



The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Special Representative on Central Asia, Vice President Pia Kauma

Overview of Activities, August 2021 - June 2022

Mandate:

- Encourage active participation by parliamentarians from Central Asian OSCE participating States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and Mongolia in the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to strengthen parliamentarism in the region;
- Liaise with and support the work of the OSCE field presences in the region, as well as relevant OSCE institutions, international and regional organizations and diplomatic missions;
- Encourage closer contacts between the parliaments in the region to promote greater intra-regional cooperation in all three OSCE dimensions; and
- Report to the President of the Assembly on developments in the region, including opportunities for enhanced parliamentary dialogue and further inter-parliamentary co-operation among the Central Asian OSCE participating States and Mongolia.



Mr. Mukhtar Tileuberdi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and Vice-President Kauma. Nur-Sultan, April 2022.

Kazakhstan

In January 2022, the protests in Kazakhstan caught many by surprise. What started as peaceful demonstrations following a sudden increase in prices for liquified petroleum gas turned into violent unrest that spread throughout the country. On 6 January, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Margareta Cederfelt and Special Representative on Central Asia Pia Kauma issued a joint statement unequivocally condemning the use of violence and calling on all sides to use dialogue and democratic institutions to resolve grievances. At that moment, it was difficult to verify the accuracy of the information on the events unfolding in the capital Nur-Sultan, Almaty and elsewhere. In February, several separate online meetings were held with representatives of the non-governmental organizations Human Rights Watch, Open Dialog Foundation as well as human rights activists from Kazakhstan regarding the January 2022 events, including official investigations into them and the potential role the OSCE could play.

In April 2022, a visit to Kazakhstan took place on the invitation of OSCE PA Vice-President Askar Shakirov to learn more about the reforms announced in mid-March by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as well as the steps taken to ensure that those responsible for unlawful killings of protesters

and law enforcement officials, excessive use of force, arbitrary detentions and other human rights violations would be brought to justice.

Meetings were held with the following interlocutors: Maulen Ashimbayev, Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Head of the Delegation of Kazakhstan to the OSCE PA; Yerlan Koshanov, Chairman of the Legislative Chamber; members of the delegation of Kazakhstan to the OSCE PA including OSCE PA Vice-President and Deputy Senate Chairman Askar Shakirov; Minister of Justice Kanat Musin; Prosecutor General Berik Asilov; and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mukhtar Tileuberdi. The discussions focussed on political reforms, reform of the judiciary, official investigations into the events of January 2022 as well as Kazakhstan's role in promoting regional stability. Prior to these meetings, meetings were held with civil society representatives in both Almaty and Nur-Sultan, as well as with the Head of the EU Delegation and the Ambassador of Finland. The OSCE PA stands ready to support the implementation of the political reforms announced by the president which aim to promote a more inclusive society and enhance democratic governance.

Kyrgyzstan

At the end of November 2021, the PA conducted an election observation mission to Kyrgyzstan. As stated in the preliminary conclusions of the international election observation mission, the parliamentary elections were competitive, but they lacked meaningful voter engagement due to a stifled campaign, constitutional changes weakening parliament and extensive legislative changes to key aspects of the election.

In April 2022, another visit to Kyrgyzstan was made to meet key officials as well as the newly formed delegation to the OSCE PA to discuss the ongoing political reforms and parliamentarism in the country. Meetings were held with Deputy Speaker of the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) Zhamilya Isaeva and members of parliament, Deputy Foreign Minister Dinara Kemelova and Ombudsman Atyr Abdrakhmanova. The programme included a visit to the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek to learn more about the projects carried out by the OSCE in all three dimensions. A visit to the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, a flagship initiative educating future leaders of the region, was a great opportunity to discuss with



Ms. Zhamilya Isaeva (Deputy Speaker of the Parliament Jogorku Kenesh), members of the delegation of Kyrgyzstan to the OSCE PA and Vice-President Kauma. Bishkek, April 2022.

the students how to promote stability, peace and democracy in the OSCE region. Prior to the official meetings, meetings were held with civil society representatives as well as with representatives of UNDP and the EU. It could be observed that key stakeholders in the country are keen to closely cooperate with international partners, especially in capacity-building of the newly elected parliament.

Vice-President Kauma and staff members of the OSCE PA's Secretariat with Dr. Alexander Wolters, Director of the OSCE Academy, and students of the Academy. Bishkek, April 2022.



Tajikistan

A visit to Tajikistan took place in October 2021. It included meetings with Mahmadoir Zokirzoda, Chairman of the Assembly of Representatives of the Supreme Assembly (Majlisi Oli) of the Republic of Tajikistan; Saidmurod Fattohzoda, Head of the Delegation of Tajikistan to the OSCE PA and members of the PA delegation; and Sirojiddin Muhridin, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The growing role of women and youth was widely discussed. A women’s resource centre that we visited in Obi-Kiik is a great example of the key role civil society actors can play in empowering women and thus enabling societies to tap into the potential of half of their population. The programme also included a visit to the OSCE Border Management Staff College, which works to promote open and secure borders across the OSCE area, as well as a youth center and a painting workshop for refugees from Afghanistan.



OSCE Programme Office. Dushanbe, October 2022.



OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt and Vice-President Kauma at a women’s resource centre in Obi-Kiik, Khatlon Province, in October 2021.

Uzbekistan

A visit to Uzbekistan took place in October 2021. During the mission, meetings were held with a broad range of political decision-makers and officials, civil society actors, as well as representatives of the international community and OSCE field operations, including: Tanzila Narbayeva, Chair of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis; Nurdinjon Ismoilov, Chair of the Legislative Assembly of the Oliy Majlis; Gairat Fazilov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan; Sadik Safoev, First Deputy Chairperson of the Senate and Head of the Delegation of Uzbekistan to the OSCE PA, and members of the PA delegation; and Ambassador Pierre Von Arx, OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan.

Prior to the start of the visit, the PA conducted an election observation mission to Uzbekistan's 24 October Presidential Election.

While many of the discussions were dominated by the developments in Afghanistan and their implications for the region - in particular regarding a potential refugee crisis as well as threats to regional security, as well as how the OSCE and its Parliamentary

Assembly could contribute to addressing these challenges - the meetings were also an important opportunity to engage a variety of interlocutors on issues relevant to the implementation of ongoing political, economic, and social reforms since 2017. The discussions also explored areas where the OSCE and the international community more broadly could provide additional support and relevant expertise. The authorities expressed their strong commitment to carry on with an ambitious set of reforms aimed at enhancing democratic institutions, restructuring the domestic economy, and promoting fundamental freedoms and human rights. The growing role of women and youth was particularly emphasized in the discussions. It was heartening to see that promoting women's effective participation in public life, notably in parliament, is at the top of the political agenda in Uzbekistan.

This visit also cemented the new level of relations between Uzbekistan and the OSCE PA. Uzbekistan has offered to host the 2023 OSCE PA Autumn Meeting.



Photo: OSCE PA

Vice-President Kauma, OSCE PA President Margareta Cederfelt and OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella with Tanzila Narbaeva, the Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of Uzbekistan, and members of the delegation of Uzbekistan to the OSCE PA. Tashkent, October 2021.

Turkmenistan and Mongolia

It was hoped that the past months would have allowed for much more extensive engagement with the Mongolian and Turkmen delegations to the OSCE PA, including to find out more about how the OSCE PA can contribute to strengthening parliamentarism in these countries and what can be learned from them. The travel restrictions necessitated by Covid-19 - in place for much of the past year - made some of the planned visits practically impossible.

An exchange with Damdin Tsogtbaatar, Head of the Delegation of Mongolia to the OSCE PA, was possible on the sidelines of the High-Level Conference

on Parliamentary Support to Victims of Terrorism, held in Rome in June 2022. At the time of writing, arrangements to set up bilateral meetings with the Turkmen and Mongolian delegations as well as a joint meeting with delegations of the five Central Asian countries and Mongolia in the margins of the OSCE Annual Session in Birmingham are ongoing to allow for an in-depth exchange on issues of common concern as well as opportunities for shared responses.

From left to right: Mr. Damdin Tsogtbaatar (Head of the Delegation of Mongolia to the OSCE PA), Vice-President Kauma, Vice-President Reinhold Lopatka (Chair of the CCT, Deputy Head of the Delegation of Austria to the OSCE PA), Mr. Kamil Aydin (Vice-Chair of the CCT, Member of the Delegation of Turkey to the OSCE PA) and Mr. Semih Emre Özer (Legislative Expert of the Delegation of Turkey to the OSCE PA) in a meeting held in connection with the High-Level Conference on Parliamentary Support to Victims of Terrorism. Rome, June 2022.



Concluding Observations and Way Forward

In August 2021, following my appointment as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Special Representative on Central Asia, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and its potential repercussions were causing serious concern across the region. The continued, profound and multi-faceted impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the political and economic reverberations from the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine have made the past ten months all the more challenging period for Central Asia and, indeed, the whole OSCE region. The past period also saw renewed tensions on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and unprecedented protests in Kazakhstan. As a positive development, the repeat parliamentary elections

in Kyrgyzstan in November 2021 were peacefully conducted. They completed a busy year of elections and constitutional reform that were undertaken in the aftermath of the unrest of 2020.

While the past ten months were characterized by many unforeseen events, we should not lose sight of long-term trends and continuity in the region. This message is clear from the exchanges with national authorities, civil society representatives and experts across the region over the past year. Other key recommendations that have emanated from the meetings and that I hope will help inform the future actions of the Central Asian countries and the OSCE PA include:

- *Maintain focus on sustainably addressing longstanding issues, with particular focus on economic development, reduction of social inequalities, energy security and a fair distribution of limited water resources which remain among the most critical questions of mutual concern for Central Asian countries;*
- *Develop concrete, cooperative responses for preventing and mitigating the effects of climate change in Central Asia;*
- *Ensure an environment in which civil society actors can operate freely and safely and in which citizens can make informed choices; and*
- *Further strengthen regional cooperation by fully utilising the existing fora and by creating new meaningful ways of collaboration.*



Kyrgyzstan. April 2022.



Central Asia and Mongolia



Kazakhstan



Tajikistan



Kyrgyzstan



Turkmenistan



Mongolia



Uzbekistan

Total population: 78,413,511 (2020 est., source: the World Bank)
Area: 5,567,372 sq km (source: the World Bank)