

OSCE PA holds webinar on COVID-19's impact on diverse societies



An OSCE PA webinar on Monday, entitled “COVID-19 response in diverse societies: challenges and opportunities for stability and social cohesion,” featured remarks from Chair of the OSCE PA Third Committee Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus); OSCE HCNM Lamberto Zannier; and Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Noting that the pandemic and related measures have the potential to fuel discrimination, threaten stability and undermine security, participants emphasized that public officials have a duty to work towards social cohesion.

Opening the event, Hadjiyianni noted that some studies indicate that online traffic to hate websites has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic by as much as 200 per cent and that spikes in hate-based incidents have been widely reported. He cited the PA's Luxembourg Declaration, which called for creating a “coalition of respect by publicly speaking out against hate speech and

other manifestations of intolerance.”

Zannier highlighted a set of recommendations by his office on ensuring that COVID-19 emergency measures promote social cohesion. Al-Nashif spoke about the importance of making verified and credible information available to all and especially in local and minority languages.

President George Tsereteli (Georgia) also spoke at the webinar, welcoming the commitment of parliamentarians to address these difficult issues head-on. In the discussion, participants underlined the heightened health risks to minority communities and possible impacts on elections. Parliamentarians highlighted measures that have been taken in their countries to counteract scapegoating of minorities as well as efforts to ensure that minority communities have access to information.

OSCE PA Vice-President and Rapporteur of the Third Committee Kari Henriksen (Norway) highlighted the efforts of people around the world banding together to demand equality and respect for all in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement. Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism and Intolerance Ben Cardin (United States) stressed the importance of reforming policing to ensure that human rights are upheld.

Monday's event was the seventh in a series of Parliamentary Web Dialogues organized by the PA. It was moderated by Andreas Baker from the International Secretariat.

Hadjiyianni addresses OSCE/ODIHR meeting on freedom of the media

Speaking at ODIHR's Supplementary Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, held online Tuesday, Third Committee Chair Kyriakos Hadjiyianni expressed concern about the persecution of journalists and aggressive rhetoric against their work. He reiterated OSCE PA calls for greater parliamentary oversight of governments' actions on cases of journalists' murders, imprisonment or ill treatment.

House of Lords hosts event on child refugees and prevention of human trafficking

On the eve of World Refugee Day, parliamentarians from the OSCE and Council of Europe participated in a high-level discussion held on 19 June by the British House of Lords on how to best protect unaccompanied child refugees, enable relocations and prevent human trafficking.

The webinar was co-chaired by Earl Alexander Dundee, Chair of the PACE Sub-Committee on Refugee and Migrant Children and Young People, and Lord Alf Dubs, Member of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration.

Participants explored how to ensure a high level of co-ordination between countries and support from relevant international and non-governmental organizations in order to protect refugees. Lord Dubs stressed that addressing the challenges of child refugees must be done on the basis of international co-op-



eration and shared responsibility. PA Vice-President Margareta Cederfelt, Acting Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, praised the support given by the European Commission for the relocation of unaccompanied child refugees from Greece and expressed hope that additional states would step forward.

PA leadership meetings provide forums to share common challenges related to COVID-19

Assembly President George Tsereteli and Secretary General Roberto Montella met Tuesday with leaders from Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and Liechtenstein to focus on the economic and health impacts of the pandemic and related recovery efforts. Participants welcomed the meeting as an important opportunity to bring the common challenges facing small states to the forefront.

Also on Tuesday, Tsereteli and Montella met online with Mongolian Foreign Minister and Head of PA Delegation Tsogtbaatar Damdin. Discussions focused on Mongolia's parliamentary elections, challenges of international observation and the country's COVID-19 response.

Last week, an online meeting was held with parliamentarians from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine to focus on regional aspects of the pandemic.

