

Parliamentarians and OSCE officials meet online for 20th OSCE PA Winter Meeting



Opening joint session of the Winter Meeting, 25 Feb. 2021

In the first-ever virtual statutory meeting of the OSCE PA, some 290 parliamentarians participated in the Winter Meeting last week to discuss issues such as protracted conflicts, the crisis in and around Ukraine, economic and environmental security, human rights, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the opening joint session on 25 February, OSCE PA members heard keynote addresses by President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka, OSCE PA President Peter Lord Bowness, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Foreign Minister of Sweden Ann Linde, and OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid, followed by a question and answer session.

President Bowness noted that the OSCE must defend principle-based dialogue as the core of comprehensive security. Foreign Minister Linde outlined the priorities of the Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship and highlighted the role of parliamentarians in the OSCE's work. The PA is an essential part of the OSCE family, said Secretary General Schmid, noting that parliamentarians consistently provide fresh ideas for the Organization's work.

In the general debate, moderated by OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella, members stressed the need to recommit to the spirit of multilateralism. The resumption of armed confrontation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict last autumn was highlighted as a tragic example of what happens when protracted conflicts go unresolved.

Opening the meeting of the First Committee on 25 February, Chair Richard Hudson (United States) recalled the series of parliamentary web dialogues held in 2020 that explored the security implications of COVID. Rapporteur Laurynas Kasciunas (Lithuania) presented his ideas for the report that he is preparing for the OSCE PA's Annual Session this July, focusing on conflicts and security threats in the OSCE area, including the situation in Georgia, the unfinished Transdniestrian settlement process, and the crisis in and around Ukraine.

Chaired by Doris Barnett (Germany), the Second Committee met on 26 February and discussed how OSCE parliamentarians and governmental representatives of the OSCE can join forces in building economic and environmental security amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Committee Rapporteur Elona Hoxha (Albania) focused her remarks on themes such as economic recovery, economic empowerment of women, migration management, good governance, and pollution and climate change as top priorities to be addressed through new regulations, technologies, partnerships and development schemes.

Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus) chaired the meeting of the Third Committee, which heard a presentation by Rapporteur and OSCE PA Vice-President Kari Henriksen (Norway). Sharing her ideas for the report to be considered at the Annual Session this summer, Henriksen highlighted the pandemic's impact on the human dimension, including women, children and migrants. The Third Committee meeting also featured reports and discussion on recent election observation missions to Montenegro, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the United States of America. Committee Vice-Chair Michael Georg Link (Germany) reported on the US election observation mission, noting that it was a successful effort despite the difficult circumstances due to the pandemic.

All three general committees were addressed by high-level OSCE officials from the executive structures and OSCE institutions. The OSCE PA's Standing Committee met on 25 February to hear reports and discuss ongoing Assembly work.

OSCE PA President Emeritus Kanerva hosts Belarusian opposition figure in Helsinki

OSCE PA President Emeritus Ilkka Kanerva (Finland) is hosting a visit of Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in Helsinki from 1 to 4 March. On Monday, Kanerva discussed with Tsikhanouskaya how to make progress on the situation in Belarus, noting that the OSCE could play a role in establishing dialogue in the country.

On Tuesday President Emeritus Kanerva opened a discussion on the rule of law and the role of peaceful protests organized by the Finnish Institute for International Affairs. In his introductory speech Kanerva underlined that Belarus is an important player in the regional context and a valued member of the OSCE family, emphasizing that the people of Belarus have the right to enjoy full fundamental political rights and freedoms.

The international community and parliamentarians have continued to express solidarity with these aspirations immediately following the elections, and have consistently condemned the



Ilkka Kanerva with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in Helsinki, 1 March.

use of violence, Kanerva stressed.

Tsikhanouskaya's programme includes meetings with the President of Finland Sauli Niinistö, Prime Minister Sanna Marin and Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto as well as with former President of the Republic of Finland Tarja Halonen and Vice Speaker Tarja Filatov.

Secretary General Montella participates in OSCE Heads of Institutions meeting

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella participated in the OSCE Heads of Institutions meeting on 25 February, which focused on activities related to the upcoming International Women's Day being observed on 8 March, the OSCE Asian and Mediterranean Partnerships, and COVID-related issues

including vaccination plans for OSCE officials. OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid reported on recent developments at the Secretariat in Vienna while SG Montella reported on a number of OSCE PA initiatives and areas of focus for Special Representatives.