitful discussions among OSCE PA members. It created a space for learning and the exchange of experience and brought a lot of interesting insights and ideas, that I hope our members will also take with them to discuss in their parliaments. I already know that discussions triggered bilateral exchanges on youth policies, especially in the field of national implementation of UN SCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, and I am sure that such initiatives will be continued.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the world has the largest youth population that it has ever seen. In some countries within the OSCE area, over 50% of the population is youth. Therefore, the contribution of these younger generations is essential in solving our global challenges. I will continue to closely follow developments in the area of youth agenda with OSCE structures, national authorities and, most importantly, with young people to ensure that perspectives and voices of youth will be heard in our Assembly.

Annex I: Overview of main initiatives/activities

#	Event/Meeting	Date(s)
1	Meeting with Ambassador Zannier (Helsinki+50 Project)	07.09.21
2	Meeting with Ms Anastasia Fusco, OSCE Secretariat, Advisor on Youth and Security	22.09.21
3	Meeting with Ms Augusta Featherston, OSCE/ODIHR Democratic Governance Officer and Youth Focal Point	22.09.21
4	Meeting with Ms. Shannon Simrell, U.S. Helsinki Commission Representative in Vienna. (U.S. is Co-Chair of the OSCE's informal Group of Friends of Youth and Security)	22.09.21
5	OSCE PA Meeting with Young Political Leaders – Call for Action - Helsinki +50 project	28.09.21
6	Meeting with Ms Rosaline Marbinah, Sweden OSCE CiO Special Representative on Youth and Security	07.10.21
7	Participation in the OSCE 8 th Annual South East Europe Media Conference Meeting with OSCE Presence in Albania	10-13.10.21
8	Address to the OSCE/ODIHR/MiS Digital Roundtable - Working with and for Youth	20.10.21
9	Address to the OSCE Youth Group of Friends Meeting	29.10.21
10	Visit to Uzbekistan. Meetings with: 1. Agency on Youth Affairs 2. Nation Wide Movement <i>Yuksalish</i> 4. Group of youth representatives and youth NGOs	26.10.21
11	Visit to Kyrgyzstan. Meetings with: 1. Agency on Youth Affairs/Ministry of Culture 2. OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek 3. OSCE Academy in Bishkek	30.11.21
12	Participation in the OSCE Perspectives 2030 Online Academy Meeting	07.12.21
13	OSCE PA Meeting of the Informal Network of Young Parliamentarians	13.12.21
14	Meeting with Poland OSCE CiO Special Representative on Youth and Security, Ms Maria Raczynska	11.02.22
15	Webinar “Youth contribution to strengthening of rule of law, democracy and human rights in the OSCE area”	18.02.22