

REPORT OF OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY  
SECRETARY GENERAL ROBERTO MONTELLA  
TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE



23 February  
2024

# Report by OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella February 2024

Just two months ago, the OSCE narrowly avoided a potentially existential crisis, when Foreign Ministers finally agreed at the last moment to select Malta to Chair the Organization this year and to reappoint the executive heads of the OSCE institutions. Our Assembly has been very clear in stating that in addition to attacking Ukraine with a brutal military onslaught, Russia's actions have been undermining the OSCE and the overall European security architecture.

At times such as this, an effective and fully functional Parliamentary Assembly that can actively contribute to European security is absolutely vital. In the OSCE PA, we have flexibility that the governmental side of our organization does not, and we must make use of it. We need to be strong in our support for Ukraine and for the OSCE as a whole.


The International Secretariat has a proven track record in delivering effectively and in a cost-effective manner on the priorities outlined by the Assembly, and we appreciate the trust and support parliamentarians have placed in us. Through facilitating parliamentary dialogue, organizing election observation work, and arranging targeted visits on priority topics, the Secretariat looks forward to continuing this work.

## PA contributions to the OSCE and regional security

Our Yerevan Autumn Meeting was a resounding success, bringing parliamentarians together for discussions on priority topics including the OSCE's role in conflicts, challenges related to corruption, and the situation in the Middle East. I extend the Assembly's thanks to the Delegation and Parliament of Armenia for hosting us in such fine manner, particularly under the difficult circumstances facing the country. Armenia exemplifies the spirit of our work, both benefitting from and contributing to the OSCE's work.

The Secretariat has continued its support to a wide range of Assembly-related activities. In pursuit of the Assembly's core function of inter-parliamentary

dialogue, we have taken an active role in facilitating meetings among parliamentarians within the gender network led by Special Representative Hedy Fry, within the network of young parliamentarians, and regional meetings such as by the Special Representative on Central Asia with MPs from this region. We worked to support meetings by Special Representatives, such as Irene Charalambides' meetings in Brussels focused on corruption and Eugenio Zoffili's meetings in Vienna on Combating Organized Crime; while at times our work requires travel, we aim to achieve as much as possible without the costs associated with this. Secretariat



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support to keynote interventions, such as by our Second and Third Committee Chairs Azay Guliyev and Lucie Potuckova in Portoroz and Vienna helps to keep Assembly priorities high on the international agenda. [The ability of Special Representatives to travel and take Assembly messages to national capitals, such as Mark Pritchard's visit to Iceland, Kyriakos Hadjiyianni's visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kristian Vigenin's recent work in Moldova demonstrates our ability and commitment to targeted and impactful work.](#)

We have been pleased to support President Pia Kauma's continued active leadership in recent months. Her visits to Azerbaijan and Georgia immediately prior to the Yerevan Autumn Meeting demonstrate the added value that the Assembly can have. By engaging in high-level parliamentary diplomacy, we can contribute to mutual understanding of serious international challenges. Recent visits by the President to the United States and to Ukraine with the Parliamentary Support Team, followed by a very successful address to the Permanent Council in Vienna and a number of important bilateral meetings with Ambassadors, have similarly





helped to ensure that the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly remains high on national agendas. As always, the Secretariat will continue to support this leadership work and honing of priorities.

Since our last meeting, the Secretariat has organized and supported two sensitive election observation missions, in Serbia and Azerbaijan. We have appreciated the leadership shown by Reinhold Lopatka and Farah Karimi in Serbia and Artur Gerasymov and Daniela De Ridder in Azerbaijan. The analytical and logistical work that goes into organizing such a mission is a major undertaking, and I'm proud of the consistently high quality of work that the Secretariat is able to achieve. I understand the steady increase in the number of parliamentarians in our observation missions to be an overall vote of confidence in the professional work of the Secretariat team.

[The Secretariat has also been active in planning future work by the Assembly.](#) In particular, we were pleased to support discussions among Bureau Members on the Assembly's strategic direction, and appreciate the President's leadership in this regard. Countless other projects are also underway, including several migration-related visits, work by Ukraine support team, a

focus on artificial intelligence by the Committee on Countering Terrorism, and numerous Special Representatives, and the Sub-Committee on the Rules of Procedure. Our team has also been in active dialogue with hosts for our upcoming meetings, and I take this opportunity to again thank the Romanian and Irish parliaments for hosting our upcoming Annual and Autumn meetings.

In all fields, the Secretariat will continue to encourage focusing activities on areas where we can genuinely bring added value in order to be as cost effective as possible.

## Budgetary and Secretariat administrative matters

As previously reported, [the Secretariat continues to work within strict budget constraints, particularly following the noteworthy cuts agreed in multiple fields in recent years](#). In the face of significant cost increases in areas such as travel and hotel costs, prudent fiscal management has ensured that we have been able to continue Assembly work in all fields.

That being said, the withholding of the Russian Federation's contribution to the Assembly for the second year in a row, which represents six per cent of the total budget, remains a serious obstacle that Assembly leadership will need to address if it continues. With many efficiencies already implemented in recent years, the Secretariat's ability to continue even the current level of service (let alone increasing demands) while facing a constant deficit of funding is not sustainable.

I want to again thank our Treasurer, Johan Buser, for his leadership in encouraging small contributors to increase their allocations to the suggested minimum of 10,000 EUR. While they cannot entirely make up for the budget shortfall resulting from Russia's unwillingness to fund the organization, such innovative approaches are helpful under current circumstances.

I echo the Treasurer's appreciation to the San Marino, Icelandic and Estonian delegations for their willingness to deliver on this request. I use this opportunity to again thank for the contributions that the parliament of Denmark and the Government of Austria offer through support to our offices, as well as the Italian and German governments' secondment of personnel which all contribute to keep the Assembly's overall budget at a very low level.

Maintaining an office in Vienna has long been an Assembly priority, and it continues, among other activities, to ensure effective and regular liaison and

communication with the OSCE Secretariat, Institutions, and diplomatic representatives in line with objectives set out in the Assembly's Rules. Our team there regularly facilitates visits by parliamentary delegations seeking to co-operate with OSCE executive structures, providing cost-effective service to this important work. As previously indicated, I have nonetheless identified potential savings and have thus ordered steps to downsize the Assembly's office presence in Vienna; the changes I have ordered will more appropriately match our needs, and makes our office space fit with the cuts already implemented in recent years.

Within the International Secretariat, we continue to seek ways to strengthen not only our external delivery of services to parliamentarians, but also our internal working processes. In line with this, we have recently put in place a performance appraisal process that I expect will further ensure effective working methods. As called for by the Assembly in the Vancouver Declaration, I hope to work closely with the Treasurer to implement calls for enhanced staff retention measures that will enable us to continue benefitting from the expert support the International Secretariat has within the staff.

## Audit

The audit report on our financial management for the past fiscal year was recently presented to the Treasurer, with Deloitte delivering a report without concerns or qualifications. This has always been the case for the International Secretariat: we have consistently received praise for the diligence and care with which we handle the Assembly's resources. I was particularly pleased that both the President and Treasurer travelled to Copenhagen in September and January to meet with the auditors and to get a full briefing on their process and findings.

This year's audit report is particularly welcome as the extended performance audit, which goes beyond financial management and studies efficiency and managerial approaches, also had high praise for the overall effectiveness and cost-efficiency of the Secretariat. I want to thank the previous President and Treasurer and the entire Assembly leadership for agreeing to this expanded auditing process, and our current Treasurer for his leadership in making this a permanent process moving forward. We will continue to pay close attention to this external advice on our work, and see how best to match this with Assembly priorities.

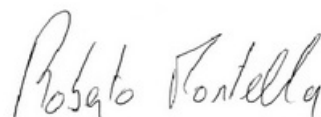
The auditors' findings this year that Secretariat compensation is overall substantially lower as compared to partner organizations lends additional credibility to the Assembly's calls for improved staff retention efforts.



## Concluding comments

Managing the International Secretariat's work in support of the Assembly is a privilege that I and colleagues do not take lightly. We listen carefully to the input, feedback, and priorities identified by the Assembly, and have, I believe, proven adept at responding in a flexible manner. We will continue to do so, and will also continue to encourage strategic thinking on priorities by the Assembly and its leadership so that we can support Assembly work in a consistent, and cost-effective manner.

Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly  
Roberto Montella  
Vienna, 23 February 2024











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