

Report of the Secretary General
to the OSCE Parliamentary Standing Committee
22nd Winter Meeting



Dear Bureau Members,
Dear Members of the Standing Committee,
Dear colleagues,
Dear friends,

I would like to present to you my report for the period of November 2022 to February 2023 on the work of the OSCE PA International Secretariat, which I have the responsibility and the honor to lead.

As you are aware, I regularly report to the Assembly in all its articulation 6 times a year: in February at the Winter Meeting in Vienna, in April at the Copenhagen Bureau Meeting, twice in July at the Annual Session – namely the Standing Committee and in the Plenary, in October at the Autumn Meeting and in December at the Bureau Meeting that precedes the Ministerial Council. My written and oral reports at the Assembly's statutory meetings and the Bureau Meetings depict the **institutional opportunity** foreseen by our Rules of Procedure for members **to inquire about, assess and scrutinize** my leadership of the administrative branch of our organization, as well as the work of the staff of the International Secretariat, which I am mandated to head and manage.

Before proceeding to elaborate on our activities in this reporting period, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the words of **appreciation and support you have repeatedly expressed** regarding my work and that of my colleagues at the International Secretariat in our service to the Assembly's members on every occasion I have reported to you. To ensure full transparency and accessibility, please be informed that all my reports since assuming my role as Secretary General are available in video format **here**, as well as in written form **here**.

OSCE PA ACTION ON UKRAINE

Undoubtedly, our Assembly's activities continue to focus on the on-going war against Ukraine, which is tragically entering its second year as we gather in Vienna for our 2023 Winter Meeting. The continued aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has generated ample debate within the Assembly as to how we can support Ukraine. The 2022 Birmingham Declaration calls for the introduction of a suspension mechanism to the Rules of Procedure for those participating States in gross violations of international law and the Helsinki Principles. Such call, debated by the Standing Committee in Warsaw during the 2022 Autumn Meeting, displayed however a lack of consensus among Standing Committee members for a relevant change to the Rules of Procedure.

Nonetheless, the Assembly has, and continues to show unanimous and unwavering support for Ukraine since the adoption of the **Resolution on Clear, Gross and Uncorrected Violations of Helsinki Principles by the Russian Federation** in **2014**, which condemned violations of all Helsinki Principles by Russian Federation and expressed unequivocal support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Unlike the OSCE governmental side, which is constrained by the consensus rule, our Assembly has persistently used every opportunity – through inter-alia resolutions, statements, press releases and visits – to condemn the illegal and unjustifiable actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine in the strongest possible terms.

Admittedly, there are limits to any meaningful contribution the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly can make as an interparliamentary forum when dialogue is not possible. In the interim period, until dialogue is revived, **the Assembly relies on one of its strongest and most effective tools, namely political statements** – in this respect, the OSCE PA has a proven track record in speaking up against the Russian Federation's persistent military aggression towards Ukraine, while maintaining a sensible and realistic approach to ensure to protect the organization, which remains of distinct value being the only regional security organization of its kind.

Such statements, including joint statements with the OSCE Chairmanship, the OSCE Secretary General and the Institutions, have manifested the unity of the organization in these challenging times. The Assembly, particularly in the face of the OSCE's greatest security challenge yet, continues to advocate for the organization and its existing structures and toolbox, which should be revived to pursue opportunities for de-escalation and dialogue when the political environment is conducive, hopefully in the near future. Overall, **I am immensely proud of the incredible patrimony of credibility and coherence this Assembly and its leadership have demonstrated over the past 9 years since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea to today's war of aggression**

CHALLENGES

It goes without saying that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and its International Secretariat have been tremendously challenged over the last 3 years. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic posed serious obstacles to the nature of our work as we were not able to gather in-person for almost 2 years. Besides paralyzing political dialogue, the pandemic and the war against Ukraine have impacted the global economy, which has lead to a **sharp increase of overall living costs specifically affecting our line of work**. These inter-alia include expenses related to travel, such as flight fares, accommodation and transportation, as well as costs related to interpretation services and the rental of conference rooms and equipment.

Yet, we continue to emerge from these monumental challenges stronger and more resilient and strive to do our outmost to overcome these trying times as best as we can. During the pandemic, we were forced to

introduce new IT infrastructure and technologies - including videoconferencing and e-voting – to ensure the Assembly can continue its core functions. Further, **activities involving our parliamentarians have in fact exponentially increased by 48 % from 2017 to 2023** (ANNEX II), which not only reaffirms the strong commitment of our members to the OSCE PA, but also our ability to adapt to new realities in spite of less resources.

However, our extraordinary efforts have additionally stretched already limited resources of the International Secretariat: political instability and economic uncertainty will continue to be the reality within which we operate, which is why I am grateful to all our members for their support and understanding in what is realistically achievable in these difficult times.

In trying to find the appropriate response to extremely strained relations among participating States Delegations, characterized by the complete absence of dialogue, the Vienna Office of the International Secretariat has increased its outreach to the Permanent Missions and the OSCE Executive Structures and Institutions. Coordination, focusing on continuous presentation of the PA acquis, is also touching upon regional and thematic issues and is more frequent than it has ever been.

ADMINISTRATION

Audit

The conclusion of the annual financial audit of the International Secretariat, which was recently finalized, **was highly satisfactory again this year.** The audit was performed by our new, external auditor **Deloitte**, one of the most reputable audit firms worldwide; it **encompassed a thorough review of the financial accounts of the International Secretariat, as well as an extensive assessment of our reporting systems, business processes and internal controls. The report contains a positive appraisal and confirms our accounts are very well managed, and our working methods of high quality.** The audit report will be available to you together with the Treasurer's report.

Staff

Nonetheless, I am compelled to stress that maintaining our high-quality work comes with a price. **The concept of doing “doing more with less” is certainly ambitious, but not sustainable in the long run.** As noted earlier in my report, the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war against Ukraine and subsequent record inflation rate(s) have led to substantial increases in living costs, which you are witnessing too. Unlike other international organizations, in particular OSCE Executive Structures, our annual budget does not contain provisions for inflation-adjusted salaries, which negatively impacts our capacities to perform.

The International Secretariat staff has formally communicated to me, via their staff representative, their concerns regarding the increasingly challenging living and working conditions: more specifically, our staff has suffered a de facto loss of 20% in their effective salaries over the past 3 years as a result of stagnant wages and the absence of an inflation adjustment mechanism. Further, the staff has inquired as to whether different possibilities to remedy the mentioned loss in wages could be assessed and considered, in line with equalization measures that are common practice for international organizations and national decisions adopted by the governments of our respective host countries. Please note that all other OSCE Executive Structures provide regular wage increases and adjust salaries in accordance with inflation indexes.

In view of the above, **I would like to reiterate that as Secretary General I have a duty of care towards all staff of the International Secretariat. As such, the draft budget 2023/24 that I will submit to our Treasurer for consideration will include appropriate** adjustments mirroring the mechanisms adopted by OSCE Executive Structures.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

As per usual practice, the exhaustive list of all activities in this reporting period can be found in the annex to my report (ANNEX I).

As it pertains to activities, the leadership of the Assembly continues to underline that while the OSCE PA must exhaust all possibilities to lend its contribution to bring peace to Ukraine, it must equally remain engaged in other major issues. As such, I wish to briefly highlight some of our on-going and upcoming activities:

Informal Call for Action – Helsinki +50

In 2022, the OSCE PA held in total 10 events (8 online and 2 in-person) as part of the Call for Action - Helsinki +50 Process. While last year's meetings focused mainly on the war against Ukraine and its repercussions for the OSCE region, the first meeting of this year, which will be held before the Winter Meeting, will gather more than 25 parliamentary delegations and Permanent Missions to the OSCE to seek ways to revive genuine political dialogue that is much needed among the OSCE participating States. The event will address crucial issues such as budgeting, Helsinki principles violations, co-operation and consensus culture as well as possible reforms of the organization.

Election Observation Missions

Election observation missions remain a flagship activity of the Assembly, and have increasingly drawn interest from our members, as the number of members participating in election observation missions have, on average, doubled since pre-pandemic times.

In 2023, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will deploy an election observation mission to the Kazakh legislative elections to be held on 19 March - preparations for the mission are currently on going.

Further, the Assembly is planning to deploy an election observation mission to the upcoming general election in Türkiye, which is scheduled to be held on 14 May.

Ad Hoc Committees

The **Ad Hoc Committee on Migration** is going to conduct a visit Chisinau from 9-10 March, which will be hosted by the Delegation of Moldova to the OSCE PA and the Parliament of Moldova. The focus of the visit will be on Moldova's response to the influx of refugees from Ukraine with the aim to identify examples of best practice and areas where further support is needed.

The Swiss Delegation to the OSCE PA will host a visit of the **Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism** to Switzerland, which will take place in Bern and Geneva from 21 -22 March. The event will address issues concerning security policy, as well as the return of the families of Swiss fighters abroad – it will be an opportunity for members to exchange views and share experiences with domestic interlocutors and international organiza-

CONCLUSION

On a concluding note, I wish to wholeheartedly thank the staff of the International Secretariat for their dedication and hard work and thank all the members of parliament of the OSCE PA for their continued support and appreciation of our work in their service.

ANNEX I:

Table of Activities

OSCE PA Activities from November 2022 - February 2023

Event	Place	Date
SR Participation in ODIHR event on Addressing Violence Against Women in the OSCE Region	Online	28. Nov
OSCE Ministerial Council	Lodz	1-2 Dec.
OSCE PA Participation in Conference of Institutional Openness of Kazakh Parliament	Astana/online	2 Dec.
Election Department DoP Election Observation Conference	Brussels	6 - 8 Dec.
MP Stogmuller participation in ODIHR's Meeting with the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine	Warsaw	8 Dec.
Treasurer Juel Jensen Visit to CPH office	Copenhagen	13 Dec.
Visit to Uzbek Parliamentary Delegation to Vienna Office	Vienna	13 Dec.
Migration Committee Field Visit	Czech Republic	14-16 Dec.
Rapporteur Buser Visit to CPH office	Copenhagen	15 Dec.
High-Level Visit to Berlin	Berlin	15-16 Dec.
3rd Committee Visit to Georgia	Tbilisi	11 - 12 Jan.
Meeting of Working Group on Statute Development of Network of Young Parliamentarians	Online	18 Jan.
Meeting of the SR on Youth Engagement with Dame Audrey Glover	Online	19 Jan.
Bureau Meeting	Online	20 Jan.
Joint Event with ODIHR	Online	24 Jan.
Meeting of Informal Gender Network	Online	25 Jan.
President Address to Permanent Council	Vienna	26 Jan.
3rd Counter-Terrorism Coordination Meeting of Parliamentary Assemblies	Doha	30 - 31 Jan.
SG Visit to US	Washington DC	31 Jan - 2 Feb.
Meeting of the Statute Development - Network of Young Parliamentarians	Online	1 Feb.
SR Participation in Conference on Anti-Semitism in OSCE Region	Skopje/Online	7 Feb.
Meeting of the Informal Network of Young Parliamentarians	Vienna	21 - 22 Feb.
Bureau Meeting	Vienna	22 Feb.
Call for Action - Helsinki +50 Meeting	Vienna	22 Feb.
OSCE PA WINTER MEETING	Vienna	23 - 24 Feb.

ANNEX II: Increase of Activities



Assembly's Activities

Number of Activities
per year 2011 – 2022



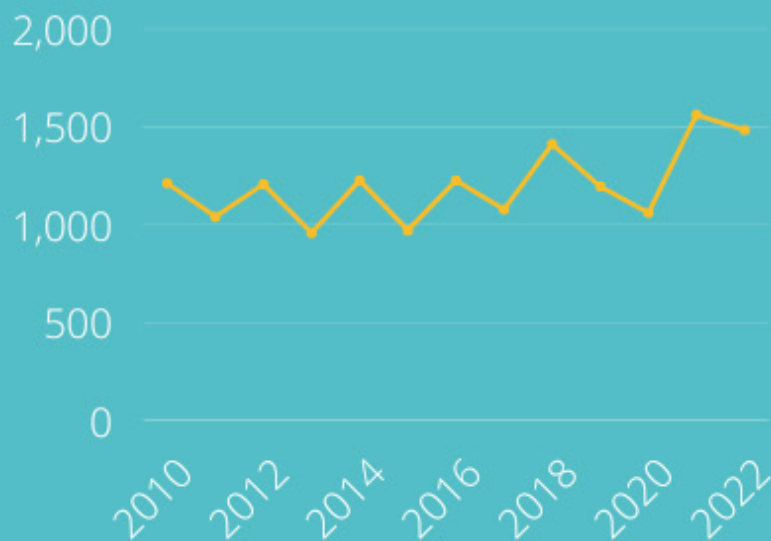
Everything You Want to Know

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic the Assembly has not only not limited but embraced the opportunities offered by new remote working formats and video conferencing tools, thereby increasing the number of activities.

"Flexibility and adaption are some of the OSCE PA's greatest assets. I am proud that the Assembly is fully operative in all its key mandated activities, carving its functionality to respond to challenges and remaining engaged and on target on the most pressing issues of the international security agenda."

Report of OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella, 3 November 2021

Total participation of MPs in OSCE PA Activities 2011 – 2022



Total participation of MPs in OSCE PA Activities 2019 – 2022

