

Joint OSCE PA-PAM-UNOCT event takes stock of terrorism trends amidst COVID-19

The OSCE PA, the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) co-organized a joint webinar Tuesday on the role of parliamentarians in countering terrorism in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Held on the occasion of the International Day of Parliamentarism, participants concurred that co-ordinated policy and legislative efforts are needed to counter the evolving threat of violent extremists, some of whom are exploiting the pandemic to advance extremist narratives.

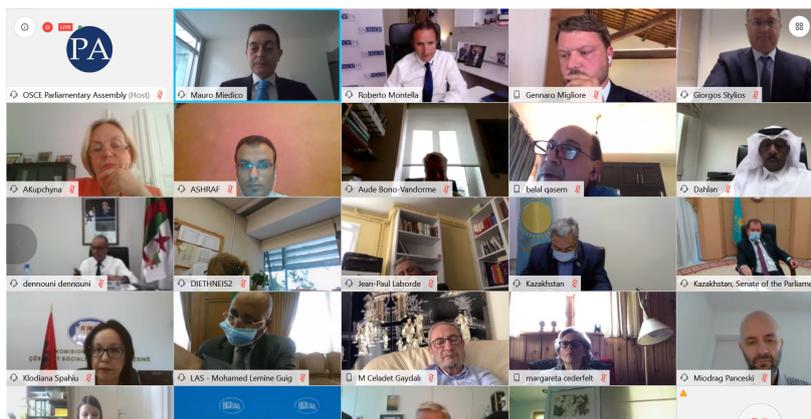
Speakers at the webinar included Reinhold Lopatka, Chair of the OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism; Gennaro Migliore, Chair of PAM's Special Parliamentary Committee on Counterterrorism; Mauro Miedico, Deputy Director and Chief of Special Projects and Innovation Branch – UNOCT; Amb. Mohamed El-Amine Ould Ikek, Assistant Secretary General for Legal Affairs at the League of Arab States; Amb. Alena Kupchyna, Director of the Transnational Threats Department at the OSCE; Dr. Andrea Margelletti, President of the International Studies Centre and Advisor to the Ministry of Defense of Italy, and OSCE PA President George Tsereteli.

The webinar also included a brief video message by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who spoke about the important role of parliaments in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is paramount that we all stand united on this symbolic day marking the International Day of Parliamentarism to counter terrorism and violent extremism throughout our vast regions," Lopatka said, noting that terrorists have remained active during the crisis.

President Tsereteli said that the joint event was a strong indication of the deepened co-operation between international partners and parliamentary organizations, demonstrating the importance of joining forces to fight terrorism.

Moderating the event, OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella emphasized that the fight against terrorism and violent extremism should be an area of the international security



agenda that brings together all States, even in cases where hostility or divergence mark their relations, to join forces in bona fide co-operation.

The OSCE PA-PAM-UNOCT Parliamentary Web Dialogue provided a forum for representatives of more than 65 parliaments to exchange views on how to keep counter-terrorism efforts high on the international agenda during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It is vital to assess the impact of the pandemic on violent extremism and carefully monitor terrorism trends throughout the Mediterranean region, the Sahel, and the OSCE region, participants said.

Parliamentarians discussed how crisis situations such as the pandemic may aggravate terrorist threats by offering new opportunities for terrorist groups to advance their agendas, as the attention of the world has shifted and resources may be refocused to fighting the pandemic and its consequences. The crisis has provided a fertile ground for terrorist groups to boost their online propaganda, call for new attacks, and increase recruitment operations, it was stressed.

Tuesday's event was the eighth in a series of Parliamentary Web Dialogues organized by the PA on COVID-19-related themes.

ICYMI: Videos of recent OSCE PA activities online

The OSCE PA has posted videos of recent activities on YouTube, including the webinars "COVID-19 response in diverse societies: challenges and opportunities for stability and social cohesion" and "Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic." Watch, like and share: www.youtube.com/oscepa

OSCE PA informal leadership meeting with delegations of Russian Federation and Belarus

Opening an OSCE PA leadership meeting with the Heads of Russian and Belarusian Delegations on 26 June, the latest in a series of ongoing regional discussions, President George Tsereteli noted the importance of meeting with all delegations during this pandemic and Secretary General Roberto Montella stressed that these forums are a vital platform for dialogue based on shared values and respect.

Petr Tolstoy, Head of the Russian Delegation, expressed gratitude for the PA's webinars on security topics, pointing out that it is important to maintain parliamentary dialogue during this period. Head of the Belarusian Delegation Anderei Savinykh provided an update on the country's response to COVID-19 and the upcoming presidential election.

During the discussion, hope was expressed for the OSCE



PA to continue its work and try to return to normality as soon as possible. Discussions also focused on the possibility for the deployment of election observation missions, with SG Montella pointing out that the PA is not planning to conduct any before autumn, at the earliest.