



OSCE PA Special Representative on Central Asia
Vice-President Pia Kauma
Report to the Standing Committee

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

Dear President

Dear Colleagues,

It is an honour for me to have been appointed last August to act as the President's entrusted representative in a key region for the OSCE. My specific role as **Special Representative on Central Asia** is to encourage active participation by parliamentarians from Central Asian OSCE participating States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) as well as Mongolia in the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to strengthen parliamentarism in the region.

I would like to use this opportunity to briefly report on my recent activities in my capacity as Special Representative.

Last October, I took part in a high-level visit to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, together with PA President Cederfelt and Secretary General Montella. Over the course of two weeks, we met with a broad range of official interlocutors as well as representatives of the OSCE field operations, civil society and the international community. While the implications of the situation in Afghanistan dominated our discussions, I also had the opportunity to engage with a variety of actors on other important issues related to the implementation of political, economic and social reforms in Uzbekistan, with a special focus on the growing role of women and youth.

In Tajikistan, where we visited a Women's Resource Centre, we learned more about how civil society can play a key role in addressing community-based security issues and in empowering women. We also saw how the integration of Afghan refugees can be promoted at the local level through joint educational and vocational activities.

As emphasized during our meetings, the OSCE PA is the ideal forum for parliamentarians from the region to share their experience with other members on a variety of topics.

At the end of November, I returned to the region to take part in the PA's **election observation mission to Kyrgyzstan for the 28 November parliamentary elections**. This was my third participation in an election observation mission in Central Asia in 2021. Kyrgyzstan has seen major changes to its political structure, system, and landscape

over the past year, one of the most notable changes being the move from a parliamentary to a presidential form of government, including a shift to a mixed electoral system, accompanied by a reduction in the number of seats in Parliament from 120 to 90. The effects of this transition remain to be seen but voter disillusionment was apparent. As a strong advocate of parliamentarism, I will continue to monitor developments and to stress the importance of preserving the separation of powers and of strengthening mechanisms for parliamentary oversight. Kyrgyzstan has a rich civil society and has the potential to once again become a leader in the region along the path of democratic transformation.

The events in **Kazakhstan** at the beginning of January caught us all by surprise, as what started as peaceful protests in reaction to the lifting of price caps for liquid petroleum gas on 2 January in the city of Zhanaozen quickly spread to the rest of the country. It was very difficult to ascertain what was happening as internet connections were disrupted and journalists were among those being detained. In a joint [statement on 6 January](#) with President Cederfelt, we deplored the loss of life, condemned the use of violence and called upon all sides to exert restraint and to use dialogue and democratic institutions to resolve grievances. I also called for respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, including peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

I am deeply concerned by reports of unlawful killings, excessive use of force, arbitrary detentions as well as allegations of mistreatment and torture and hope that all necessary steps will be taken to hold accountable all persons responsible for deaths and other abuses.

We are thankful to Vice-President Askar Shakirov for briefing the OSCE PA Bureau later in January about the events that unfolded in his country and I look forward to the more comprehensive briefing which he has offered to organize for the OSCE PA once the official investigation has been completed. I understand that the results of the official investigation will be made public in mid-March when President Tokayev is also expected to make important announcements regarding the course of political and economic reforms in an address to the nation.

As the authorities of Kazakhstan have clearly reiterated their commitment to the values of the OSCE, and have taken care to keep the Organization informed about their responses to the events, I would like to encourage them to allow for a full and independent investigation that would provide transparency both to domestic and international stakeholders. The OSCE and its Institutions can provide support and expertise in these endeavours.

I also look forward to visiting **Kazakhstan** again in the near future, following the reiteration of an official invitation by Minister of Foreign Affairs Tileuberdi to PA President Cederfelt in a meeting last month in Vienna. During my visit I intend to meet with a broad range of interlocutors, including the Ombudswoman as well as civil society representatives.

I intend to then travel onwards to **Kyrgyzstan** to further engage with the new PA delegation and to also reinforce our ties with the **OSCE Academy in Bishkek**, a flagship

OSCE initiative with whom we enjoy a memorandum of understanding to hire recent graduates as part of the OSCE PA Research Assistant programme.

I know that Special Representative on Youth Engagement Farah Karimi is actively engaged with Central Asian counterparts on the **youth** agenda and has already paid an official visit to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Youth engagement is a very important topic in the state policies of Central Asia and I look forward to continue closely working with Ms Karimi and national stakeholders on this topic.

In recent years we have seen increased engagement by the delegation of **Turkmenistan** in the PA's activities. A visit is also on my list of planned activities in order to learn more about ongoing political transformations, although it is difficult to make concrete plans for the moment due to the lack of regular flights. I stand ready to engage with the new leadership following the 12 March snap presidential election.

As a humanitarian catastrophe unfolds in **Afghanistan** and economic collapse looms, compounding the effects of years of armed conflict, drought and the COVID-19 pandemic, the neighbouring countries of Central Asia have not seen massive influxes of refugees, mostly due to their borders remaining closed due to security fears. This is not to say that they have not contributed in other ways. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has relocated to Almaty while the border city of Termez in Uzbekistan has acted as a logistics hub for much-needed humanitarian aid. Tajikistan already hosts a sizeable share of Afghan citizens and has recently announced plans to provide food aid to Afghanistan through international organizations.

However, the lack of safe, legal routes out of the country remains a grave concern. I would like to appeal to all of our countries to provide access to asylum procedures to those who have already fled, to protect the most vulnerable and to refrain from forced returns. While we may have legitimate security concerns, we must nevertheless continue to uphold our international humanitarian commitments.

As the largest regional security organization with a long standing field presence in Central Asia, the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly are in a good position to provide expertise and help counter the spillover effects of the Taliban takeover and the multiple cross-border threats to regional security posed by the export of radical ideologies and foreign terrorist fighters who see in Afghanistan a potential safe haven, as well as transnational crime and the trafficking of illicit drugs, weapons and human beings, to name a few.

We must support Afghan women and girls in particular, so that the hard-earned progress of the past decades is not lost.

Although Afghanistan is not a participating State but a Partner for Co-operation, some projects implemented by our OSCE Field Operations and the Border Management Staff College, which I had the opportunity to visit last October while in Dushanbe, have included participants from Afghanistan in the past. I hope that such inclusive and important initiatives will again be possible in the future.

Afghanistan also faces a critical energy situation. The country has a huge electricity supply gap and is largely dependent upon supplies from Central Asia.¹ Domestic sources, such as hydropower plants and fossil fuels, only meet 22 per cent of the country's energy needs. The other 78 per cent of consumption is supported by imports, primarily from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Since the Taliban took control of the country, electricity bills have not been paid to neighbouring countries, creating a critical energy situation.

In fact, **energy security** is an issue for the whole region. Joint management of water and the use of water resources of transboundary rivers are among the complex issues in Central Asia, a region with rich but unevenly distributed fossil fuels and water resources.

As we witnessed during the latest energy blackout in the Central Asian region at the end of January, which affected millions of citizens in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the solution cannot be found solely based on the national strategies for water and energy use. Rather, it **requires enhanced regional cooperation** to promote sustainable solutions.

I commend the excellent initiative of the Second Committee to organize a web dialogue on "The Clean Energy Revolution and its Implications for the OSCE Region" earlier this month. As I noted in my short intervention, much of the region's natural potential for wind and solar energy capture has yet to be unlocked. Encouragingly, the **transition to clean energy has begun** in Kazakhstan which adopted new environmental legislation in 2021.

Smarter and more innovative technical solutions such as a transition to renewable energy should be considered at the regional level through broader initiatives.

As parliamentarians, we must all work to **safeguard our societies** and to **promote accessible clean energy resources** for all our citizens.

Concluding Remarks

The past year was again a challenging one not only for Central Asia and Mongolia but for the entire OSCE region, due to the events in Afghanistan as well as the continued impact of the COVID pandemic. I will continue to closely follow developments in each of the countries within my mandate and to working together with all of the PA delegations to further facilitate their engagement in the activities of our Assembly and to ensure that their concerns and perspectives continue to be heard within our Assembly.

I look forward to reporting to you again at our Annual Session in Birmingham in July.

¹ Global Times, [Chinese PV suppliers ponder market potential in Afghanistan](#), 10 January 2022 (accessed 26 January 2022).

Upcoming activities

- 24-25 February 2022 (Vienna): Participation in the 21st OSCE PA Winter Meeting.
- 2 March (online): Participation in the PA web dialogue “Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the OSCE region: a parliamentary perspective” organized within the framework of the OSCE PA Call for Action – Helsinki +50 initiative.
- 28-29 March 2022 (Almaty): Participation in the meeting of the IPA CIS Council dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (*in my capacity as Vice-President rather than Special Representative on Central Asia*).
- Second half of April (tbc): Official visit to **Kazakhstan** (Nur-Sultan, Almaty).
- End April (tbc): Official visit to **Kyrgyzstan**, including a visit to the OSCE Academy.
- tbd: Official visit to **Turkmenistan**.
- Ongoing: engagement with the Heads of PA Delegations from Central Asia and Mongolia; Permanent Missions in Vienna; relevant OSCE Secretariat departments, Heads of OSCE Field Operations, OSCE Institutions as well as counterparts within the EU, UN and other relevant international organizations.

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.

Annex II: Overview of main initiatives/activities

- 25 August 2021 (online): Meeting of PA President Cederfelt and PA Special Representative on Central Asia Kauma with the Heads of Delegation of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and Vice-President Askar Shakirov on impact of recent developments in Afghanistan on the neighbouring OSCE participating States of Central Asia, and potential contribution of the OSCE and its PA to address challenges and concerns. The OSCE field presences in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre and the OSCE Secretary General's office were also represented.
- 27 August 2021 (Helsinki): Meeting with OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid and OSCE CPC Director Tuula Yrjölä.
- 13-15 October 2021 (St. Petersburg): participation in the Third Eurasian Women's Forum, including an intervention in the opening plenary session as well as bilateral meetings with representatives of parliaments and international organizations, including former Speaker of the Parliament of Moldova, Zinaida Greceanii; Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan, Tanzila Narbaeva; Chairperson of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus Natalia Kochanova; and Natali German, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Central Asia and Head of the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia. Vice-President Kauma also exchanged with Speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation and CIS IPA President Matvienko on the margins of the forum, as well as Deputy Speaker Konstantin Kosachev.
- 24 October 2021 (Tashkent): EOM to Uzbekistan for the 24 October Presidential Election
- 25-26 October 2021 (Tashkent): High-level visit to Uzbekistan together with President Cederfelt and Secretary General Montella, including meetings with Tanzila Narbayeva, Chair of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis; Nurdinjon Ismoilov, Chair of the Legislative Assembly of the Oliy Majlis; Mr. Gairat Fazilov, Deputy MFA of the Republic of Uzbekistan; Mr. Sadik Safoev, First Deputy Chairperson of the Senate and Head of the Delegation of Uzbekistan to the OSCE PA, and members of the PA delegation; Amb. Pierre Von Arx, OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan, as well as representatives of the international community and civil society.
- 27-29 October 2021 (Dushanbe, Vahdat, Obi-Kiik): High-level visit to Tajikistan, including meetings with Mahmadoir Zokirzoda, Chairman of the Assembly of Representatives of the Supreme Assembly (*Majlisi Oli*) of the Republic of Tajikistan; Mr. Saidmurod Fattohzoda, Head of the Delegation of Tajikistan to the OSCE PA and members of the PA delegation; Mr. Sirojiddin Muhridin, MFA, as well as representatives of the international community and civil society. Visit to the OSCE Border Management Staff College field visit to a youth center in Vahdat, a painting workshop for refugees and a Women's Resource Centre in Obi-Kiik.
- 28 November 2021 (Bishkek): EOM to Kyrgyzstan for the 28 November Parliamentary Elections
- 6 January 2022: statement regarding developments in Kazakhstan: [OSCE PA leaders urge peaceful resolution of unrest in Kazakhstan](#)
- 4 February 2022 (online): Participation in the OSCE PA Parliamentary Web Dialogue "The Clean Energy Revolution and its Implications for the OSCE region"
- 17 February 2022 (online): Meeting with representatives of Human Rights Watch and Open Dialog Foundation regarding the January events in Kazakhstan.