

**Final Report of the
Special Representative on Arctic Issues
Torill Eidsheim**



2019-2021

Foreword

The climate has always been changing, but what we need to ask ourselves is: has it ever changed this fast before? The answer scientists are giving us is a clear NO!

With my appointment as Special Representative on Arctic Issues back in 2019, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly aimed at raising awareness on challenges facing the Arctic, and there is no greater challenge than the effects of climate change. As the world's most severely affected region, it is essential that we all promote solidarity with the Arctic and pursue joint action for a global problem that requires global solutions.

We are slowly understanding that we should address climate change as a climate crisis. In the meantime, Arctic communities are defining it as a climate disaster. It is not just a natural phenomenon: it affects people directly.

Acknowledging that what we are experiencing in the Arctic and beyond is a result of human activity is the only option that leaves us with the possibility to actually do something about it. As parliamentarians, not only do we have this power, but we also carry a responsibility to make use of it.

My mandate as OSCE PA Special Representative on Arctic issues ended in July 2021, as I now approach the end of my term in Parliament. In this report, you can find a short overview of climate change in the Arctic and its relevance for the rest of the world. You will also read about our activities and efforts, as well as some inputs, suggestions and recommendations for future work.

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OSCE PA Special Representative on Arctic Issues (2019-2021)

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Summary of key points

- There is a need for increased awareness on the main characteristics of the Arctic region, which is home for more than four million people and is undergoing severe environmental changes, with clearly interlinked consequences and dangers for society.
- The Arctic, which is warming almost three times faster than the global average, should serve as an eye opener on the whole world's climate. It is crucial to monitor developments in the High North to understand and predict developments and dynamics at lower latitudes.
- Climate change should be considered and addressed as a climate crisis, directly affecting and posing considerable threats to human security alongside the natural environment. The economic and environmental dimension of the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly should continue to enhance their efforts in addressing it.
- The Arctic is and must remain an area of peace and security, especially against the backdrop of new challenges. Natural, economic and geostrategic dynamics always carry along the risk of political tensions. Good co-operation in the Arctic Council must be supported and preserved.
- Parliamentarians should make better use of their key assets, notably legislative, oversight and public awareness capacities, to support and provide long-term strategic political leadership to efforts aimed at building resilient, sustainable and climate-friendly societies.

Overview on Climate Change in the Arctic

We are heading towards a new and largely unknown Arctic that will have large ramifications for natural and political systems.

- Prof. T. Furevik, during OSCE PA Parliamentary Dialogue on the Arctic

For the past 50 years, the Arctic has been warming at a rate nearly three times the global average. This has dramatic effects on the natural environment, on biodiversity, on infrastructures, and on society as a whole, including the subsistence-based livelihoods of many Arctic communities. In fact, the region – often mistaken for a mass of ice - is home to over four million people, who are experiencing climate change effects disproportionately to the rest of the world and are living through a real climate emergency.

Global warming is undeniably transforming the region, and this is compounded by the challenges of unsustainable development and pollution. Even a simple overview of effects manages to underscore the gravity of what is happening:

Reindeer-herders have noticed that more and more trees are rapidly growing in their pastures: a changing Arctic flora necessarily leads to challenges for the fauna and, in turn, to new agricultural, hunting and herding patterns, overturning the Arctic ecosystem and established livelihood traditions, and posing considerable risks to the subsistence of many indigenous communities.

The thawing permafrost is increasingly disrupting and destroying critical infrastructure such as roads, buildings and pipelines. Moreover, bigger waves and increased rain and snow precipitations are leading to stronger coastal erosion and more avalanches and flooding, posing further dangers to human settlements. This has forced human migrations in recent years. For instance, parts of Longyearbyen in Svalbard and whole other villages have been resettled inland in Alaska.

The polar ice cap and Arctic sea ice are rapidly shrinking. Since 1980, it is estimated that the sea ice has been diminishing by around 230 billion tons a year. Some of the last multiyear ice north of Greenland is also breaking up, and the ice sheet lost a record 532 million tons only in 2019.

The most recent report¹ by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) presented in August 2021 concluded that: “In 2011–2020, annual average Arctic sea ice area reached its lowest level since at least 1850”, and that “Late summer Arctic sea ice area was smaller than at any time in at least the past 1000 years.” The report



Photo credit: Harald Finkler

further notes that: “Global mean sea level has risen faster since 1900 than over any preceding century in at least the last 3000 years”. A warmer ocean and the melting of glaciers are among the main contributors to global sea level rise.

Moreover, the rapid melting of ice also weakens the ice surface reflectivity – this is the so-called albedo effect-, absorbing more heat and exponentially amplifying the warming. Short-lived climate pollutants, such as soot, are influencing the melting of ice when it darkens its white surface. There are a number of new initiatives, i.a. in the Arctic Council, to reduce the emissions of black carbon in the Arctic region, which will have an immediate effect on the melting of the ice. Moreover, as the permafrost melts, frozen animals and plants will decay, releasing methane and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

A warmer, open and more acid Arctic Ocean has severe consequences also on fishing and the economy. The migration patterns of fish stocks are rapidly changing, leading to consistent threats to Arctic economy which is heavily dependent on fisheries. Moreover, the melting ice is opening up new shipping routes. While this can be positive for economic growth, an increased maritime activity requires increased rescue ca-

capacity and stronger preparedness and response. New business opportunities can pose a threat to Arctic indigenous communities and lead to more competition for the use of land for instance connected to mining operations and infrastructure development.

Global warming is also leading to increased extreme weather events, including wildfires and severe storms and flooding. In the Arctic, scientists² predict even more severe weather conditions: in over forty years the region experienced extremely cold winter despite amplified warming.

Satellite technologies are of particular importance for the Arctic region, which is characterized by limited infrastructure and large distances. They play a crucial role in monitoring climate change dynamics impacting the Arctic such as the loss of sea ice and thawing permafrost. It is key to enhance co-operation on sustainable use and governance of resources, and further develop the role and capacities of space programmes.

I take the opportunity to draw attention on the latest report on Arctic Climate Change, published by the Arctic Council at the 2021 Arctic ministerial meeting. [Click here.](#)

Overview on the Relevance of the Arctic Climate for the rest of the Planet

The climate crisis did not disappear with the arrival of COVID-19 and it remains humanity's greatest long-term threat to the survival of our planet. Addressing it now is not a choice, it's a reality we face.

- Mr. D. Violetti, UNFCCC, during OSCE PA Parliamentary Dialogue on the Arctic

A barometer for the global warming

The Arctic has an important role in regulating temperatures all over the planet. Climate change effects are not an exclusive feature of the region, but simply happen more intensely and more quickly there, due to the so-called Polar or Arctic amplification. The changes in the Arctic should serve as an eye opener of what the whole planet is facing: a climate crisis with profound impacts on the environment, on the life of citizens and on society as a whole.

Certain effects of the climate crisis in the Arctic have a direct physical impact on lower latitudes. The melting Arctic ice causes changes in weather patterns globally. Scientists are also finding evidence on the linkages between the melting ice, mutating ocean flows and extreme weather events. The melting of land ice also causes a general rise of the sea level that threatens to submerge low-laying islands and entire nations (1cm rise of sea level can result in 1 million people to be displaced). The above-mentioned IPCC

report further notes that “global mean sea level has risen faster since 1900 than over any preceding century in at least the last 3000 years”.

Arctic sea routes

As noted, the retreat of Arctic sea ice is also opening up the Northern shipping route (the Central Arctic Ocean, North West Passage and North East Passage). Most of the increase in shipping traffic so far is internal traffic between destinations along the Russian coastline, but there is also a growing traffic to ports in Europe and Asia. Using the North East Passage will cut the sailing time by approximately 40 per cent between Asian ports and ports in Northwest Europe, compared to going through the Suez Canal. This provides huge opportunities for new and expanded economic activities, but also increases trade competition and geostrategic tensions. It is not by chance that – for instance - China, a non-Arctic country, has put the Arctic in the top priority areas for 2020-2030. Also the increase in resources exploitation can potentially lead to tensions.



Photo credit: Arctic Council Secretariat / Linnea Nordström

Maintaining “the Arctic model” – co-operation, predictability, and low tension

While the above serves as an early warning, it should be noted that the Arctic continues to be characterised by co-operation, predictability and low tensions, something that can be defined as the Arctic model. Clear evidence of this was the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Reykjavik on 20 May 2021 which was a constructive meeting preparing the ground for continued co-operation in the Arctic Council under the Russian Chairmanship. It is paramount to maintain the Arctic as an area of peace and co-operation.

When the sea ice is retreating, the Law of the Sea, most notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), becomes more important as it regulates important rights

and obligations for the use of the Arctic Ocean. In 2008, the five Arctic coastal states committed themselves in the Ilulissat-declaration to follow the law of the seas for an orderly settlement of disputes and overlapping claims on the continental shelf.

Raise the ambition level at COP 26

The main driver of climate change is global emissions of greenhouse gases – which is caused by human activities. This is why an effective implementation of the Paris COP 21 Agreement is of major importance, and why the upcoming COP 26 meeting in Glasgow in November 2021 is crucial, for the Arctic and the whole world. More countries, especially large economies, need to raise their ambition level. Global warming is a global problem, which needs global solutions.

Annotated Report of implemented Activities (May 2019 - July 2021)

Based on the mandate received by OSCE PA President George Tsereteli in the immediate aftermath of the PA leadership's study trip to the Svalbard Islands organized by the Norwegian Parliament (the Stortinget) in May 2019 to raise political awareness on the effects of climate change in the High North³, I decided to center my activities as Special Representative on the following:

- Raising general awareness in the OSCE PA on challenges affecting the Arctic - with a clear priority on effects of the climate change crisis on society.
- Establishing contacts and partnerships with relevant stakeholders (including OSCE executive structures and Arctic organizations),
- informing of the increased attention of the OSCE PA to Arctic Issues and climate change, promoting the role parliamentarians and international parliamentary fora such as the OSCE PA can play on Arctic Issues and climate change.
- Offering to Arctic organizations (with specific expertise but limited reach out) the wider reach out of the OSCE PA.
- Use the topic of climate change - common challenge as a confidence-building topic within the Assembly.
- Provide policy recommendations.
- Media messaging aimed at raising awareness.



I implemented these points throughout the following activities:

a) Raising Awareness within the OSCE PA

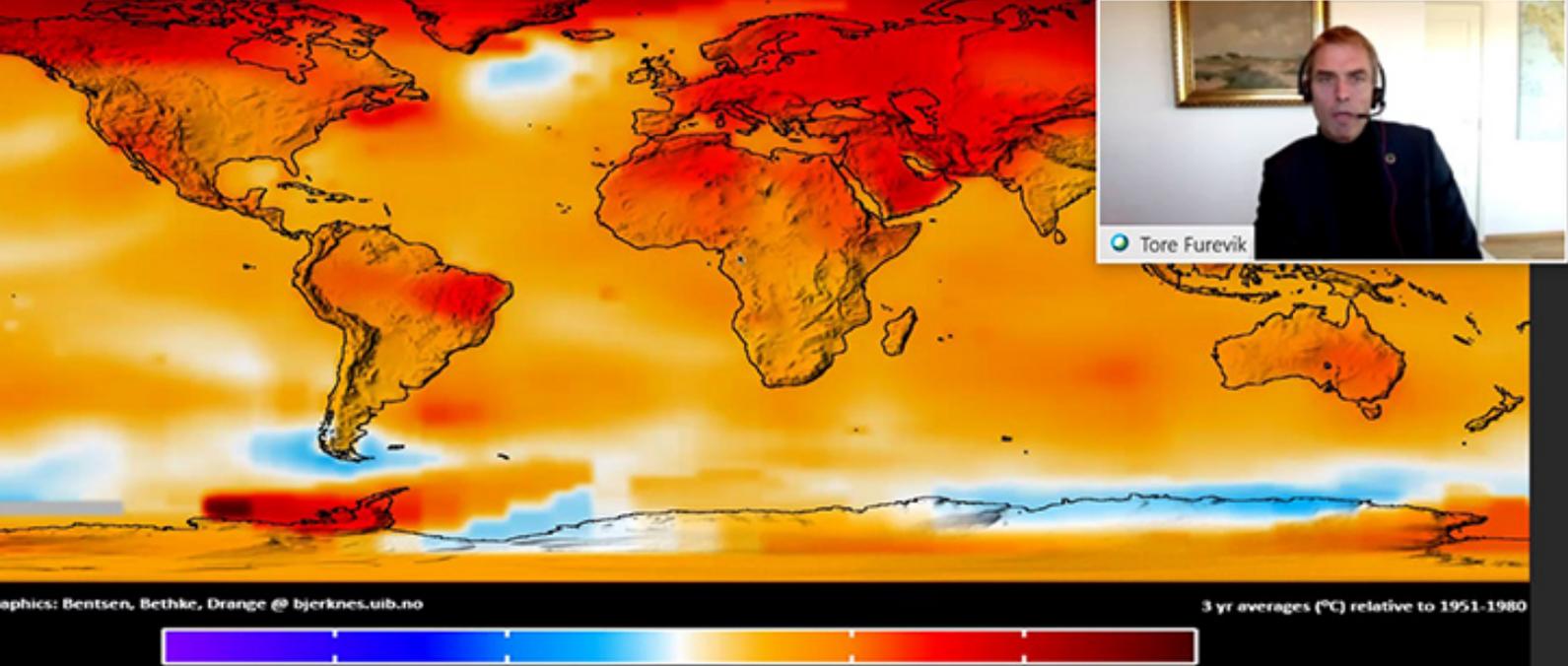
- **Regular reports to the Bureau and to the Standing Committee** (overall 9 reports)
I regularly reported to the OSCE PA leadership about my activities, not only for a matter of transparency but also to maintain the topic of the Arctic and its challenges high on the Assembly's agenda. I took these opportunities to call for an increased focus of our organization on climate change.
- **Regular public messages on the OSCE PA media**
I took the opportunity of international days, such as the World Environment Day, or of events concerning the Arctic environment, such as record high temperatures or wildfires, or publications of other organizations reports, to deliver some media messages aimed at raising awareness and calling for action.
- **Introductory Keynote speech to the 2nd Committee Special debate on the Security Implications of Climate Change and the Role of parliamentarians**, Vienna, 20 February 2020
See the full intervention [here](#).
- **Organization and chairing of an OSCE PA Parliamentary Web Dialogue: From the Arctic to Global: the Political Role in addressing Climate Change**⁴, 16 September 2020
The organization of this event, which saw the participation of more than 50 parliamentarians and other dozens of external stakeholders, was organized online to replace what would have been an in-person side event to the OSCE PA Annual Session in Vancouver, cancelled due to the outbreak of the COV-

ID-19 pandemic. The web dialogue has been one of the highlights of my mandate. The overall recommendations are integrated in this report. A summary of the webinar⁵ was circulated to all delegations.

- **Organization and chairing of a Meeting with OSCE PA delegations from Arctic countries**⁶, 21 May 2021
The meeting aimed at hearing directly from Arctic delegations what their main concerns and policy priorities are concerning the Arctic region and Arctic co-operation, including within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. We underscored together the need to keep it high on our agenda.
- **Official contribution to the Report of the OSCE PA 2nd Committee at the Remote OSCE PA 2021 Session**⁷ (in absence of possibilities to propose a stand-alone resolution)
Throughout my whole mandate, I have cooperated and exchanged notes with the leadership of the Assembly's General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment, which has also clearly prioritized the topic of environmental security in its activities.

b) Participation and Contributions to International Conferences and Events

- **2019 Arctic Circle Conference, Reykjavik**, 12-15 October 2019
The Arctic Circle conference is the yearly biggest gathering of governmental, non-governmental and academia experts on the Arctic, and I took part in this event with the two-fold aim of receiving inputs for my work and of establishing contacts with relevant stakeholders.



2019 Nordic Council⁸, Stockholm, 31 October 2019

Similarly, I attended the Nordic Council to further establish contact, to promote the increased importance of the Arctic region within Nordic co-operation, to offer to Nordic countries the wider OSCE PA platform and to promote an increased role of parliamentarians. I also engaged with relevant environmental bodies and committees.

- **Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) Committee on External Affairs on "Developments in the Arctic and opportunities for international co-operation"**⁹, Rovaniemi, 16 December 2019

I delivered a keynote speech upon invitation from the PACE President, focusing on the reasons why our two partner organizations should focus more directly on the Arctic, highlighting the importance of building synergies and making a better use of parliamentary assets to address climate change in the region.

- **Marshall Center Security Seminar on the geostrategic importance of the Arctic**¹⁰, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, 3 March 2020
I delivered a keynote speech and took part

in a high/level panel shifting the focus to climate change as the main root cause of the increased geostrategic importance of the Arctic. I noted that the Arctic must remain an area of co-operation and that jointly addressing climate threats is also the only viable solution to defuse arising trade and military tensions.

- **14th International Conference of parliamentarians of the Arctic Region**, Oslo, 18 April 2021
Invited as an official Observer, I delivered remarks to reiterate the readiness to bring Arctic instances to the wider forum of the OSCE, acknowledging that many of the Arctic problems require global solutions. My role was strongly appreciated as a link for Arctic legislators to reach foreign partners and should be further developed.
- **European Space Agency (ESA) Workshop on Climate Security**, Session on the Arctic, June 2021
In my intervention, delivered on my behalf by the Secretariat, we underscored the need to promote a closer partnership between science and politics, with parliamentarians implementing a science-driven environmental policy.

c) Meetings with External Stakeholders

- **OSCE Office for Economic and Environmental Activities**

While the OSCE executive structures do not have a specific focus on the Arctic region, we emphasized the increased importance of the climate-security link and agreed to regularly exchange notes at Secretariat level and build on each other's activities.

- **Arctic Council Secretariat and Chairmanship representatives** (in multiple occasions)

The Arctic Council is a key interlocutor. I first of all ensured to align my efforts to its activities, in order to be able to promote them, to raise awareness on them and not to duplicate. The opportunity to have a direct counterpart in a big organization as the OSCE was appreciated, although it is important to preserve the different mandates and areas of engagement of the two organizations.

- **European Union Special Envoy for the Arctic**

The EU has been placing increasing importance to the Arctic region over the last years, especially on climate and trade related issues. With its project management capacity as well as its political power, the EU is a crucial stakeholder.

- **Chairmanship of the Nordic Council**

- **Parliamentary Committee for Nordic Sustainable Development**

- **PACE President**

- **Chair of Arctic parliamentarians**

- **OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities**

One of the autonomous institutions of the OSCE, unique among international organizations, works on protecting and promoting national minorities. With new challenges affecting Arctic communities, we together decided to place increased attention to their needs, including in terms of political representation. The pandemic blocked the organization of possible joint initiatives, which could resume soon.

- **Sami Council Representatives**

As the organization bringing together the Sami living in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, I consider it crucial to hear from them directly what are the current challenges and policy priority areas, offering the OSCE platform to raise awareness on their needs. I learned that their voice is "always listened to but rarely heard", and that they believe that too often Arctic communities are sacrificed in the name of economic pursuits. I sent a policy note to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on this issue.

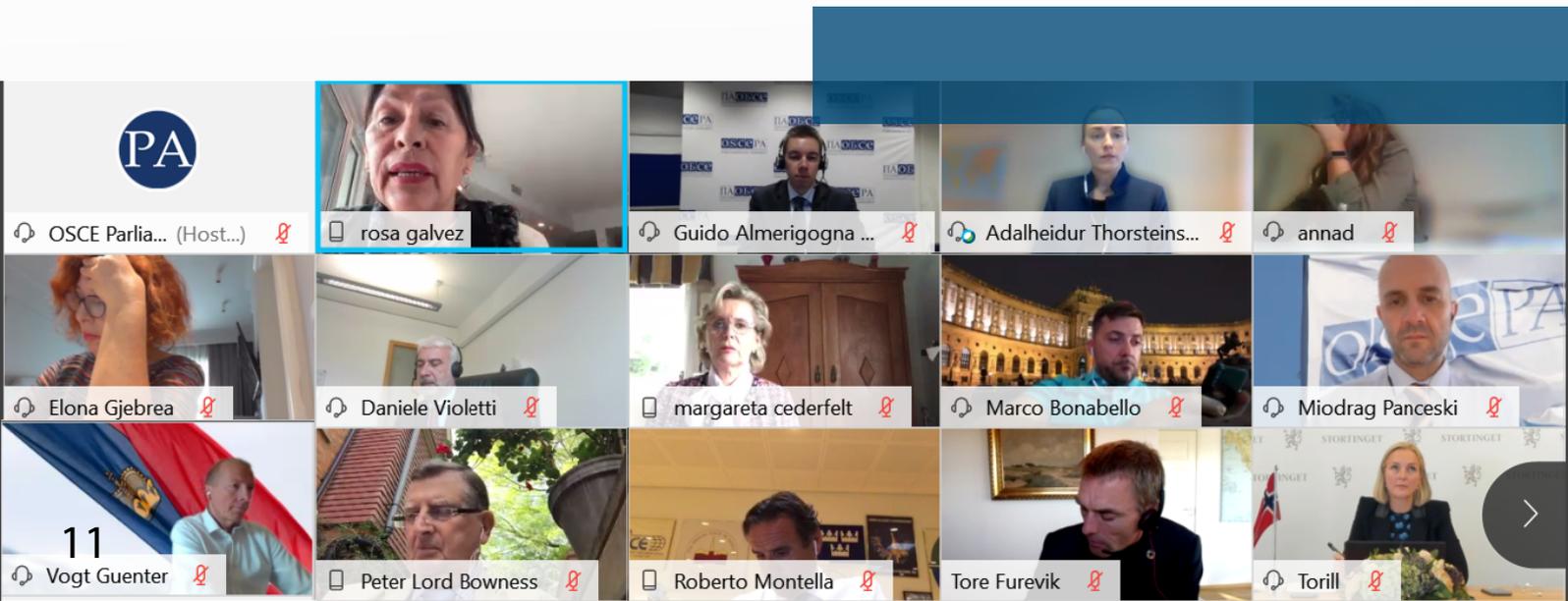


Reccomendations to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Parliamentarians

The cancellation of the OSCE PA 2020 Annual Session and the restrictive procedural rules for the OSCE PA 2021 Remote (Annual) Session due to the COVID-19 pandemic unfortunately prevented me from presenting and sponsoring a resolution on the effects of climate change on the Arctic. In addition to the below points which aim at offering some inputs and recommendations as a result of my two-year work, I would also urge the Assembly to adopt a resolution on this topic at the next Annual Session, in order to assign to it the right political weight - which only a voted document can carry. In such a way, the Arctic and specifically the importance it has in global climate would become part of the official OSCE PA acquis.

a) For the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

- Maintain a focus on the Arctic, acknowledging that the severe effects of climate change pose a direct threat to Arctic communities and to the planet, with consequences on the wider political, socio-economical, and geo-strategic interests in the region.
- Address unequivocally climate change as a climate crisis.
- Continue to raise awareness in the Assembly on the specific challenges faced by the 4 million people living in the Arctic, including Arctic indigenous communities.
- Recognize the Arctic as the “world’s refrigerator” to raise awareness on the effects of climate change at lower latitudes and on the role that the Arctic environment plays in regulating the entire globe’s climate.
- Engage more actively parliamentary delegations from Arctic countries, as important forces in promoting more effective climate change policies and sustainable development.
- Serve as an OSCE-wide hub for best practices and track climate-related legislation, potentially working as a catalyzer of efforts, also with the aim of raising awareness with those countries which are failing to implement environmental commitments or are not acknowledging their importance.



- Promote the portfolio of the Arctic and the climate-security link as a confidence-building topic within the Assembly and support the primary role of the Arctic Council in managing Arctic co-operation.
- Support the Arctic Council, the Conference of parliamentarians of the Arctic Region and other relevant stakeholders to continue to identify areas of synergies and possible added values. In particular, engage actively with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on the specific challenges faced by Arctic communities, including in terms of political representation, impact of COVID-19, and consider joint initiatives.
- Acknowledging the urgency of the issue, develop a stronger and more structured portfolio on climate change within the Assembly, within and/or in co-ordination with the General Committee on Science, Technology and Environmental Affairs (2nd Committee), to provide a contribution to global efforts based on distinct parliamentary assets.
- Liaise parliamentarians with prominent youth/women activists/groups as well as civil society for future informed policies and ensure that all voices are heard.
- Promote a science-based policymaking and increased interchanges between legislators, academia and scientists.
- Consider the drafting and the voting of a supplementary item (resolution) on the topic of Arctic and climate change for the next OSCE Parliamentary Annual Session.

b) For parliamentarians

- Keep a close attention to developments in the Arctic when addressing climate change nationally. Making projections in the local context, acknowledging the role that Arctic climate plays in regulating the climate at lower latitudes and that natural development in the Arctic should serve to help predict developments in the rest of the world and thereby better inform climate policies.
- Engage with parliamentarians from Arctic countries to exchange views and best practices, and develop joint policy recommendations/actions, as no unilateral climate policy can be effective.
- Make the best use and coordinate key parliamentary assets - notably legislative, oversight and public awareness capacities – including within international parliamentary fora, to support and provide long-term strategic political leadership to efforts aimed at building resilient, sustainable and climate-friendly societies.
- Prioritize climate and environmental policies in the public agenda, including in parliamentary and governmental work, demonstrating strong political will and solidarity.
- De-politicize the topic of climate change and address it as a climate crisis.
- Adapt national legislation in order to implement commitments included in the milestone COP21 Paris Agreement and other relevant international agreements, in particular those concerning CO2 emission reduction, and to be fully in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

- Exercise effective oversight on governments' participation in international climate negotiations, including the upcoming COP26, on the implementation of international commitments and on the support to the UNFCCC and UN ICCP.
- Urgently mobilize adequate resources for the transition to a carbon-free, sustainable society, including with new or revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- Secure research funding and cross-border research co-operation and invest on climate education.
- Ensure inclusive public consultations on climate-related issues, mainstreaming a whole-of-society approach, including the business community (public-private-partnerships), youth, women, elderly, people with disabilities, national minorities, indigenous people, and other marginalized groups, as well as involve civil society organizations, academia and scientists.
- Promote a science-based policy making, mainstream climate-friendly policies in all areas of national planning and adapt all legislation to be in line with sustainable development goals.
- Consider joint responses to fight pandemics such as COVID-19 and climate change together, taking into account climate-related challenges in post-COVID19 recovery plans.
- Develop adaptation plans with early-warning systems, following the Arctic model.
- Given that environmental factors in the Arctic put pressure on livelihoods and increase human security risks, engage in various high-level discussion platforms with climate change experts to inform the PA members and the Special Representative about the trends and possible solutions.

I would like to take the opportunity to link the "Summary for Policy-Makers" of the latest report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. [Click here.](#)



Conclusions



Photo credit: Ekaterina Anisimova//AFP

It emerges very clearly: what happens in the Arctic, doesn't stay in the Arctic.

The United Nations Secretary General presented the last UN climate report in August 2021 declaring 'Code Red'. How can we hear this without getting terrified? I briefly mentioned the consequences we are experiencing: it's all overwhelming and hard to fathom. Most likely, we are in serious trouble and can no longer avoid a negative impact on our future. Mother Earth will live on, but if we do not heal the wounds, it will be the ones living here - you and me and our children- who are threatened. We still have a leeway, but we need hope, dedication and urgent action.

This report is not an expert–scientific report, nor it is in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's mandate and resources to provide concrete responses to the fight against the climate crisis in the Arctic and beyond. However, we do have the capacity to generate political thrust around this topic, push it on top of our national and international policy-making agendas, listen to science, and support – urgently and decisively - current frameworks for global climate negotiations.

The strongest fear is the fear of the unknown and as humans we are uniquely vulnerable to uncertainty. We are now putting behind us almost two years marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been hard on everyone - but also showed us the strengths of co-operation, sharing knowledge, experience and assistance. Let us work in the same way on climate change. We need to move on the same side in this existential battlefield and resist our real enemy - the sum of the negative climate changes - in the Arctic and beyond.

With my report, I also wanted to highlight some of the peculiar challenges that Arctic communities are living. As noted, the Arctic has a population of more than four million people – and it must not be confused for a mass of ice somewhere up in the north, as too often happens. Full support should also be given to the Arctic Council, a true model for international co-operation: the Arctic is a region of peace and stability – and such it must remain.

In conclusion, I wish the very best to my successor, OSCE PA Special Representative Bryndis Haraldsdottir, and hope that this report can be useful for her future work within the Assembly. It has been a true honour and privilege to serve in this position.

Torill Eidsheim

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>
- 2 <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abi9167>
- 3 <https://www.oscepa.org/en/news-a-media/press-releases/press-2019/in-visit-to-arctic-region-osce-pa-leadership-explores-local-and-global-impact-of-climate-change>
- 4 <https://www.oscepa.org/en/news-a-media/press-releases/press-2020/parliamentary-input-greater-urgency-from-governments-needed-to-address-climate-crisis-say-osce-parliamentarians-at-webinar>
- 5 <https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/special-representatives/arctic-issues/4090-highlights-webinar-on-arctic-and-climate-change-16-september-2020/file>
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- 10 <https://www.oscepa.org/en/news-a-media/press-releases/press-2020/special-representative-eidsheim-addresses-arctic-challenges-and-climate-change-at-the-marshall-centre>

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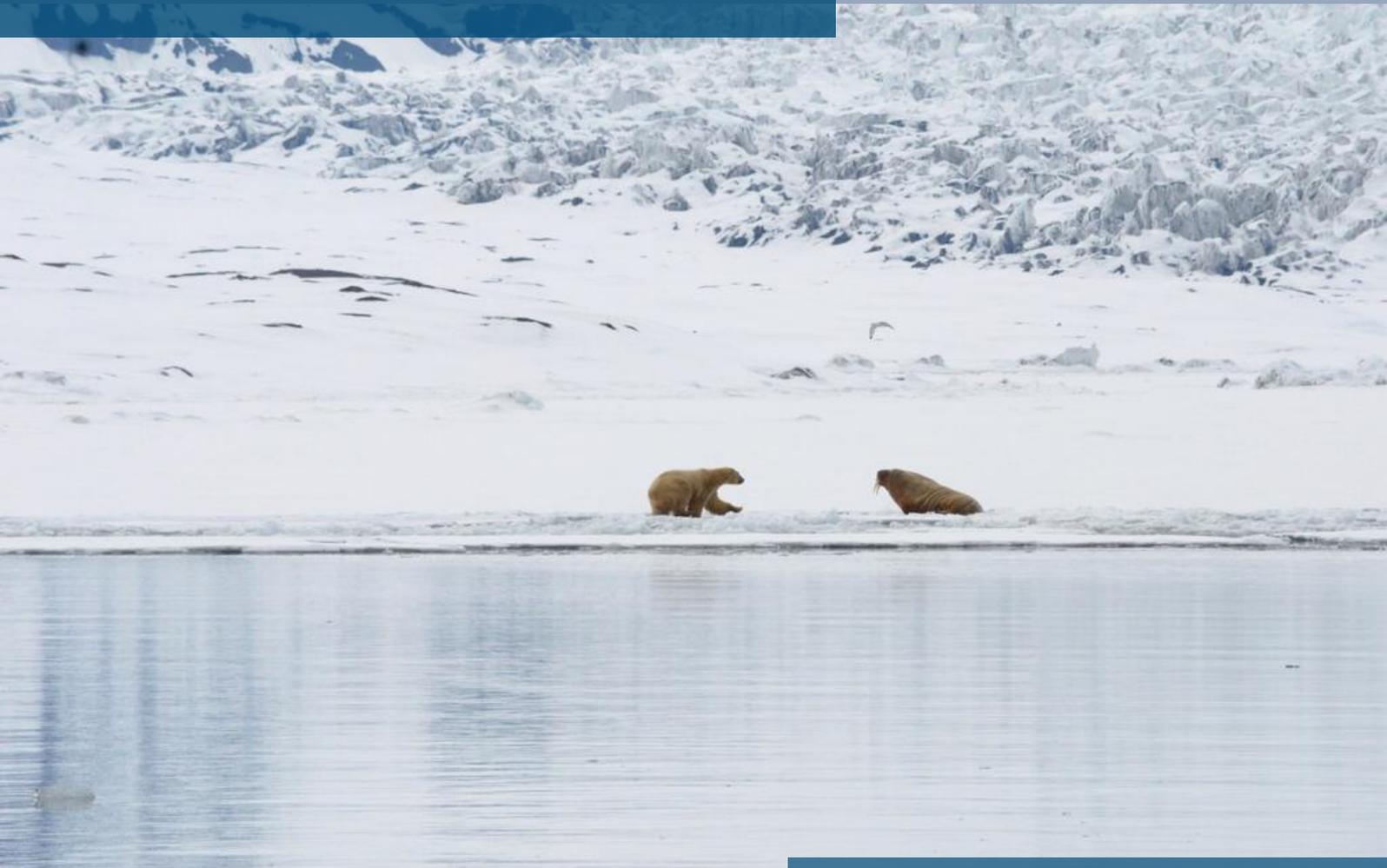


Photo taken during the visit of the OSCE PA delegation to Svalbard



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