

Autumn Meeting in Yerevan features debates on security, corruption and minorities



Inaugural session of the Parliamentary Conference, 18 Nov. 2023

The OSCE PA's 21st Autumn Meeting concluded Monday with a debate on the situation in the Middle East, wrapping up three days of discussions on security, corruption and minorities. The Parliamentary Conference was held under the theme "OSCE in Times of Crisis: Role of the PA in Responding to Internal and External Challenges," and included speeches dealing with the Russian Federation's ongoing war against Ukraine, as well as recent military hostilities in the South Caucasus. More than 300 participants, including nearly 200 parliamentarians from some 50 countries, took part in the Autumn Meeting.

Speaking at the inaugural session were Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of Armenia; Alen Simonyan, President of the National Assembly of Armenia; and Pia Kauma, President of the OSCE PA. OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid and Armen Grigoryan, Secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Armenia, spoke at session one, held under the theme "Addressing security: the OSCE's role in an era of conflict."

Chaired by OSCE PA Vice-President and Special Representative on Fighting Corruption Irene Charalambides (Cyprus), session two was held under the theme "Corruption as a fundamental threat to peace and security" and featured presentations by experts from the World Bank, Armenian Government and OSCE/ODIHR. In the debate, lawmakers highlighted their national efforts in the fight against corruption, noting that it requires legislative changes as well as an overhaul of the relationship between government and citizens.

Session three, chaired by OSCE PA Vice-President Daniela De Ridder (Germany), was held under the theme "Respect for all: protecting minorities and people affected by conflict," and heard contributions by experts from academia and the office of the Prime Minister of Armenia. Parliamentarians raised issues including the need to adopt legislation for the integration of child refugees, and for international organizations to provide support to those suffering the effects of war.

Monday's Mediterranean Forum was chaired by OSCE PA Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs Pascal Allizard (France), who argued that the Israel-Palestine conflict must be resolved on the basis of mutual security, and included remarks by Chair of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group Vesa Häkkinen. The Forum included addresses by parliamentary delegations from OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, and closing remarks by President Kauma who outlined a range of issues that can be agreed by all.

The PA's Standing Committee also met to hear reports by the President, Treasurer, Secretary General, and Chairs of Ad Hoc Committees.

President Kauma urges normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan

On 17 November, at the end of a three-country tour of the South Caucasus, OSCE PA President Pia Kauma (Finland) and Secretary General Roberto Montella held a number of high-level meetings in Yerevan. Reiterating messages delivered to leaders of Azerbaijan earlier in the week, Kauma underlined the importance of Armenia reaching a full settlement with Azerbaijan. She welcomed the willingness that Armenia has expressed in this regard, and stressed that it will require sustained political attention. Kauma and Montella met with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, President of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan, and Deputy Foreign Minister Vahe Gevorgyan.

The OSCE PA delegation visited a shelter for refugees and also met with representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, Anahit Manasyan. During the meetings, Armenian in-



Pia Kauma and Nikol Pashinyan in Yerevan, 17 Nov. 2023

terlocutors discussed the security challenges facing the country and emphasized the prospects for enhanced regional co-operation. They also described the government's efforts to support refugees recently arrived from Azerbaijan.

Yerevan side meetings focus on Ukraine, gender, refugees, terrorism and youth

The OSCE PA's Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine (PSTU) met on the margins of the Autumn Meeting on 18 November for discussions led by the PSTU's three rapporteurs dealing with the security, economic and environmental, and human dimensions of the war. President Kauma delivered opening remarks focused on the tragic human costs, including the tens of thousands of civilian casualties and millions of refugees.

Also meeting in Yerevan were the OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Migration and Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT). President Pia Kauma (Finland) briefed the migration committee on her recent visit to a refugee shelter in Armenia, describing the stories she heard from many people who had to flee their homes due to the military operation in Azerbaijan in September. At the meeting of the CCT, Chair Reinhold Lopatka briefed mem-

bers on his recent visit to Israel where he met with people directly affected by Hamas's terrorist attack on 7 October.

On 17 November, OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues Hedy Fry (Canada) held a meeting with a group of civil society organizations in Yerevan to discuss gender-related issues in Armenia. The meeting brought together representatives of nine civil society organizations, providing a platform to discuss issues such as gender-based violence and the rights of displaced people, especially women from Karabakh. Also in Yerevan, Special Representative on Central Asia Farah Karimi (Netherlands) held a meeting with the Central Asian OSCE PA delegations and the Network of Young Parliamentarians met to discuss youth issues, review implemented activities, and discuss ongoing work.