



## **OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Pia Kauma**

Opening Remarks

23rd Winter Meeting

Vienna, Austria | 22 February 2024

Mr. President,

Mr. Chair,

Madam Secretary General

Dear Members,

This Winter Meeting comes at a critical moment, both for our Organization and for our region.

When we last met in Armenia, we faced an unparalleled situation:

The possibility of an Organization without a Chair, Secretary General, or Heads of Institutions.

Even though this dangerous situation has temporarily been averted, the solution reached by the Ministerial Council falls short of ensuring the OSCE's sustainability in the long-term.

This Winter Meeting therefore offers truly a unique chance for us, parliamentarians, to exchange with you, the leaders of the executive side of the OSCE.

Debates with Heads of Institutions and counterparts within the OSCE's governmental structures will also take place during our committee meetings.

Many of the issues plaguing the OSCE are not recent.

But they have been exacerbated by the current international environment, and - let's be frank - the actions of one participating State.

Both the OSCE and our Parliamentary Assembly now share similar challenges.

Take our funding for example: years of zero-nominal growth had already hamstrung the OSCE.

No budget has been agreed to in almost 3 years.

If you consider the high inflation, which all our countries are still experiencing, this means that the Organization operates with much less than it did just a few years ago.

This poses a clear challenge for the OSCE.

How can we recruit and retain the people essential to delivering the OSCE's mandate?

How long can we aim to do more with less?

Our Assembly faces the same issues.

This situation has been made worse with Russia refusing to pay its contribution to the Assembly.

I received yesterday a letter from the Head of the Russian Delegation confirming that Russia will not pay its contribution this year either, nor participate in our meetings.

Let me use this opportunity to clarify what has been reported in the media.

The Russian Federation is not withdrawing from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Its Delegation is essentially suspending its participation.

In practical terms, this changes very little. Russian Members have not participated in our activities since our last Winter Meeting.

They had already stopped paying their contribution.

This simply clarifies what we have been expecting regarding the Russian Delegation's intentions.

Although this may complicate our financial stability, this decision confirms the righteousness of our collective efforts to hold the Russian Federation accountable for its clear and repeated violations of OSCE principles.

We said it last year: the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is not an unrestricted platform to spew propaganda and promote a war of aggression.

We will never let our Assembly be misused in that way.

Instead, we will remain a forum for frank and honest dialogue, rooted in our shared values and commitments.

Our doors will always remain open to those committed to these basic principles.

In recognition of those who are fighting for these values on the frontlines in Ukraine, let us take a moment of silence.