

25th WINTER MEETING OF THE OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Vienna, 20 February 2026

(Hofburg Congress Centre, Vienna)

Intervention by the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Ms Petra Bayr

Check against delivery.

Dear President of the Assembly,

Dear fellow parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address you on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. As an Austrian MP and Viennese, I'm especially pleased to welcome you to my hometown for this first official address outside Strasbourg since my election.

Human Rights as the Foundation of Security

The Council of Europe and the OSCE share a fundamental principle: human rights and democracy are not separate from security - they are its foundation. What the OSCE calls the "human dimension" of security, we at the Council of Europe recognize as the pillars of democratic security: human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

This vision was born here in Vienna at the 1993 Hofburg Summit, the very first summit of the Council of Europe, where Heads of State declared their commitment to "democratic security" as the antidote to territorial ambitions, aggressive nationalism, and totalitarian ideologies. Our 2023 Reykjavík Declaration reinforced this: democratic security is key to addressing current and future challenges together.

Current Security Threats

Europe faces unprecedented security challenges. Russia's large-scale war of aggression against Ukraine enters its fifth year, with devastating attacks on civilian infrastructure. Simultaneously, hybrid warfare targets our democracies through disinformation, cyber-attacks, and electoral interference - as our colleagues from the Republic of Moldova and Romania can attest.

Our Assembly has given an unequivocal response. In October 2025, we emphasized that defending democracy requires multi-layered international cooperation, strengthening Ukraine's defence capabilities, and ensuring collective security through democratic values - not despite them.

Human Rights Instruments Build Security

Regional human rights instruments demonstrate how rights create stability. The European Convention on Human Rights with its Court in Strasbourg, the American Convention with its Court in San Jose, and the African Charter with its Court in Arusha all show that protecting human rights strengthens regional security.

I envision our two Parliamentary Assemblies playing a role in establishing an Asian-Pacific human rights instrument for the over 5 billion people in that region. Such regional mechanisms, subsidiary to state responsibilities, provide the legal architecture for lasting peace.

Strengthening Democratic Security Together

The PACE works to counter democratic backsliding, strengthen electoral frameworks, and provide election observation across Europe and beyond. I often had the chance to witness the very good cooperation of our election observation bodies and consider the creation of synergies in our cooperation very fruitful, far beyond the election observation missions.

I particularly encourage OSCE PA members from Central Asia to deepen dialogue with our Assembly. Democratic consolidation and strong human rights institutions directly increase security and stability.

Moving Forward

Co-operation between PACE and the OSCE-PA is essential. Together we can strengthen the accountability agenda and fulfill our founding purpose: preserving durable peace, maintaining the rules-based order, and ensuring the prosperity of our citizens - all built on the foundation of human rights.

History has taught us that walls, weapons, and spheres of influence cannot secure lasting peace. But courts, conventions, and the courage to defend every person's dignity can. Security without human rights is temporary. Human rights without security are impossible. But human rights **as** security - that is the future Europe and the future world we must build together.

Thank you!