

Standing Committee meets virtually for discussions on OSCE PA work



OSCE PA Standing Committee meeting on 7 July 2020

Some 40 members of parliament participated in a virtual meeting of the OSCE PA's Standing Committee Tuesday, holding debates on international issues in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and hearing reports from the PA President, Treasurer, and Secretary General.

OSCE PA President George Tsereteli (Georgia) highlighted a report that is expected to be published in the coming days by the International Secretariat based on the series of Parliamentary Web Dialogues organized by the PA since March. The President noted that recent crisis situations have demonstrated the unmatched value of the OSCE, including its versatility and ability to respond rapidly and efficiently. He urged governments to ensure that the pandemic is not used as an opportunity to undermine the OSCE and that the Organization's executive structures can ensure leadership continuity during challenging times.

Treasurer Peter Juel-Jensen (Denmark) presented his report and thanked the Standing Committee for having unanimously approved the budget for the next financial year.

Hedy Fry, the Head of the Canadian OSCE PA Delegation and Special Representative on Gender Issues, noted Canada's regret that it was not able to host the Annual Session this year. The COVID-19 pandemic has redefined how parliamentarians interact and communicate, Fry said, noting that in some ways, they have become more connected and their voices more relevant. She expressed hope that Vancouver will be able to host an Annual Session in the future.

Secretary General Roberto Montella highlighted the tools the PA has used to keep dialogue alive during the lockdown and outlined upcoming plans for the Assembly, including election observation missions in the autumn, depending on the public health conditions. A presentation by Vice-President Peter Bowness focused on the Rules of Procedure reform process. The Rules Committee should take a comprehensive review of all the Assembly's rules, he noted. OSCE PA Deputy Secretary General Andreas Nothelle provided an update on the situation at OSCE headquarters in Vienna, noting that the atmosphere for dialogue has deteriorated but that the PA's recent activities have been appreciated.

It was stressed in the general debate that COVID-19 has highlighted many underlying challenges that must be addressed. Topics raised by parliamentarians included the crisis in and around Ukraine, racism and police brutality, migration, environmental sustainability and climate change, discrimination and LGBT rights, resiliency and social cohesion, the continuation of parliamentary activity during the lockdown, and human trafficking.

OSCE PA Secretary General receives Albanian Acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs

A bilateral meeting between OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella and Acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania Gent Cakaj focused Wednesday on OSCE matters ranging from the valuable work of the field operations and conflict resolution efforts to budgetary issues and political deadlock.

Montella welcomed the co-operation the PA enjoys with the Chairmanship and praised Albania's leadership of the OSCE in difficult times, noting in particular challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing conflicts and internal OSCE issues related to the budget and senior leadership positions. He underlined the PA's value as a forum to build confidence among parliamentarians from countries in difficult circumstances.

Cakaj said that the parliamentary dimension of the OSCE is crucial and expressed appreciation for the PA's work in ensuring the implementation of OSCE commitments in all three dimensions. He noted that despite the challenges of this year,



Gent Cakaj and Roberto Montella meet at PA headquarters, 8 July.

the Chairmanship has adapted well, highlighting a number of the Chairmanship's priorities including cybercrime and hybrid threats.

The sides discussed political challenges that the OSCE faces, including ensuring that the Organization is not left with a leadership vacuum in times when leadership is most needed, and urged that agreement is reached in a spirit of co-operation which is more required than ever in this time of crisis. All 57 OSCE participating States should commit to building dialogue through the forum provided by the OSCE, Montella and Cakaj agreed.

OSCE parliamentarians, EU officials discuss migration co-operation during pandemic

In recent meetings with Paraskevi Michou, Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations at the European Commission, and Monique Pariat, the Director-General of the European Commission's Migration and Home Affairs Department, OSCE PA members discussed the need for solidarity in addressing migration in a comprehensive way. Focusing on the situation in Syria, OSCE parliamentarians heard about the importance of unimpeded access to crisis areas so that humanitarian aid can be delivered to vulnerable populations, as well as points of concern regarding the well-being of migrants and refugees in first recipient countries.

On 3 and 6 July, members of the PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Migration discussed with Michou and Pariat issues including

the alarming increase in gender-based violence in migrant communities, integrating solid migration management into co-operation agreements, enhancing legal migration pathways, enforcing border control, and establishing "mandatory solidarity" in crisis situations.

Ad Hoc Committee Acting Chair and OSCE PA Vice-President Margareta Cederfelt (Sweden) stressed that the international community has a responsibility to increase humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants, especially those affected by the Syrian conflict, and to contribute to building economic resilience in host countries to help them deal with the COVID-19 crisis. Also participating in the meetings were Lord Alfred Dubs (United Kingdom), Hedy Fry (Canada), Gudrun Kugler (Austria), Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus), and Elona Gjebreja Hoxha (Albania).