

PA holds webinar on COVID's impact on conflicts in the OSCE region



With nearly 50 parliamentarians from some 30 countries participating, an OSCE PA webinar on 15 May explored the topic of “COVID’s impact on conflicts in the OSCE region.” Key-note speakers included Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre Tuula Yrjölä and Head of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine Yaşar Halit Çevik. The event also featured remarks by the Chair, Vice-Chair, and Rapporteur of the OSCE PA’s First Committee – Richard Hudson (United States), Costel Neculai Dunava (Romania), and Laurynas Kasciunas (Lithuania), respectively.

Participants stressed that populations of conflict-affected countries are at greater risk due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the pandemic poses obstacles to conflict resolution and humanitarian aid efforts. Ambassador Tuula Yrjölä noted that the

crisis has disrupted meetings and prevents the interactions that are essential for securing progress in conflict mediation efforts.

Ambassador Çevik focused on the security situation and its impact on civilians in eastern Ukraine, security incidents involving the SMM, freedom of movement of the SMM, and the SMM's response to COVID-19. He regretted that the SMM continues to observe attacks on populated areas and civilian infrastructure.

During the debate, participants discussed conflicts in the OSCE area, with parliamentarians from conflict-affected countries offering details on the impact of the pandemic on civilians, including IDPs. With limited access to basic healthcare infrastructure and public services, people in conflict zones are on one of the most dangerous frontlines of the pandemic, they said. Speakers also reiterated the call by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for a global ceasefire.

PA President George Tsereteli (Georgia) closed the event with remarks on how to mitigate tensions in the OSCE area and activate preparations for a post-COVID era with a renewed focus on conflict resolution.

The webinar was moderated by OSCE PA Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares. It was the third in a series of Parliamentary Web Dialogues planned by the OSCE PA, with another one scheduled for this Friday focused on the environmental aspects of COVID-19 recovery.

War & Peace podcast featuring President Tsereteli

OSCE PA President George Tsereteli joined Olga Oliker and Hugh Pope on the podcast of the International Crisis Group to discuss the topic, "The OSCE's Role in a COVID-19 World." Listen at www.oscepa.org.

Montella meets with counterparts in OSCE institutions and international partner organizations

On Monday, OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella participated in an online meeting of OSCE Heads of Institutions to exchange views on reopening offices and budget-related issues. OSCE SG Thomas Greminger informed participants that telecommuting is working effectively and will remain the modus operandi for most staff. Montella told his counterparts that the PA's Vienna Liaison Office will follow the recommendations of the Austrian authorities and the memorandum of the OSCE Secretariat, and the Copenhagen Headquarters is open on an individual basis but teleworking will remain the rule until mid-summer.

SG Montella also shared information about the PA's webinars, and noted that participation of the OSCE SG and Heads of Institutions in PA events is welcomed and appreciated.



Last week, Montella met online with the SGs of NATO PA and PACE to compare notes on how partner organizations are adjusting to the COVID-19 crisis. Procedures for remote committee meetings and remote voting were among topics of discussion.

Nothelle participates in SIPRI meeting on democratic governance

OSCE PA Deputy Secretary General Andreas Nothelle represented the Assembly in an online meeting on 15 May organized by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The discussion focused on how to reduce risks to democratic governance in the context of the widespread implementation of emergency powers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The session included the participation of a number of other OSCE officials and examined OSCE comparative advantages that can be brought to bear in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Amb. Nothelle noted that even before the pandemic, parliamentary oversight had already been weakened to a significant degree in many countries, and that international norm-setting

has not benefited from corresponding parliamentary powers. With this in mind, the PA committed from the outset of the coronavirus crisis to show continued and even increased presence through virtual meetings and other tools.



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