

# The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's 21st Winter Meeting



**2022**  
**24-25 February**

# Contents



- 3 Summary
- 5 Joint Session of the General Committees
- 13 General Committee on Political Affairs and Security
- 21 General Committee on Economic Affairs,  
Science, Technology and Environment
- 27 General Committee on Democracy,  
Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions
- 35 Standing Committee Meeting

# Summary

The 21st Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly took place on 24-25 February 2022 in a hybrid format, with members of the Standing Committee and Special Representatives attending in person in Vienna, and the rest of the OSCE PA members joining online.

High-level OSCE officials addressed the Winter Meeting, including Secretary General Helga Schmid, Chairman-in-Office Zbigniew Rau, ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci, OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt, and OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella, as well as President of the Austrian Parliament Wolfgang Sobotka. With heads of OSCE institutions and other governmental representatives intervening in the general committees, the Winter Meeting served as a valuable opportunity for parliamentarians to interact with the governmental side of the OSCE.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine – which was launched on the opening day of the Winter Meeting – was the primary focus of discussions. In an open debate during the plenary session on 24 February, 28 parliamentarians took the floor, with the vast majority expressing strong opposition to the incursion and concern for the lives of civilians in Ukraine. Parliamentarians called the Russian military operation in Ukraine “indefensible” and a “gross violation of international law,” urging an immediate end to the hostilities and a return to diplomacy.

Opening the discussion, Chairman-in-Office Rau, President Cederfelt, and Speaker Sobotka reiterated the role of the OSCE in facilitating dialogue and building confidence. Sobotka said that OSCE principles are being violated on a broad spec-

trum, and expressed hope that diplomatic relations could be reopened. Foreign Minister Rau said that Russia’s actions constitute “a fundamental breach of the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act.” President Cederfelt stressed the OSCE PA’s steadfast support for the resolution of the conflict based on core OSCE principles such as the inviolability of frontiers and the indivisibility of security.

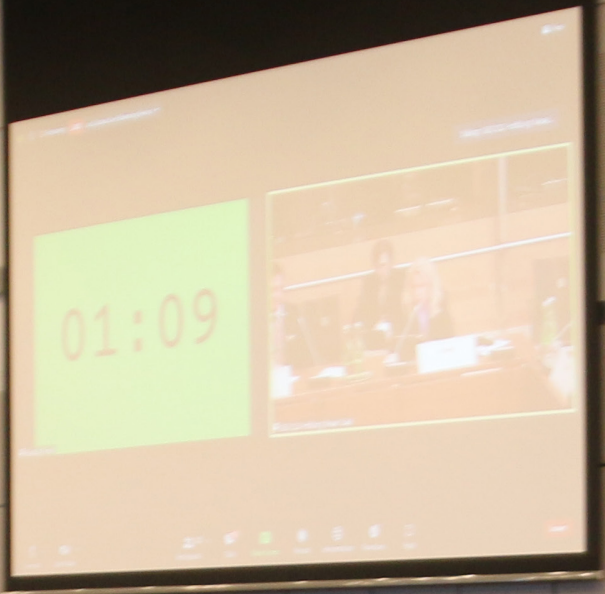
Ukrainian Head of Delegation Mykyta Poturaiev described the dire situation that his country faces, with large-scale military operations in Ukraine’s biggest cities. Several parliamentarians remarked that the recent developments represent a major threat to peace not only in Ukraine but the whole of Europe.

The crisis was also debated in the Standing Committee, where OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid noted that dialogue had been offered by the OSCE and the Polish Chairmanship, but regretted that “Russia chose force over dialogue.”

The PA’s General Committees focused their attention on the issue, with discussions touching on the impacts on the OSCE’s three dimensions of security, informing the preparation of reports and resolutions to be presented at the Birmingham Annual Session in July 2022. Committee members also heard from representatives of the OSCE’s executive structures who briefed the parliamentarians on the work of their offices.

OSCE PA Special Representatives, Chairs of Ad Hoc Committees and leaders of recent election observation missions reported to the Standing Committee on their activities. Standing Committee members also heard a report on the Call For Action – Helsinki +50 Process.





# Joint Session of the General Committees

**M**eeting in a joint session on 24 February, OSCE parliamentarians heard from President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Margareta Cederfelt, and OSCE Chair-in-Office Zbigniew Rau. The Russian invasion of Ukraine featured prominently in their remarks, as well as in the open debate that followed, with most parliamentarians expressing strong opposition to the military operation.

# Joint Session of the General Committees

Address by the President of the  
Austrian National Council,  
Wolfgang Sobotka

In his address, President Sobotka said that Austria condemns Russia's attacks on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, emphasizing that the international community can never concede that "might makes right." The twisting of history, he said, cannot negate the right of Ukraine to its sovereignty and he expressed particular support for the civilians who suffer under hostilities – the ones who suffer first and suffer the most.

Address by the President of the  
OSCE Parliamentary Assembly,  
Margareta Cederfelt

President Cederfelt emphasized the importance of finding solutions to the conflict in Ukraine, stressing the OSCE PA's steadfast support for its resolution of based on core OSCE principles such as the inviolability of frontiers and the indivisibility of security.

"The Russian military invasion of Ukraine is an armed aggression in clear and gross violation



**Today more than ever, parliamentarians must exercise their oversight role, rather than enable their governments to breach international commitments.**

**- President Margareta Cederfelt**

"Today the OSCE principles are being violated on a broad spectrum," Sobotka said. "Our hope is that diplomatic relations should be able to turn the tide and relaunch the Minsk process."

President Sobotka offered mutual assistance and recalled the importance of the OSCE as a platform for dialogue, where States show unity and where parliamentarians must use the tools at their disposal. He underlined his support to the Ukrainian people, particularly the elderly and children suffering from the hostilities.

of the most basic norms of international law and OSCE principles and commitments," President Cederfelt said. "Today more than ever, parliamentarians must exercise their oversight role, rather than enable their governments to breach international commitments. Parliaments must be tools for de-escalation, not weapons of confrontation."

The President noted that mistrust among OSCE PA participating States has impacted security in Europe, and that diplomacy re-



OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt

mained the only tool to build sustainable peace. She invited all participating States to engage in discussions and build the trust needed in achieving the Helsinki principles, recalling that OSCE parliamentarians were guided by a common mission: acting for the well-being of their citizens. Parliaments, Cederfelt said, are tools for de-escalation, not weapons for confrontation, and are needed to bring stability in Europe.

#### Address by the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE and Foreign Minister of Poland, Zbigniew Rau

Addressing the Assembly by video link, Foreign Minister Rau condemned the attack on Ukraine as a violation of international law. "Russia's unprovoked all-out invasion against Ukrainian cities and villages constitutes a fundamental breach of the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act," he said. "Invoking article 51 of the UN Charter to justify this crime against humanity is deplorable and

shameful. We condemn, in the strongest possible words, this act of aggression."

The CiO recalled that the OSCE was designed to prevent another war on the European continent and urged the Russian Federation to honor its international obligations and commitments. "Any sustainable, political solution must fully respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of Ukraine," Rau underscored.

He further emphasized that nations have a right to live in peace and dignity, that security was key for a stable world, and that no State has the the right to use violence and coercive power to advance political goals. Finally, he invited the Russian Federation to take part in a meaningful dialogue in good faith, and noted the importance of the OSCE PA in strengthening multilateralism.

# Joint Session of the General Committees

## Open Debate – Security Guarantees and the Indivisibility of Security in Europe: The Role of the OSCE

During the open debate, Head of the Ukrainian Delegation Mykyta Poturaiev described the dire situation that his country faces, with large-scale military operations in Ukraine's biggest cities. He warned of the consequences of allowing Ukraine to fall, noting in particular the challenges posed to Moldova, Georgia, and the Baltic States. He called on all parliamentarians to take a stand in defence of European security.

Parliamentarians from across the OSCE area expressed alarm over the current security situation, with several remarking that the developments represent a major threat to peace not only in Ukraine but the whole of Europe. This is a time for the Parliamentary Assembly to stand with Ukraine, it was stressed. OSCE parliamentarians underscored that the focus now must be on halting the escalation of conflict and preventing a wider war, urging a return to bilateral and multilateral dialogue. Diplomacy remains relevant, it was emphasized, but sanctions were also called

for as a deterrent. The negative impact of the conflict on Russian citizens was also pointed out.

Russian parliamentarian Tatiana Kusaiko said that the military operation in Ukraine was intended to protect civilians in Donbas. Claiming that the Russian Federation's objective was to bring peace to Ukraine, she said that the military action was the only possible course of action and called for mutual understanding to face common challenges.

Other parliamentarians reiterated the role of the OSCE as a platform for dialogue and urged the full use of its toolbox for resolving the conflict, noting that the invasion was a grave breach of international agreements. The Russian Federation's operation was widely condemned and parliamentarians from across the OSCE region urged an end to the act of aggression. Hostilities should immediately cease and all parties should return to the negotiation table, it was stressed.



Helga Schmid speaks with Margareta Cederfelt and Roberto Montella



President of the Austrian Parliament Wolfgang Sobotka, OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella and Head of the Ukrainian Delegation Mykyta Poturaiev, Vienna, 24 February 2022



# General Committee on Political Affairs and Security

Chaired by Richard Hudson (United States), the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security met on 24 February 2022. The meeting featured presentations by Ambassador Jocelyn Kinnear, Chair of the Security Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE; Ambassador Rovshan Sadigbayli, Chair of the Forum for Security Co-operation and Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the OSCE; Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities; and Laurynas Kasciunas (Lithuania), Rapporteur of the First Committee.



# General Committee on Political Affairs and Security

Richard Hudson,  
Chair of the First Committee

Committee Chair Richard Hudson (United States) noted that dialogue is an important aspect of the OSCE's work, but what's needed for dialogue to be meaningful is a common starting point, and in this regard, there must be respect for the principles forged over years of discussions and consummated in the Helsinki Final Act. In the PA, parliamentarians have always sought to hold each other to account in upholding OSCE values, he said, and therefore the evidence of violations cannot be ignored – particularly when one participating State is attacked by another, as was the case when Russia invaded Ukraine.

Fundamental underpinnings of comprehensive

security, including commitments to respect territorial integrity, sovereignty and the right to choose alliances, are being breached flagrantly and deliberately at this very moment by one participating state conducting an unprovoked invasion of another participating State, the Chair said. He added though that at this moment of deep crisis, with likely consequences for generations to come, there is still a role for dialogue, and therefore the work of the OSCE PA could not be more relevant. Moments of crisis demand parliamentary engagement and exchange of views. Hudson stressed the need to make sure everyone fully understands what is at stake and what can be lost in this potentially pivotal moment in the region's security, while remembering commitments all participating States have pledged to uphold in the Helsinki Final Act.



Ambassador Jocelyn Kinnear, Chair of the Security Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE

Amb. Kinnear began by describing the mandate of the Security Committee and its plans for the year, which she noted were developed before Russia's invasion and therefore would have to adapt to the impact of the war in Ukraine would have going forward. What is clear, she said, is how security challenges faced by the OSCE region are systematically compounded by crises and instability like the COVID-19 pandemic and use of force. It is more important than ever to strengthen collective capacity to deal with security challenges, Kinnear said.

She noted that the Security Committee would remain a forum for substantive and informative discussion, with both geographic and gender balance. She discussed the importance of diversity, gender mainstreaming, and the role of youth in the committee's programme, which she noted would focus on core thematic areas such as cybersecurity, counterterrorism, transnational organized crime, borders and law enforcement.

Other important aspects include combating trafficking, countering terrorism and VERLT, and fighting transnational organized crime. The Security Committee, she said, is also planning to address border security and management, seeking perspectives from Central Asia on this issue. The work of the committee, she underlined, should be complementary and contribute to comprehensive security.

Ambassador Rovshan Sadigbayli, Chair of the Forum for Security Co-operation and Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the OSCE

Amb. Sadigbayli highlighted the priorities of Azerbaijan's Chairmanship of the FSC. He noted that the OSCE's politico-military dimension does not exist in a vacuum, but rather reflects a broader context, and stressed in this regard the unconditional respect for fundamental norms, principles and commitments enshrined in core OSCE documents like the Helsinki Final Act.

The main objective is to uphold and strengthen compliance with fundamental principles and enhance implementation in good faith of politico-military commitments, he said, noting that only through this approach is it possible to restore mutual trust and confidence. He also stressed the importance of reinvigorating the application of instruments and enhancing predictability and transparency.

He pointed to five workshops the FSC has conducted so far on humanitarian law, mine action, SALW/SCA, role of non-aligned countries in European security architecture and counterterrorism. Three more workshops were expected in the coming weeks, he said, focused on topics such as UNSC 1325, conventional arms control and CSBMs, and post-conflict rehabilitation.

Azerbaijan seeks to ensure that the FSC serves effectively as the key platform leading the OSCE's work in the politico-military dimension, Amb. Sadigbayli underscored.

# General Committee on Political Affairs and Security

## Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

It has been 30 years since the creation of the mandate to provide early warning and action to prevent ethnic tensions from turning into conflict, Amb. Abdrakhmanov said, noting that successive HCNMs have assisted participating States in developing and implementing policies that facilitate the integration of diverse societies. Each decade diversity has increased, he said, which requires effective and sustainable policies. How participating States choose to manage the phenomenon might vary, the HCNM said, but the aim is always to strengthen society from within, and in this regard systematic management of diversity is key to ensuring stability.

Since taking up his mandate, Abdrakhmanov has undertaken more than two dozen trips, including to Russia and Ukraine, he pointed out, noting that he always emphasizes the importance of fostering constructive dialogue, sharing best practices and depoliticizing matters related to

national minorities. He also provides advice on national policies that promote integrated and cohesive societies as a means of long-term conflict prevention, but in daily work, focuses on short-term projects aimed at reducing tensions and providing guidelines promoting integration of diverse societies.

Managing diverse societies does not stop at creating legal and institutional frameworks, he pointed out, but also requires systematic management of policies and programmes encouraging representation and participation of national minorities in public life with a view toward increasing their socio-economic and educational opportunities. Particular attention should be paid to youth and women, said Abdrakhmanov, with co-operation essential with OSCE parliamentarians to promote the effective execution of his mandate, proactive outreach.

## Laurynas Kasciunas (Lithuania), Rapporteur of the First Committee

Presenting his preliminary intentions for the report and draft resolution being prepared for the 29th Annual Session in Birmingham, Rapporteur Kasciunas acknowledged that it is difficult to find the right words to capture the shock of one participating State attacking another. The situation in Ukraine is very dangerous, he noted, in flagrant breach of OSCE commitments, and he regretted that diplomacy and international law did not work in preventing Russia's invasion. He

noted that while Moscow demanded security guarantees, Kyiv, Tbilisi and Chisinau also have a right to security, a right that was being violated by Moscow.

Kasciunas said that the lack of commitment by the Russian Federation and Belarus to the main OSCE principles means that mutual accusations and reliance on the use of force once again risk returning us to the adversity of years long

thought past. He emphasized the importance of supporting Ukraine – its independence, unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The rapporteur noted that more than a year had passed since the cessation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, but true peace is yet to be achieved. Within the OSCE, the Minsk Group has worked to facilitate direct dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan and encourage a comprehensive conflict resolution, he said, with the full support of the previous Swedish and incumbent Polish Chairmanships. Kasciunas said that the joint talks held throughout the autumn of 2021 should be commended, it must be noted with regret that no similar meeting was able to occur under the auspices of the Co-Chairs at last year's 28th Ministerial Council. The OSCE PA must call on both sides, he said, to work together to settle disputes regarding the demarcation of the border and the restoration of economic and transport links. In this regard, he expressed his full support to the work of Special Representative on the South Caucasus Kari Henriksen.

The rapporteur also discussed the outstanding issues within Russia-Georgia conflict and the need to resolve the most pressing concerns of conflict-affected populations in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. When it comes to Transdniestria, he regretted that attempts at conflict resolution within the 5+2 format have stalled. OSCE parliamentarians, he said, cannot consider these developments in abstraction, but must understand that people's suffering is a concrete reality that must be urgently addressed. The OSCE PA, as a unique platform for

inter-parliamentary dialogue, can complement traditional diplomatic channels in averting future crises by giving a voice to the marginalized and oppressed, he said.

## Debate

In the debate, OSCE parliamentarians raised issues including Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the South Caucasus regional security issues, Arctic security, hate speech and xenophobia, and illegal drug trafficking.

Head of the Ukrainian Delegation Mykyta Poturaiev said that war crimes were taking place against Ukrainians on a massive scale, drawing attention to the many civilians who had already been killed since the onset of the invasion. OSCE PA Members expressed shock and disbelief over the events in Ukraine, insisting that respect for international law must be restored and that all democracies need to unite in the defence of territorial borders and European security. Urging support for the civilian population, OSCE parliamentarians condemned the Russian attack and rejected Moscow's rationales for the military action, insisting that crises must be settled by diplomatic means.

Members also expressed support for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, noting the particular importance of its collection of unbiased information in the context of the unfolding situation. It was emphasized that the OSCE remains an important platform for dialogue. The work of the OSCE PA is important to building trust between countries, parliamentarians said.

# General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment

On Friday 25 February, General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment met with Pere Joan Pons (Spain) chairing the meeting. Following an address by Chair Pons, the committee heard from Rapporteur Gudrun Kugler, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities Igli Hasani, Head of Economic and Environmental Dimension Unit for the 2022 OSCE Polish Chairmanship Katarzyna Wisniewska-Rosik, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Valiant Richey, and OSCE PA Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues Christopher H. Smith.



# General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment

## Pere Joan Pons, Chair of the Second Committee

In opening the meeting, Pons (Spain) said that these are very difficult days, noting that the news coming from Ukraine was appalling. "Large scale invasions of free, independent countries should never be considered as legitimate means to pursue national security interests," Pons said.

He expressed his full solidarity with Second Committee Vice-Chair Artur Gerasymov (Ukraine) and the Ukrainian people. "At the end of the day, those suffering the most will be innocent civilians," he regretted.

Pons noted that the work of the Second Committee will be affected by these developments, with economic and social distress, energy crisis, mass waves of refugees and environmental damages just some of the likely consequences of the Russian invasion.

Although committee members could not ignore what was happening in Ukraine, the committee decided to proceed with its agenda as originally planned, the Chair said, noting that there would be a special debate on human trafficking in a globalized economy. Calling it a serious crime and grave affront to human dignity, Pons noted that human trafficking also undermines security and weakens economies.

Pons discussed the disruptive effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on growth and development, noting that promoting security and stability in the OSCE area through sustainable economic recovery is a top priority of the committee as well as the broader OSCE.

## Gudrun Kugler, Rapporteur of the Second Committee

Rapporteur Kugler began by expressing her feelings about the Russian invasion of Ukraine. "Wars are for history books and not for the 21st century," she said. Despite the destruction and destabilization being carried out in Ukraine, she noted the importance of OSCE PA committee members continuing their work in the three dimensions of OSCE security.

Focusing on the environment, economy, science and technology is vital for sustainable development for the present as well as for the future, she said. Parliamentarians are in the driver seat for change, Kugler argued, and must co-operate with governments to achieve progress. She advocated joining forces with experts to maximize impact and minimize duplication, noting that in the preparation of her report she consulted with many institutions, stakeholders and representatives in and around OSCE.

Kugler stressed that we cannot afford new forms of "energy poverty," and should keep in mind that climate change must be tackled globally. She also highlighted the need for a strong science policy and noted that there are new emerging security threats that must be addressed within the context of the development of new technology. She prioritizes economic recovery from the pandemic, combating corruption, supporting good governance, protecting the environment, promoting energy security and clean energy, and developing the digitalization agenda.

"We must remember that digital processes must be backed up in essential supplies and critical infrastructure," she said.

## Ambassador Igli Hasani, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities

Amb. Hasani offered an update on his office's main areas of engagement, noting that its primary task is to support the efforts of participating States, and foster dialogue and co-operation to promote sustainable economic growth and environmental security. The Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities supports and provides advice to the Chairmanship and Secretary General, he said, noting that assistance is demand-driven and based on the needs of participating States.

Among the office's top priorities are ensuring mitigation of climate change, combating corruption and money laundering, and promoting dialogue on energy security, including through the development of renewable and sustainable energy. The 2022 Economic and Environmental Forum has received much attention, Hasani said, due to the very relevant theme developed by Polish Chairmanship, "Promoting security and stability in the OSCE area through sustainable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic."

Hasani said that there is a need to increase OSCE-wide synergies, pointing out that when it comes to addressing the repercussions of the pandemic, it is not possible to tackle these alone. All governments must work together, he said, and increase common approaches, including with the scientific sector and civil society. OSCE participating States must intensify dialogue and work towards mitigating climate change and other threats. Parliamentarians have a key role to play, he said, especially in the fight against corruption and ensuring the integrity of public service delivery.

The OSCE is well positioned to support these efforts, he noted.

## Katarzyna Wisniewska-Rosik, Head of Economic and Environmental Dimension Unit for the 2022 OSCE Polish Chairmanship

Addressing the committee on behalf of the Polish Chairmanship, Wisniewska-Rosik noted the OSCE's primary function of preventing conflict. She underlined that Poland is committed to utilizing the second dimension both as a forum for dialogue and to promote common solutions to economic and environmental challenges.

The Chairmanship, she said, is convinced that co-operation with the PA is essential and looks forward to continuing to build this relationship, noting that the PA's work is complementary with the CiO's. She highlighted digitalization and sustainable agriculture as areas of common interest and noted that the Polish Chairmanship is striving to promote continuity with the priorities of the 2021 Swedish Chairmanship, including by ensuring women's participation.

The Polish Chairmanship's priority is promoting security through sustainable economic recovery from the pandemic, she said, which can only be achieved by close co-operation and dialogue. Anti-corruption measures are also essential in order to overcome challenges in the economic and environmental dimension.

To address these issues, Wisniewska-Rosik highlighted the need to make economies environmentally sound, including through the development of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. It is only possible to reach the goal of reducing pollution and reducing the carbon footprint by tackling these issues together, she said.

## General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment



### Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

In a special debate on human trafficking in a globalized economy, Special Representative Richey focused his remarks on the growing reality that many goods and services are produced by victims of human trafficking and forced labour.

The advent of a globalized economy has meant that goods and services are regularly sourced from all corners of the globe through far-reaching supply chains, he said, noting the unfortunate reality that governments, businesses and individuals are undoubtedly buying goods made with exploitation.

Not only is this a human rights problem, he said, but forced labour is also a major problem for businesses that play by the rules, with legitimate

companies undermined and put out of business by unfair competition. Trafficking also fuels organized crime, drives instability, and undermines the rule of law. To combat this problem, he noted that parliaments can contribute to the solution by eliminating the market for goods and services produced by human exploitation, including through informed and ethical purchasing.

He highlighted concrete areas in which parliaments can contribute to reducing the amount of goods and services produced by victims of human trafficking and forced labour, pointing to several legislative tools that parliaments can adopt to follow this principle: import bans, reporting laws, and due diligence laws.

## Christopher H. Smith, OSCE PA Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues

Special Representative Smith highlighted legislation that he has sponsored in the United States Congress, such as the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and Federal Acquisition Regulation's Ending Trafficking in Persons rule, which include provisions that prevents the federal government from inadvertently enabling forms of trafficking in persons. To do so, the law prevents grants, contracts, or co-operative agreements to be provided to a private entity that has procured a commercial sex act or uses forced labour.

Arguing that governments must lead by example, Smith urged other parliaments in the OSCE region to develop similar laws that prevent government employees, contractors, and subcontractors from engaging in trafficking in persons, purchasing commercial sex, or engaging in activities known to lead to human trafficking. These include charging workers recruitment fees, confiscating workers' identity documents, or using misleading and fraudulent recruitment practices.

Smith commended the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for its leadership on this issue, as well as OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid for following through on this commitment, and highlighted the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights handbook on National Referral Mechanisms as a useful tool to strengthen laws and policies to combat human trafficking.

## Debate

Several OSCE parliamentarians took the floor during the open debate to discuss best practices on combating human trafficking, which was described as a modern form of slavery.

Many of the victims are children, it was stressed, and the number of men in forced labor has increased in recent years. Working conditions in forced labour situations are horrifying, it was pointed out, and what is most important is that parliaments create legislation to tackle the issue.

It is also vital to enhance public awareness because people need to know what sort of products they are buying and how they are produced, parliamentarians said during the debate. As a cross-border problem, parliamentarians from different countries must work together, it was stressed.



# General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions

The meeting of the General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions took place on 25 February 2022. Committee members heard presentations by Chair Sereine Mauborgne, Rapporteur Johan Büser, ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci, Ambassador Anne-Kirsti Karlsen, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dmitry Andreyevich Muratov, and OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro. A special debate was held on the topic, “Journalism as a Precondition for Justice and Rule of Law,” featuring the participation of Muratov, Ribeiro, and 12 OSCE parliamentarians.



# General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions

## Sereine Mauborgne, Chair of the Committee

In her opening remarks, Mauborgne (France) recalled the subject of the 2021 Winter Meeting debate on the impact of the pandemic on human rights, which, she reminded her colleagues, still remains a challenge today. She emphasized the actions taken by the Third Committee over the previous year, including joint statements, field visits and active contributions to conferences. She noted the multifaceted approaches taken by the work of the committee, which include addressing thematic issues, focusing on specific and localized issues, and maintaining open dialogue with human rights defenders.

Mauborgne also highlighted that particular attention will be given to human rights in conflict zones in the coming times.

## Johan Büser, Rapporteur of the Committee

Büser (Sweden) presented his ideas and intentions for the report being prepared for the 29th Annual Session in Birmingham. Noting that the ongoing conflict in Ukraine will feature prominently in the report, Büser also highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on human rights, and noted that the decisions taken by governments to contain the spread of the virus have at times exacerbated human rights violations and inequalities. He emphasized the need for parliamentarians to ensure that pandemic response measures will not undermine values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Specifically, Büser presented the following points on which the Third Committee report will focus on:



- The shrinking of the space for civil society, for instance the violence and harassment that women politicians and journalists regularly face;
- Minority rights (LGBTQI, religious minorities, ethnic groups or indigenous people);
- Freedom of press, expression and assembly.

Stressing that additional rights-related issues will be addressed with regard to the Russia-Ukraine war, Büser highlighted the importance of the OSCE PA as a space to develop solutions through dialogue.

In the discussion on Büser's presentation, parliamentarians raised issues including the need to support the victims of war, and particularly the imperative of protecting women and children. European countries must step up to support refugees fleeing from Ukraine, it was stressed.

OSCE PA members also highlighted the need to focus on core human security issues such as education, fundamental freedoms, and health care.

#### Matteo Mecacci, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Director Mecacci highlighted his growing concern for the human impact of the current security crisis in Europe. He stressed the importance of protecting civilians in Ukraine and recalled the human dimension commitments of OSCE participating States.

Noting the disruption caused by the ongoing pandemic, Mecacci underlined the weakening

of the balance of powers and the role of parliaments in building consensus, and of ODIHR in assessing legislative processes. Mecacci mentioned a number of areas of concern for ODIHR:

- Hate crimes, which can escalate into conflicts;
- Right to freedom of peaceful assembly;
- Humanitarian consequences of migration.

In order to meet the challenges in the human dimension, he emphasized the need for adequate financial resources to be allocated to the

#### Ambassador Anne-Kirsti Karlsen, Chair of the Human Dimension Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Norway to the OSCE

In her presentation, Amb. Karlsen highlighted the importance of respecting human rights, media freedom, and rule of law.

She emphasized the role of the human dimension as part of the OSCE's concept of comprehensive security and explained in particular the role of the committee she chairs. Amb. Karlsen provided an overview of the Human Dimension Committee's objectives for 2022 and the fruitful discussions already taking place on promoting the safety of journalists, human rights in the digital era, violence against women, and other key topics.

Amb. Karlsen highlighted the work achieved in 2021 and the co-operation the committee enjoys with the Parliamentary Assembly, saying that she looks forward to more discussions with OSCE parliamentarians.

# General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions

Sereine Mauborgne,  
Chair of the Committee

Opening a special debate on “Journalism as a Precondition for Justice and Rule of Law,” Chair Mauborgne noted the importance of a free press for society, and the role of independent media in supporting the rule of law. She emphasized the role of quality journalism at the national level to ensure that state action is efficient and responsive to the needs of the public, and to protect the liberties of citizens.

Mauborgne highlighted the wave of disinformation on the Ukraine conflict and the need to combat fake news, acknowledging in particular the dangers faced by reporters covering the conflict.

Dmitry Andreyevich Muratov,  
Editor-in-Chief of Novaya Gazeta and  
Nobel Laureate

In a recorded keynote address, Muratov, who received the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize together with Maria Ressa “for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace,” noted the lack of concerted and effective action to stop the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

He emphasized the need for a robust grassroots movement of Russian citizens and others around the world to promote peace and security.





## Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

In her presentation, Ribeiro highlighted violations of OSCE commitments by a troubling number of countries, focusing in particular on the challenges facing journalists in conflict zones such as Ukraine.

She emphasized the importance of freedom of information, which is essential but difficult in times of crisis. A healthy media environment must involve a variety of sources, she said, including independent media. Ribeiro regretted the unacceptable regulations on media covering the Russian Federation's military operation in Ukraine, noting that propaganda for war constitutes an act of aggression in itself. In the Helsinki Final Act, she recalled, OSCE participating States have committed to preventing propaganda for war.

She further underlined the role of journalists as defenders of freedom and rule of law, and highlighted the dangers that journalists face in the OSCE area. She highlighted also the role of parliamentarians in ensuring the safety of journalists and protecting the right of freedom of expression for everyone, stressing that she looks forward to close co-operation with the OSCE PA.

## Debate

In the debate, parliamentarians described freedom of media as a cornerstone of a democratic society, which is necessary to expose corruption and abuses of power. OSCE PA Members expressed concern over the prosecution of journalists and emphasized the need for parliamentarians to act in defence of media freedom.

Support was expressed for all OSCE participating States respecting international law, on which European security is based, and for defending principles of freedom, democracy, rule of law, and a pluralistic media environment, as well as countering disinformation. Freedom of expression was called a precondition for rule of law, but there is also a need to support media literacy in order to combat the influence of fake news.

Other topics that were raised during the Third Committee debate were xenophobia, hate speech and challenges of election observation.

In response to the issues raised by OSCE parliamentarians, Teresa Ribeiro emphasized the role of parliaments in upholding media freedom and freedom of expression, creating conditions needed for good investigative journalism, and the need for greater investment in effective reforms.

# Standing Committee Meeting

**T**he Standing Committee of the OSCE PA, consisting of the heads of national delegations and members of the Bureau, met on 24 February 2022 to hear reports and discuss ongoing Assembly work.

## President of the OSCE PA Margareta Cederfelt

Chaired by OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt, the Standing Committee altered its agenda to reflect the reality of the day's exceptional circumstances, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine having just been launched hours earlier. The President announced that the Standing Committee would consist of a report by Secretary General Helga Schmid, followed by an open debate, with reports by Special Representatives and Chairs of Ad Hoc Committees the next day. The meeting was opened with a moment of silence for the victims of the war, and President Cederfelt underlined the importance of unity in these challenging times.

## OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid

In her address, Secretary General Schmid noted that normally she would be talking about the great work of the OSCE, which has established an excellent toolbox in advancing the OSCE's approach, but regrettably, she said, the Russian Federation has launched an attack against Ukraine calling into question the fundamental principles of the Organization. The invasion of Ukraine violates international law and OSCE commitments, the Secretary General said, with hundreds having already died and a growing danger of escalating into a humanitarian crisis.

SG Schmid noted that it didn't have to be this way, regretting that Moscow chose force over dialogue. She said that the safety and security of OSCE personnel in Ukraine is a priority, with contingency plans being put into action. Another priority, she said, is co-ordination, with a pressing need to work together with participating States and other international partners now. A reinforced Permanent Council meeting would be taking place in the afternoon, she said, and called on Russia to de-escalate. The role of parliamentarians is more important than ever, she said.

## Open Debate

In the open debate, members condemned Russia's invasion and expressed solidarity with Ukraine. There were calls for a ceasefire and for all sides to return to the negotiating table, noting that the OSCE would be an appropriate forum for dialogue. Regret was expressed over the non-implementation of the Minsk Agreements over the previous eight years, and the apparent failure of diplomacy to maintain the peace. Additional sanctions against Moscow were also called for, as well as a general rethinking of Europe's energy policy in order to curb its dependence on Russian oil and gas.

OSCE parliamentarians strongly condemned the use of force and called for respect for international law, as well as respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Beyond the immediate impact on Ukrainian



**HELGA SCHMID**  
*SECRETARY GENERAL*  
**OSCE**

civilians, concerns were also raised about whether the Russian Federation's actions could undermine the viability of the OSCE itself. The role of disinformation was also highlighted as a problem, and some members expressed concern over the possibility of the conflict escalating into World War III, with pleas made to ensure that this doesn't happen.

Parties must use diplomatic channels and international mechanisms to engage in dialogue and settle the conflict, it was stressed, and parliamentarians continue to have a role to play by conveying correct information, implementing humanitarian relief to vulnerable groups and strengthening international sanctions.

### OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella

Secretary General Montella presented his report, which emphasized the need to promote mid- and long-term sustainability to the Assembly's work by prioritizing efforts and ensuring a prevalence of quality over quantity. He highlighted the International Secretariat's support to the political leadership of the Assembly, stressing that it is the Secretariat's role to support the decisions made by the President and Standing Committee. In this regard, Montella highlighted the support provided to the President, General Committees, Ad Hoc Committees and Special Representatives in an array of targeted initiatives, international conferences, and field visits.

He also discussed the need to be clear in condemning without ambiguity violations of OSCE principles but simultaneously keeping open channels of dialogue and ensuring the full use of the Assembly's toolbox, including parliamentary diplomacy.

### Reports of Special Representatives and Chairs of Ad Hoc Committees

Vice-President Reinhold Lopatka (Austria), Chair of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT), noted that the OSCE PA has done well to continue its important work during the pandemic. He pointed out that the CCT managed to carry out many worthwhile activities during COVID, working with other inter-parliamentary forums, with the UN, organizing workshops, holding webinars on parliamentarians' responses to countering terrorism, and promoting implementation of national action plans.

Vice-President Kristian Vigenin (Bulgaria), Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, noted that with the changed reality facing the OSCE, the migration committee would need to adapt. He highlighted the importance of co-operating with other institutions and ensuring that sufficient resources are allocated to countries experiencing an influx of war refugees.

Special Representative on Arctic Issues Bryndis Haraldsdottir (Iceland) highlighted challenges stemming from climate change and developing in other areas, such as economic development. She stressed the need for strategy foresight and common action, noting that the Arctic must remain an area of peace and co-operation.

Special Representative on South Caucasus Kari Henriksen (Norway) reported on her visit to Georgia, and meetings held with Armenian and Azerbaijani officials. She also commented on the need to urge Russia to confirm Geneva Convention principles and make them responsible for fulfilling these expectations.









Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

[www.oscepa.org](http://www.oscepa.org)

[osce@oscepa.dk](mailto:osce@oscepa.dk)

## **OSCE PA International Secretariat**

Tordenskjoldsgade 1  
1055 Copenhagen K  
Denmark

Tel: +45 33 37 80 40

Fax: +45 33 37 80 30