

PA Bureau holds discussion with Belarusian Head of Delegation and exiled opposition leader



PA President George Tsereteli (Georgia) and Secretary General Roberto Montella opened a web meeting Wednesday with Belarusian Head of Delegation Andrei Savinykh, Belarusian opposition presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and OSCE PA Bureau members by noting the importance of building dialogue and pursuing a way forward for Belarus.

In her opening remarks, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya said that Alexander Lukashenko has lost support from Belarusian society and to facilitate transition of power, she instituted the Coordination Council on 14 August. She asserted that new elections are the only way forward and that the OSCE has a role in facilitating dialogue, as well as promoting the conduct of fair elections. She also expressed support for the move by 17 OSCE participating States to invoke the Moscow Mechanism on 17 September in order to investigate alleged human rights abuses in Belarus.

Savinykh noted that Belarus is planning some constitutional changes, to be undertaken by 2022, in order to liberalize the political system, transfer power from the Presidency to the Parliament and achieve more balance between the three branches of power, as well as to empower political parties. Noting the impor-

tance of upholding human rights obligations, he also pointed out that there is a need to modernize the law on mass events, with many demonstrations in Belarus unsanctioned by local authorities.

In the discussion, Bureau members took the floor and raised issues related to the need for dialogue without preconditions. They highlighted support for civil society and the constructive role of the OSCE. All OSCE countries have committed to respecting human rights, it was pointed out, with members noting that reports of abuse in Belarusian jails are disturbing.

President Tsereteli stressed that authorities must find a more constructive way forward. There is a need for commitment on both sides to find common ground, he said, noting that the OSCE PA is well suited to facilitate and support that process. He urged both sides to demonstrate wisdom and patience.

When it comes to the prospect of engaging in direct dialogue with the Coordination Council, Savinykh raised concerns over its status as a lawful body, noting that it is outside of the legal structure of the Belarusian political system. Tsikhanouskaya noted that with so many opposition leaders in prison, there is a need for amnesty in order for any meaningful dialogue to take place.

OSCE PA Bureau members said that effort should be made to continue discussions between the authorities and the opposition, even if they are not done through official channels. Informal dialogue can be done in small steps that are useful in building trust, and this can be pursued without preconditions, it was stressed.

SG Montella said that the important thing is to find any possible common ground at this point in time and pursue a constructive way forward for Belarus rather than arguing on irreconcilable and polarized narratives of past facts. The OSCE PA will follow up in the coming days with both sides to define a way forward in the interest of all Belarus citizens.

Ad Hoc Committee on Migration members discuss situation in Lesbos and upcoming activities

The second virtual meeting of the OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Migration was opened Wednesday by the committee's Acting Chair, OSCE PA Vice-President Margareta Cederfelt (Sweden), who recalled the role of parliamentarians in promoting a common approach to migration. She discussed the limitations on the committee's activities posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the challenges of conducting field visits.

A special focus of the meeting was on the current situation in Lesbos, where a fire destroyed the Moria migrant camp on 9 September. Ad Hoc Committee member Evangelos Syrigos (Greece) provided an update, noting that five people have been arrested in relation to the fire and expressing concern that similar incidents could happen at other facilities on the island. The focus now is on housing the migrants who were displaced by the fire with a new, permanent, more humane reception center for migrants and refugees, he said.

In the discussion, members noted that the Moria fire was a



symptom of a failure of European policy and that governments should do more to help with specific measures. The committee also addressed issues related to upcoming activities, with a focus on the feasibility of field visits during the pandemic. The possible topics for upcoming webinars were also discussed, such as facilitating access to the labour market in key areas, the impact of COVID-19 on trafficking in human beings, and best practices regarding unaccompanied minors.

Eleven candidates announced for top OSCE positions

Eleven nominees have been named for the positions of OSCE Secretary General, the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), which have been vacant since July. OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella noted that the PA looks forward to a transparent and fair procedure to fill the top positions and enable the OSCE to function properly.

Candidates for OSCE Secretary General include Cristian Diaconescu (Romania) and Helga Maria Schmid (Germany). Matteo Mecacci (Italy) and Jose Maria Ridaó (Spain) are the candidates for ODIHR Director. The candidates for HCNM are Kairat Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan) and Rita Izsák-Ndiaye (Hungary). Ditmir Bushati (Albania), Maja Cappello (Italy), Patrick Penninckx (Belgium), Maria Teresa Ribeiro (Portugal), and Dimitrij Rupel (Slovenia) are running for RFoM.