

**Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
24-26 February 2021**

**Report by the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Peter Lord Bowness**

Dear Members,

In accordance with our Rules of Procedure, as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's longest serving Vice-President, I took over the duties of President from George Tsereteli on 11 December 2020, following the convocation of a new Parliament in Georgia of which he is not a Member. Let me once again take this opportunity to thank President Tsereteli for his long years of service in our Parliamentary Assembly and for his tireless dedication to the work of the OSCE.

I also want to thank Members and Delegations for their kind words of encouragement. Although I have not sought this position, I am honoured to assume the office and I will continue to carry out its duties with your assistance and the International Secretariat until our next Annual Session. I have made it clear in my letter to Members of the Standing Committee and the Bureau on 12 December 2020 that I will not run for President in July 2021. Following our Annual Session, our Assembly must have a new President and a renewed Bureau. I will therefore do my best to hand over the Assembly in good order and without any commitments, which should rightly belong to the new President.

In light of the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our activities, I therefore find it crucial that we take key decisions and procure the technology necessary to hold remote elections in the case that we are once again unable to meet in-person for the Annual Session. In our 2 December 2020 meeting, the Bureau endorsed a set of provisional emergency rules which, if approved by the Standing Committee during this Winter Meeting, would apply in the unfortunate event that we are unable to gather in Bucharest. I wish once again to encourage Members of the Standing Committee to favourably consider the adoption of these provisions, which are indispensable for the good continuation of our work.

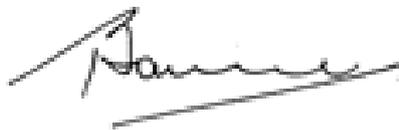
Following an established practice, I addressed the OSCE Permanent Council on 21 January 2021 to present our collective work and raise our concerns on several key issues. In the light of the violent attack against the U.S. Capitol, I reiterated concerns that were also raised by President Tsereteli last autumn regarding post-election developments characterized by unrest and violence. This worrying trend must compel us to find ways to remedy to the erosion of public trust in our governments and institutions by using all the OSCE tools at our disposal. Discussions with more than a dozen OSCE Ambassadors taking the floor also led to a full and frank exchange of views related to improving dialogue, counter-terrorism efforts, the crisis in and around Ukraine, conflicts in the South Caucasus region, and institutional co-operation within the OSCE.

In these complicated times before we return to normality, I have signalled my intention to call more frequently on meetings of the Bureau to hear advice from Colleagues and ensure that political positions are discussed and adopted in a consensual manner.

These online meetings are also the opportunity for the PA leadership to establish close contact with the new OSCE executive officers. On 26 January 2021, we gladly hosted the new Secretary General of the OSCE, Ms. Helga Schmid, for stimulating exchanges on the role of the Organization in our multilateral system and the important work that parliamentarians undertake to raise the public profile of the OSCE and connect it to decision-makers and civil society. I am pleased that we will be able to hear from Secretary General Schmid, along with the new Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Mr. Matteo Mecacci, the new Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, and the new High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, during this Winter Meeting.

Fully exploiting our political role to help generate interest in the work of the OSCE, both in our national parliaments and with our governments, is also the essence of the “Call for Action,” which was officially launched on the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in December. Our first follow-up virtual roundtable on 27 January 2021 was a truly unique event in that it brought together PA Members, former PA Presidents, OSCE Chairs, Secretaries General, and current and former leaders of OSCE institutions to chart a way forward for our Organization. I look forward to closely involving our political leadership as this project progresses, so that we can make full use of the influence of our parliaments to make the OSCE stronger, more effective, and more visible.

Especially in the light of the challenging environment we have been forced to deal with for the past year, I would like to underline my appreciation for the work of the International Secretariat under the steady leadership of Secretary General Roberto Montella, which has further reinforced the position of our Parliamentary Assembly in the OSCE family and in global conversations. As uncertain times still lay ahead, I would also like to thank you all for your assistance and for your continued engagement in our work. I look forward to working with you all during this Winter Meeting and in the coming months to meet our common challenges through honest international dialogue and strong multilateral co-operation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Bowness', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Peter Lord Bowness