



The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's 19th Winter Meeting



2020
20-21 February

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Summary

Nearly 250 parliamentarians from OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation participated in the OSCE PA's 19th Winter Meeting on 20-21 February 2020. The Winter Meeting opened with speakers underlining the importance of multilateral co-operation and inter-parliamentary dialogue in tackling common problems facing the region.

In his opening speech, PA President George Tsereteli highlighted multiple challenges and demands for change that political leaders must address, noting that the OSCE can help meet the expectations of citizens through concrete achievements.

The OSCE PA's three general committees met over two days to hear from experts and discuss issues such as how to efficiently leverage the tools and mechanisms of the OSCE to resolve protracted conflicts, the security implications of climate change, and multilateral human rights co-operation. OSCE PA rapporteurs presented their ideas and intentions for the 29th Annual Session in Vancouver.

On the margins of the meeting, the OSCE PA's ad hoc committees on migration and countering terrorism met to discuss ongoing work. National delegations also held numerous side events on issues such as civil society engagement, the Boris Nemtsov assassination, and the coming 75th anniversary of the end of World War II.

In the closing joint session, OSCE parliamentarians held a spirited debate on combating anti-Semitism, discrimination and intolerance in the OSCE region. The debate was opened by the President of the Austrian National

Council Wolfgang Sobotka, the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism, Rabbi Andrew Baker, and the OSCE PA Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism and Intolerance Ben Cardin (United States). Some 30 parliamentarians participated in the debate.

Also speaking at the closing session was OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues Hedy Fry (Canada). In her report, Special Representative Fry applauded the significant strides and improvements the OSCE PA and OSCE countries have made in the pursuit of gender equality, but noted that significant challenges remain.

President Tsereteli addressed the PA's Standing Committee on 20 February, along with Secretary General Roberto Montella, Treasurer Peter Juel-Jensen, Special Representatives and Rapporteurs, and representatives of Ad Hoc Committees.

Tsereteli and Montella held a series of bilateral meetings with PA delegations, OSCE officials and representatives of international organizations.

A meeting with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet focused on the human rights situation in the OSCE area and opportunities for joint work between her office and the PA.

Meetings were also held with the Secretary General of the CSTO PA and the TURKPA Secretary General, as well as the PA delegations of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Armenia, the Netherlands, Ukraine, and San Marino.



HOFBURG
VIENNA



Joint Session of the General Committees

The opening joint session featured speeches by OSCE PA President George Tsereteli, OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger, President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka and Deputy Foreign Minister of Albania Etjen Xhafaj, representing the OSCE Chairmanship.

In the debate, parliamentarians noted the importance of a multilateral approach to tackle today's challenges. With a geopolitical climate characterized by tensions and crises, the OSCE – along with the broader international community – needs to reflect its focus on its original core values.


Joint Session of the General Committees

George Tsereteli, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President

President Tsereteli noted that with today's technological and economic advancements and new levels of global connectivity there is much to be optimistic about, but there are also multiple crises, challenges, and demands for change.

Tsereteli also highlighted the need to address issues such as corruption, migration, arms control, terrorism, intolerance, and climate change.

"All of these have impacted our societies and revealed a sense of powerlessness among our governments to address them in a coherent way," he said.



Whether the challenges are economic, environmental, political or security-related, we are called upon to meet the expectations of our citizens who demand more than just promises and campaign slogans.

- President George Tsereteli

Protests and political instability have become hallmarks of this time, he observed. "These are indications that difficulties linger on," he said.

It is essential that politicians live up to the expectations of citizens through concrete achievements, including a peaceful resolution of the OSCE area's conflicts, he said, and to normalize the lives of millions of affected people.

Meanwhile, China's growing influence, Brexit and a prolonged EU enlargement process are leading to greater uncertainty in the OSCE area, the President pointed out.

In order to meet these challenges, OSCE participating States should develop new standards addressing contemporary threats, relying on the strength of the OSCE to respond quickly to tackle emergencies, he said.



Wolfgang Sobotka President of the National Council of Austria

The OSCE has three pillars, noted President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka, one of which being the human dimension. Attacks on the rule of law and human rights are attacks on society itself, he said, stressing the role of parliamentarians in defending OSCE values.

“Parliamentary diplomacy is a growing trend in foreign policy,” Sobotka said. “The Winter Meeting of OSCE parliamentarians here in Vienna is a welcome opportunity to discuss current challenges and seek solutions. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly can act as a bridge-builder between the West and the East and in the Mediterranean region. We should make full use of the OSCE tools to

help settle the conflict in eastern Ukraine.” In light of attacks by right-wing extremists, Sobotka said that focus must be placed on combating the rise of anti-Semitism. On this issue, Austria has a special responsibility in order to contribute to halting the rise of anti-Semitism, Sobotka said.

He highlighted the role of digitalization in speeding up the process of both positive aspects and negative aspects of today’s problems.

The involvement of the OSCE is indispensable in order to uphold the rule of law, he stressed, pointing out that the process of democratization takes time.

Joint Session of the General Committees

Thomas Greminger, OSCE Secretary General

Secretary General Thomas Greminger praised meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly as venues for open and frank discussions, noting that the Assembly has a track record of highlighting emerging issues and introducing them to the OSCE agenda.

Emphasizing that “common security is under threat” in the OSCE region, Greminger elaborated four proposals for addressing these challenges: promoting co-operative approaches and restoring trust in effective multilateral institutions; expanding the space for dialogue; achieving a peaceful resolution to the crisis in and around Ukraine, as well as intensifying efforts in all mediation formats.

He also stressed the importance of intensifying partnerships and opening up new avenues for co-operation.

Promoting human rights is a duty to ensure security for all participating States, he said, while stressing that the main priority must lie in reducing the risks of military threats and outbreaks of conflicts across the OSCE region.





Etjen Xhafaj , Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania

Minister Xhafaj laid out three main themes of the Albanian Chairmanship: making a difference on the ground, implementing our commitments together, and building stability through dialogue.

He noted that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has a privileged role to play within the OSCE and stressed the ability of parliamentarians to pressure governments to live up to commitments.

“We particularly value your support as parliamentarians, to implement our priorities, not only by building political support for the OSCE in your capitals, but also by advocating in attaining OSCE commitments by each participating State,” Xhafaj said. “As elected

officials you have not only a role but a responsibility for the implementation, or by helping us hold your government to account for the commitments undertaken.”

He emphasized that the challenges that the OSCE is confronted with can only be tackled collectively and not individually. “Progress is the prerogative of every chairmanship, but progress is something that can only be achieved together,” he said.

Joint Session of the General Committees

Questions and Debate

Key themes that parliamentarians raised included the importance of strengthening dialogue with civil society actors, reforming criminal justice systems, and making the OSCE more effective in its work.

The success of the Parliamentary Assembly depends on the efficiency within the OSCE system, it was stressed, and therefore there has to be an open and frequent degree of communication among the respective OSCE committees.

Another topic that came up in the questions included how to de-escalate tensions in Ukraine and promote paths of dialogue between the two sides.





General Committee on Political Affairs and Security

Chaired by Costel Neculai Dunava (Romania), the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security met on 21 February. The meeting featured presentations by Amb. Neil Bush, Chair of the Security Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council; Amb. Rauf Engin Soysal, Chair of the Forum for Security Co-operation and Permanent Representative of Turkey to the OSCE; Amb. Lamberto Zannier, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and Amb. Tuula Yrjölä, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. The OSCE representatives shared their working programmes and priorities for 2020.



General Committee on Political Affairs and Security

Laurynas Kasciunas, Rapporteur of the First Committee

OSCE PA Rapporteur Laurynas Kasciunas (Lithuania) presented to the committee his ideas and intentions for the report and draft resolution he is preparing for the 29th Annual Session in Vancouver. Top priorities he identified included the resolution of conflicts in the OSCE area. The Rapporteur discussed the crisis in and around Ukraine, including its high number of casualties.

Following his presentation there was a lively exchange of views on his proposals, with the need to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine through the implementation of the Minsk agreements featuring prominently in parliamentarians' remarks. He urged the prioritization of mine action, noting that landmines and other explosive devices pose a significant threat to overall security in Ukraine.

Moreover, Kasciunas added that restrictions on the freedom of the press need to be lifted and the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine need to be reinstated. In this context, Kasciunas mentioned that Russia must waive unrestricted access to the territory that is currently under control of the Russian Army, to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

With respect to cybersecurity, it was mentioned that the internet is frequently used as a tool to spread extremism and other propaganda. Kasciunas emphasized that inter-governmental efforts and joint policies are indispensable to tackle transnational threats, such as money laundering, terrorism and cybersecurity.





Neil Bush, UK Ambassador to the OSCE, Chair of Security Committee

Ambassador Bush affirmed that defending human rights is an indispensable task and that society is more stable when human rights are upheld. Bush commemorated the attacks in Hanau, Germany, committed by a suspect with far-right extremist views, which occurred on the 19th February during the OSCE PA 2020 Winter Meeting.

Bush stated that OSCE parliamentarians play a vital role in shaping the policies of the OSCE and in bringing together diverging views. As Chair of the Security Committee, Bush mentioned that this committee is a vital tool in combatting transnational threats, including countering terrorism. Bush also praised the role of the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering

Terrorism in preventing terrorist attacks.

He also noted that over the next five years, global companies risk losing an estimated 5.2 trillion USD in value creation opportunities from the digital economy due to cyber attacks and that the overall cost of transnational crimes amounts to 870 billion USD.

Finally, Bush stressed that gender dimensions also need to play an integral part, stating, "Societies are safer and more resilient when all members of society, men and women, are involved."

General Committee on Political Affairs and Security

Amb. Rauf Engin Soysal, Chair of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) and Permanent Representative of Turkey to the OSCE

Soysal pointed out the role Turkey plays as Chair of the FSC, noting the importance attached to the implementation of the Vienna Document. He noted that the Vienna Document will be modernized.

Soysal mentioned the main goals of Turkish chairmanship of the FSC are to enhance existing commitments of all three committees, providing confidence-building measures for OSCE participating States, utilizing the security dialogue for new security challenges and

to promote gender equality.

Moreover, he noted that transparency, impartiality and close co-ordination have been indispensable guiding principles of Turkish chairmanship.

Soysal further stated that the overall success of the OSCE depends on the success of the FSC and that close co-ordination with the other two members of the Troika (Czech Republic, Ukraine) has been conducted.

Lamberto Zannier, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

Zannier mentioned that worrying trends are visible within today's societies, with growing polarization and minorities being scapegoated. He highlighted that minorities are often singled out, whereby minority groups increasingly become hostage groups within society. Zannier emphasized that political parties need to be inclusive and need to represent as many demographics as possible in order to avoid growing divisions within society.

Zannier added that this polarization is also

reflected in the growing geopolitical confrontations that can be observed. Parliamentarians expressed their concerns on this development, often referring to the crisis in and around Ukraine, Turkish involvement in Northern Cyprus as well as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In addition, Zannier suggested that reform initiatives within the education, policing and justice sectors are necessary in order to make societies fully resilient to both internal and external shocks.



Amb. Tuula Yrjölä, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre

Opening a special debate on “Resolving ‘Protracted Conflicts’: The Tools and Mechanisms of the OSCE,” Amb. Tuula Yrjölä, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, described the diverse set of tools of the OSCE to address the overlapping security challenges faced today.

She highlighted the CPC’s systematic and structured approach to collecting, analyzing, and communicating early warning signals to prepare for appropriate preventive action in response to crises.

As examples, Amb. Tuula Yrjölä referred to the involvement of the CPC in resolving the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and in the Transnistrian settlement process.

General Committee on Political Affairs and Security

Debate

In their remarks, the parliamentarians addressed a number of topics, including the crisis in and around Ukraine, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and other conflicts in the South Caucasus region.

On the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict it was pointed out that the discussions between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan at the Munich Security Conference should provide a basis for further discussions on achieving peace.

OSCE PA Vice President Margareta Cederfeldt affirmed that the terms of the Minsk Agreement need to be finally implemented and other parliamentarians equally expressed their concern over the conflict. It was also stressed during the discussion that the Open Skies Treaty should be used as a framework for further progress in resolving the conflict. Other topics included the role of education in tackling extremism, Chinese involvement in the development of the 5G Network and female involvement in conflict resolution peace-solutions.





General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment

Chaired by Artur Gerasymov on 20 February, the General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment heard presentations from Committee Rapporteur Elona Gjebrea Hoxha, Ambassador Sherzod Asadov, Chairperson of the Economic and Environmental Committee (EEC), Ambassador Vuk Zugic, Co-Ordinator of the OSCE Economic and Environmental activities (OCEEA), Special Representative on Arctic Issues Torill Eidsheim, Lukas Ruttinger, Senior Project Manager, Adelphi, and OSCE PA Vice-President Pascal Allizard, each followed by lively debates.

Artur Gerasymov (Ukraine) in his opening remarks underlined that challenges stemming from the issues covered by the Second Committee are directly impacting the stability of our countries and the safety of our citizens.



General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment

Elona Gjebrea Hohxa, Rapporteur of the Second Committee

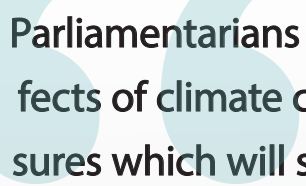
OSCE PA Rapporteur Elona Gjebrea Hohxa (Albania) presented to the committee her ideas and intentions for the report and draft resolution she is preparing for the 29th Annual Session in Vancouver.

Elona Gjebrea Hoxha (Albania) stressed that the OSCE region is experiencing several key security challenges and that in implementing OSCE commitments in the economic and environmental dimension, co-ordinated efforts are paramount in the areas of: environmental security, climate change, energy and water security, innovation, digitalization, good governance, anti-corruption, financing of terrorism and migration management.

Gjebrea Hoxha highlighted that water security is a growing issue for the OSCE area, with certain regions more prone to experience a water crisis.

Central Asia, for instance, has recently been affected by massive environmental disasters such as: the pollution of the Caspian Sea and the now irreversible drying up of the Aral Sea.

With regard to climate change, Gjebrea Hoxha underlined that weather patterns are changing, sea levels are rising, weather events are becoming more extreme and greenhouse gas emissions are now at their highest levels in history. Without decisive action, the world's average surface temperature is likely to surpass 3°C in this century.



Parliamentarians need to act to urgently mitigate the effects of climate change and in parallel implement measures which will stop, and hopefully, reverse the process before it's too late.

- Rapporteur Elona Gjebrea Hoxha

Gjebrea Hoxha then addressed issues concerning economic security, namely innovation and technology, good governance and migration management. In particular, innovation and digitalization are key vectors for sustainable and inclusive economic development, she said.

Improving good governance through innovation and technology is a distinct priority of the Albanian Chairmanship of the OSCE, Gjebrea Hoxha noted, and migration can offer remarkable opportunities for development, integration and peace if properly managed.



Debate

During the debate, the speakers voiced the importance of strengthening the role of the second dimension as a valuable tool for raising trust, encouraging a constructive dialogue, reducing tensions and preventing conflict throughout the OSCE area. Members discussed the imperative of developing renewable energies as well as issues surrounding other energy sources such as coal, hydro energy and nuclear energy.

Tackling climate change is essential, members stressed, notably to ensure that fewer people are displaced as a result of environment-induced migration. Focusing on the transition to green energy, is a prerequisite for sustainable development and reduction of the global gas emissions, parliamentarians said.

General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment

Presentation by Amb. Sherzod Asadov, Chair of the Economic and Environmental Committee, Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the OSCE

Ambassador Sherzod Asadov (Uzbekistan) presented the 2020 Economic and Environmental Committee Work Plan, underlining the goal to reflect the commitments in a result-oriented way, in line with the Albanian Chairmanship's priorities.

In 2020, there will be nine EEC meetings, he said, five of them thematic ones: focused on the role of youth in the protection of the environment, the role of corruption in undermining human capital development and the investment climate, economic policies and legislative frameworks that enhance good environmental governance, the impact of the digital transformation on the labour market and promoting good governance in water management.

Ambassador Asadov noted that the 28th Economic and Environmental Forum is being held under the theme "Promoting security, stability and economic growth in the OSCE area by preventing and combating corrup-

tion through innovation, increased transparency and digitalization."

The First Preparatory Meeting was held in Vienna and was devoted to challenges and opportunities in preventing and combating corruption, he noted; and the Second Preparatory Meeting will take place in Tirana with the concluding meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum taking place 10-11 September in Prague. The final meeting will take into consideration all recommendations, best practices and ideas generated during the Forum process.

The deliberation, synergized with the outcomes of the committee's work and with the Economic and Environmental dimension implementation meeting in October, will create the solid foundations for meaningful deliverables at the Ministerial Council in Albania in December, he said.

Presentation by Amb. Vuk Žugić, Co-Ordinator of the OSCE Economic and Environmental activities

Ambassador Vuk Žugić presented the Work Plan of his office for 2020. The activities are aligned to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, he noted, putting additional efforts into closer partnership with other international and regional organizations, civil society, business and academia.

The Work Plan represents a combination of policy work, targeted technical assistance, capacity building and sharing of best practices and expertise. These important elements assist participating States in the effective formulation and implementation of economic and environmental policies and activities for security and stability in the OSCE region, such as combating corruption, enhancing connectivity, water management, environmental good governance, climate change, and energy security



Debate

The debate's participants focused on the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to address the topic of the fight against corruption in a more robust and institutional way, including through systemic and careful reform of political institutions. Members also discussed enhancing connectivity, which is key for economic co-operation, for diversifying economies and for social development.

General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment

Introduction by Torill Eidsheim, OSCE PA Special Representative on Arctic Issues

Torill Eidsheim (Norway) introduced the special debate on climate change, which she said is a global crisis with multifaceted security implications.

She emphasized that while the phenomenon is most clearly seen in the Arctic, the so-called world's refrigerator, the effects on the Arctic will reverberate across the entire planet.

The Special Representative highlighted some of climate change's negative effects, including on the natural environment (rising sea levels, extreme weather, landslides), on the life and health of local communities (need for resettlements, disruption of critical infrastructures, changing business, agricultural and farming patterns), as well as on the global economy (the opening of new trade routes triggering international competition).

Eidsheim noted that climate change is a "threat multiplier" which requires prompt and concerted international co-operation to tackle it effectively. She called for increased political will from legislators to turn commitments into action, and lamented that efforts are still too much focused on the adaptation to the effects of climate change rather than on their mitigation.

In conclusion, Eidsheim emphasized that the climate crisis is a threat to the common security of all countries, in the OSCE area and beyond, and urged for unity and co-operation in a spirit of joint ownership to address it effectively.



Presentation by Lukas Ruttinger, Senior Project Manager, Adelphi

Lukas Ruttinger presented the activities of the Berlin-based think tank Adelphi, which works daily to tackle a broad range of sustainability issues and since more than 15 years is working on the links between climate change and security.

Adelphi has identified various climate security risks in the OSCE-region, Ruttinger reported: climate change is increasing water, food and energy insecurity and the connections between them, extreme weather events and natural disasters, competition over shared resources and climate change are impacting states outside the OSCE region, contributing to instability and conflict.

Ruttinger in conclusion stressed that parliaments should raise awareness in the national context, foster actions on the national level (influence strategies, policies, laws and budget decisions), cooperate with other parliamentary assemblies, exchange experience and promote dialogue.

Debate

Parliamentarians are well suited to address environmental and climate risks through legislative means and through an oversight function, speakers said in the debate.

MPs stressed that it is essential to minimize greenhouse gas emissions and ensure food and energy security for the people in the OSCE area; that concerning the Aral Sea crisis, no country can overcome the consequences of the disaster alone; that the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the Paris Agreement on climate change are the guides towards sustainable and green future; that there is a need for a balance between environmental and economic issues.

General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment

Presentation by Pascal Allizard, Vice President of the OSCE PA, on the Belt and Road Initiative: Challenges and Opportunities

Pascal Allizard (France) underlined that China has become a global player in the recent years, and that the “Belt and Road Initiative” is the current flagship project of China’s surge abroad.

Allizard voiced concerns about China presenting itself as a party offering assistance and cooperation, while keeping distant from the negotiations and concessions multilateralism imply. China responded to the infrastructure gap between western and eastern European countries by presenting attractive infrastructure projects, especially to the countries identified as having the most fragile economies.

Pascal Allizard also noted the increasing cooperation between China and the Russian Federation as two major commercial trade powers, and called for European countries to deploy efforts in order not to be sidelined from this process.

Concerning future perspectives: there are relevant opportunities coming from the Belt and Road Initiative. The EU and other European countries can potentially benefit from an increase of exchanges over the coming decades, so long as this is a two-way street, which is not the case today.

Allizard also highlighted the need to pay attention to the 5G project and smart cities.



Debate

A number of debate speakers expressed caution on the Belt and Road Initiative, stressing the complexity of issues of intellectual property and theft, and that participating States should refrain from undertaking short-term projects that might harm longer-term development. Others stressed that the Initiative is a win-win project, which will develop uninterrupted connectivity between Asia and Europe.



General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions

Opening the meeting of the Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions on 20 February, Chair Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus) updated members on his recent work, and highlighted the special focus of his activities on the human rights and humanitarian situation of people in conflict-related areas, citing his visit to Ukraine in December 2019.

The Chair informed members he had started direct dialogue with human rights committees of national parliaments to gain further insight into the priorities and human rights concerns of citizens and to support legislative improvements building upon the OSCE PA's knowledge and experience of election observation. Thanking delegations for a spirit of open dialogue, he described his ongoing exchanges with a number of delegations on human rights challenges in the OSCE region and his intention to further engage with them. To conclude, he reminded members that it is up to all parliamentarians to protect and uphold human rights both at home



General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions

Kari Henriksen, Rapporteur of the Third Committee

Presenting her ideas for the 29th Annual Session in Vancouver, Rapporteur Kari Henriksen (Norway) noted the worrying decline of trust in public institutions and governments across the OSCE region. She addressed the need for parliamentarians to uphold human rights and to introduce legislation which, rather than allowing and legalizing human rights violations, protects human rights. Henriksen insisted on the responsibility of states to ensure that responses to peaceful protests respect the rights of citizens and do not use violence or intimidation.

As journalists continue to face imprisonment and intimidation throughout the OSCE region, the rapporteur drew attention to restrictions on freedom of speech online. The shrinking space for civil society and the demonization of civil society remain a prominent issue in the OSCE region, she noted.

Rapporteur Henriksen highlighted the troubling persistence of violence and harassment against women in public life as a factor contributing to the underrepresentation of women in politics and as an issue of major public concern. The rapporteur noted that building trust in public institutions implies the vital need for adequate representation of minority groups, as well as for democratic elections. She also noted the need to address the humanitarian situation in conflict areas and to protect the rights of refugees who suffer from abuse and exploitation, women and children being particularly affected by such human rights violations.

Finally, she shared her concerns over the many forms of discrimination and intolerance which affect the OSCE region and stressed the share of responsibility parliamentarians hold in adopting discriminatory legislation



Henriksen concluded by inviting members to focus on confidence, inclusion, protection and legislation in their efforts to strengthen and fulfill their commitments on improving the situation of human rights across the OSCE region.

Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, Director of ODIHR

Director Gísladóttir opened her remarks by emphasizing the essential role the PA and its Third Committee play as tools of promotion of human rights and democracy across all OSCE countries. She shared her concerns over the ever deepening polarization gripping many countries and the increasing number of political leaders seeking to remove checks and balances and to dismantle fundamental pillars of democracy.

Gísladóttir went on to mention a number of areas that require particular attention such as the rights of refugees, hate, discrimination and intolerance, the pressure on civic space emanating from both states and individuals, and the pressure and attacks affecting women involved in activism and politics.

She stressed the need for co-operation and multilateralism, noting there is no lack of challenges to attend to and that together, ODIHR, the PA, and other organizations can further advance the impact of their work. She invited parliamentarians to use their voices and influence on a larger scale as global challenges require global solutions. Gísladóttir concluded by encouraging members not to be indifferent to the lives and suffering of others.

Ambassador Ivo Šrámek, Chair of the Human Dimension Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council

Ambassador Šrámek expressed his appreciation for the active engagement of the OSCE PA in the activities of the OSCE's human dimension and thanked the Assembly for its key role in promoting greater involvement of national parliaments in OSCE matters. He particularly praised the PA's contribution to election observation, as well as its support and cooperation with OSCE institutions and structures, which contribute to tackling some of the most pressing human rights challenges in the OSCE region. Ambassador Šrámek described his plans for the year, noting his aim to provide maximum support to the OSCE Albanian Chairmanship and its priorities, to ensure the continuity of activities and to maintain a strong focus on the implementation of OSCE commitments.

After identifying thematic areas to be addressed together with the Albanian Chairmanship, Ambassador Šrámek noted the Human Dimension Committee will focus its work on combatting trafficking in human beings, elections, freedom of expression and information, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of religion or belief, gender equality and empowerment of women, human rights defenders, Roma and Sinti issues, intolerance and discrimination, prevention of torture, and youth. He concluded by highlighting the crucial role of the OSCE PA in promoting the comprehensive approach to security in the OSCE area.

General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions

Dr. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Commissioner Bachelet praised the increased dynamics of co-operation between the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and ODIHR and noted that the extensive expertise in human rights monitoring and reporting her Office has developed can benefit to the OSCE, especially in contested territories and in the context of protracted conflicts. She applauded the co-operation between her Office and the OSCE in the field, which is particularly notable in Ukraine, where both UN and OSCE monitoring missions regularly exchange vital human rights information ensuring accurate monitoring of human rights situations and contributing to reducing the number of civilians killed or injured.

Co-operation between the UN and OSCE contributes to preventing the development and the escalation of crises and supports states in building more peaceful societies as peace and security rely on the upholding and the protection of human rights, she said. The Commissioner stressed the crucial importance of rule of law in keeping public institutions accountable for upholding human rights, as well as its key role as an empowering tool for citizens to claim their rights. Rule of law is not the rule by law, she pointed, but serves as a shield against the rule of narrow interests. She therefore urged states to protect the integrity, independence

and impartiality of justice systems. Commissioner Bachelet insisted that protecting civil society and media freedoms remains a strong priority as they are vital in ensuring the informed and active participation of the public. Though public participation in debate and decision-making may include critical voices, both the UN and the OSCE need to accept and embrace criticism to develop policies which reflect and respond to people's needs more accurately. The Commissioner also highlighted the need for development that is sustainable and inclusive as a key issue within the spectrum of human rights, adding that human rights are in every State's interest as they enable states to unlock the capacities and talents of their citizens.

Bachelet concluded by stating that both organizations should thrive to generate further public engagement and to adopt a new strategy with more productive and impactful discussions, focusing on multilateralism. Finally, she reiterated that parliaments are specifically positioned to spearhead changes and legislation that can improve the human rights situation and promote confidence in institutions.



Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

Désir opened his remarks by thanking the OSCE PA for its long-standing commitment to the protection of media freedom. He regretted that the weakening of multilateralism had caused human rights and media freedom to be relegated to the background of international agendas, especially while media freedom is under assault in many parts of the OSCE region. Restricting freedom of expression does not protect people, but rather endangers the whole of society as there is no development without free information and limiting media freedom impedes the interests of society, including its security and that of its citizens.

The safety of journalists and the fight against impunity for crimes committed against them must be the first priority of the OSCE. Désir emphasized the importance of ensuring the legal safety of journalists, rather than using legislature as an instrument to prevent journalists from carrying out their work. He added that the same obligation to protect freedom of expression and media freedom must be applied online as offline. Désir concluded by stressing the crucial need to engage in discussion on international platforms involving all relevant stakeholders and to clearly present human rights not as an obstacle on the road to solving security dilemmas, but as integral parts of the solution.

General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions

Debate

In addressing the debate on “Multilateralism in action: International Human Rights Co-operation”, parliamentarians discussed the universal values on which the OSCE was built, which inherently stem from human rights, and the crucial need for participating States to focus on human rights to improve their overall co-operation.

Members of the OSCE PA delegations raised various points related to media freedom, new technologies and disinformation, migration, the rights of refugees, the rights of children in migration flows, exploitation and human trafficking in migratory contexts, the rights of minorities, the rights of minorities in conflict areas, human rights violations in conflict areas, intolerance and racism, the shrinking space for civil society, foreign funding of civil society, women rights, and youth inclusion in decision and policy-making.





Standing Committee Meeting

President Tsereteli opened the Standing Committee meeting on 20 February with a report on his activities since the Autumn Meeting in Marrakech in October. The President discussed the PA's enhanced communications tools and highlighted his efforts in expanding partnerships with international and regional organizations as well as other parliamentary assemblies. These efforts were exemplified by a number of meetings with the secretaries general and presidents of PACE, NATO PA and IPU. These meetings underlined the need to enhance synergies both between parliamentary assemblies and between the respective executive structures to increase the overall impact through parliamentarians' comparative advantages.

The President also highlighted the work done to expand the PA's geographical outreach, in particular, the visit to Cairo with Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs Pascal Allizard. In reporting on visits to Central Asian States, the President underscored the election observation mission to Uzbekistan and its significance in the context of the overall reform process in the country.

The President also commented on his recent visit to Washington DC, where he endeavoured to strengthen transatlantic co-operation through a series of engagements, such as testifying at a hearing of the Helsinki Commission on the role of parliamentary diplomacy and taking part in a seminar on the inclusion of young parliamentarians in the OSCE region. President Tsereteli also added that some exchanges in Washington echoed a number of Bureau members' keen interest in the growing role of China in the OSCE area.

Furthermore, the President reiterated the PA's role in the OSCE family and its firm commitment to OSCE principles. He once again reaffirmed the PA's support to the OSCE's field work and advocated for reopening of the closed OSCE field operations, especially those in South Caucasus.

Treasurer Peter Juel-Jensen (Denmark) reported that the International Secretariat continues to operate efficiently and fiscally responsibly. He noted that the Secretary General and his staff ensured once again that the management of the budget was in compliance with national legislatures. Juel-Jensen also acknowledged the support from the Italian and German parliaments by seconding personnel and extended gratitude to Canada and San Marino for hosting the upcoming statutory meetings this year.

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella presented his report, informing the Standing Committee of PA activities and initiatives of the International Secretariat. These include internal reforms and ongoing efforts to increase the visibility of the PA, and enhance the quality of debates in Assembly meetings. He noted that the PA is recognized as an important contributor in the international community thanks to its tools, such as Special Representatives and Ad Hoc Committees, which address our most pressing issues, like climate change, migration and terrorism. Montella stressed that the attained level of efficiency and visibility needs to be maintained through enhanced dialogue within the Assembly. Moreover, he underlined the



value of stable and continuous political leadership for a smooth and effective work of the Secretariat. In this regard, he encouraged the members to empower the Bureau as well as to find a way to engage the former members of the PA in the Assembly's activities in order to utilize their considerable experience and extensive networks. In closing, the Secretary General emphasized the importance of uniting efforts of the Assembly and other OSCE institutions to improve lives of the citizens in the participating States.

The Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on the Rules of Procedure and Working Practices, Peter Bowness, presented a report and amendments to the Rules of Procedure. Proposed amendments to the rules 21.2 and 21.3 were subsequently adopted. However, the rule 32 on regarding the quorum was not amended as the members did not reach an agreement at the last meeting of the Sub-Committee in Bratislava. Lord Bowness also presented a number of ideas for improving working procedures of the Assembly.

Standing Committee Meeting

Member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT) Reinhold Lopatka (Austria) briefed the Standing Committee on the latest activities in the field of counter-terrorism. The CCT has continued to deepen partnerships with key stakeholders and engaging in numerous international events to further the PA's counter-terrorism efforts. To this end, the 3 February signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Office for Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) in New York was a noteworthy achievement for the CCT as the first regional parliamentary forum to formalize a dedicated co-operation with the UN. Lopatka noted that reinforced partnership with the UNOCT will pave the way to achieve several concrete follow-up activities, one of which being the first co-ordination meeting of all parliamentary assemblies under UN aegis in March.

Vice-President Margareta Cederfelt (Sweden) reported as Acting Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration. She expressed concern over the situation on the Greek islands, which have seen an increase of refugees and migrants resulting in overcrowding and suffering. She emphasized the urgent need to address the issue and support Greece in its efforts to handle the surge of arrivals. Cederfelt also outlined the further work of the Committee, recommending a three-pronged approach: to conduct more field visits with a view to raising awareness and exercising oversight; to promote discussion on migration within the Assembly; and lastly,

to strengthen cooperation with OSCE institutions as well as with external actors.

Cederfelt also presented a report on the 2015 assassination of Boris Nemtsov in Moscow. The report uncovered substantial flaws in the criminal case following the murder. Cederfelt noted that such mismanaged trials and investigations enable impunity for serious crimes. In this regard, Special Rapporteur Cederfelt called on the Russian Federation to co-operate in further inquiries on the case.

Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs Pascal Allizard (France) presented his report highlighting the PA's visit to Cairo. Allizard stated that he intends to engage actively with the current Chairmanship of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation and plans to visit Jordan and Tunisia to deepen co-operation with the partners.

Special Representative on Fighting Corruption Irene Charalambides (Cyprus) brought the members up to date on her activities since the Autumn Meeting in Marrakech. Charalambides participated in a number of international events on anti-corruption, where she underlined the role of the PA as a useful platform to exchange best practices on combating corruption.

Special Representative on South East Europe Mark Pritchard (United Kingdom) acknowledged that the EU Council's decision to postpone the start of accession negotiations



with North Macedonia and Albania triggered disappointment in both countries. Pritchard added that despite this setback it is important for the EU to fulfil North Macedonia and Albania's foreign policy priorities.

Special Representative on Civil Society Engagement, Pia Kauma (Finland) raised concerns about the shrinking space for civil society engagement. In this regard, she underlined the PA's timely adoption of the Resolution on the Role of Civil Society at the 2019 Annual Session. Kauma highlighted her individual meetings with some delegations to understand the developments and to facilitate dialogue with civil society representatives. She added she will continue to communicate with individual countries to

encourage an open approach to NGOs.

In a discussion of current political issues Petr Tolstoi (Russian Federation) proposed to adopt a declaration on the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Tolstoi envisioned the document as a historical statement that would cement the outcomes of the war and the results of the Nuremberg Trials. Doris Barnett (Germany) seconded Tolstoi's proposal, adding that the document should be written in collaboration with young parliamentarians.

In closing, President Tsereteli highlighted planned meetings of the Assembly and announced that Romania would host the 2021 Annual Session in Bucharest.

Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

The meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration took place on 21 February and gathered more than 20 members and observers. Three new members took part in the meeting: Massimo Mallegni from Italy, Evangelos Syrigos from Greece and Farah Karimi from the Netherlands.

The new acting chair of the Committee, Margareta Cederfelt, expressed gratitude to the former chair, Nahima Lanjri, and opened the meeting by updating on past activities and the experience of Morocco in implementing migration policies and strategies presented during the last Autumn Meeting in Marrakech. The acting chair highlighted active engagement of the committee members during four years since foundation through introduction of supplementary items and attending field visits.

The meeting featured discussions on upcoming activities including plans for the summer's Annual Session in Canada. Hedy Fry, the head of the Canadian delegation to the OSCE PA and the member of the Committee, shared insights about Canada's integration programmes and private sponsorship of refugees which had been formalized in Canadian legislation. Hedy Fry invited members to take part in the Citizenship Ceremony on Canada's National Day on 1 July and visit integration centers in Vancouver to showcase good practices on integration of migrants and refugees.

Parliamentarians also discussed worrying situations with migrants and refugees in

Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Turkey. Alfred Dubs shared his observations from a recent visit to the Greek island of Lesbos and called on members to urge their parliaments to respond to Greek request to relocate unaccompanied child refugees. Evangelos Syrigos reiterated the Greek request to the EU on assisting in relocation of children that remained unrequited. An increasing number of irregular arrivals can be also observed in Cyprus with no support for relocation from the EU, as noted by Kyriakos Hadjiyanni. Syrigos drew attention to the deteriorating situation in



Idlib province in Syria where 900,000 people were displaced which could turn into a new challenge for Europe. Kirazoglu called on for better co-operation among states to tackle humanitarian crisis, xenophobia, intolerance and social concern.

The Committee members expressed their views on means to increase the impact and effectiveness of the committee's work. Members suggested pursuing dialogue with EU officials dealing with migration issues given

the EU's intention to develop a new migration policy and agreed to pursue their focus on migrants and refugees in vulnerable situations.



Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism

Nine members of the OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT), plus staff, participated in the internal co-ordination meeting on 21 February. Richard Hudson, Vice-Chair of CCT, briefly presented the main CCT activities implemented since October 2019. He stressed that countering terrorism remains a top priority in the entire OSCE region, which is why the CCT should continue to engage in goal-oriented dialogue to bring a distinct parliamentary contribution in this field.

After expressing gratitude to the work of former Chair Abid Raja, Hudson welcomed the new CCT member Nikolai Ryzhak (Russian Federation) and recalled the valuable contribution of former CCT member Nikolay Kovaliev. In response, Nikolai Ryzhak expressed his readiness to actively support the work of the CCT, commending the important results achieved so far by the committee.

Reinhold Lopatka provided a brief overview of the CCT's contribution to the OSCE-UNOCT



Regional High-Level Conference on “Foreign Terrorist Fighters,” which took place 11-12 February 2020 in Vienna. The event brought together over 400 leading experts and policymakers. During his address as a keynote speaker, he focused on the results of the PA Oversight Initiative on Strengthening Border Security and Information Sharing in the OSCE region and encouraged participants to actively engage with their national parliaments on preventing and disrupting the threats stemming from FTFs.

Lopatka also discussed the signing of the MoU between OSCE PA and UNOCT on 3 February 2020 in New York, stressing that the OSCE PA is effectively the first regional parliamentary forum to sign such a technical co-operation agreement with the United Nations. The OSCE PA plans to work more closely with the UN, he noted, building on the specific role of parliamentarians.

OSCE PA Senior Advisor Marco Bonabello reported on CCT’s visit to Norway in January to learn more about the Norwegian’s response to the terrorist attacks of 22 July 2011, which resulted in the deaths of 77 individuals. Bonabello also updated members about CCT’s contribution to the various events, including the Third OSCE-wide Seminar on Passenger Data Exchange; OSCE Security Committee in November 2019 in Vienna; the Counter-Terrorism Conference of the Parliamentary Assembly for the Mediterranean, organized at the Italian Parliament in Rome in November

2019; and upcoming activities of the CCT.

In view of the 2020 Annual Session, Richard Hudson advocated the need to develop focused counter-terrorism policy-guidance, possibly building on the work already conducted by the CCT. For instance, CCT’s two-year active engagement on FTFs and border security could lead to a new supplementary item reflecting the committee’s latest findings in this field (i.e. Oversight Initiative), possibly complementing relevant OSCE work in this context.

In a wide-ranging discussion, CCT members noted the challenges posed by returnees from conflict-affected zones and families associated with them, underlining the key role of civil society in this context. So-called “battlefield evidence” was stressed as important in securing solid court verdicts against terrorists. The importance of reintegration and rehabilitation of FTFs, was highlighted, as well as the prevention of radicalization. Members also underlined the important role of the victims of terrorism and their families.

The meeting closed with remarks from President George Tsereteli, who thanked all members for their active contribution and announced that he would be appointing Reinhold Lopatka to replace Abid Raja as Chair of the CCT.

Closing Joint Session of the General Committees

President Tsereteli opened the final session on 21 February by previewing the agenda, composed mainly by the presentation of the report by the Special Representative on Gender Issues, Dr. Hedy Fry, reports by the leaders of election observation missions as well as a general debate on combatting anti-Semitism, discrimination and intolerance.



General Debate on Combatting Anti-Semitism, Discrimination and Intolerance in the OSCE Region

The debate was opened by President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka and the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism, Rabbi Andrew Baker, and included the participation of some 30 parliamentarians.

Address by Wolfgang Sobotka, President of the National Council of Austria

President Sobotka spoke of anti-Semitism as a phenomenon currently on the rise in the OSCE region and he underlined societies' collective responsibility to take a stronger stance against it. Sobotka described anti-Semitism as a mindset covering the whole political spectrum. Sobotka's address explicitly underlined that sole the identification of the phenomenon is not sufficient, thus calling for bigger efforts in engagement in education and research as well as in tackling anti-Semitic content online.

Address by Rabbi Andrew Baker, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism

Rabbi Baker described his work around the OSCE area, noting that anti-Semitism is a rising problem throughout the region. He stressed that anti-Semitism takes many forms and can be seen across the political spectrum.

The Rabbi underlined the importance for the adoption of a definition of anti-Semitism as well as an identification of its newest forms. Baker identified three main sources of anti-Semitism and pointed out the challenges imposed by

rhetoric of Holocaust distortion as well as hateful content circulated online. He underlined the broad extend of challenges faced by the Jewish communities today, particularly those related to safeguarding physical security and freedom of religious practice while he emphasized on the need to focus in education and intercommunity dialogue.



Closing Joint Session of the General Committees

Report by Special Representative on Gender Issues, Hedy Fry

In her report, Special Representative Fry applauded the significant strides and improvements the OSCE PA and OSCE countries have made in the pursuit of gender equality, but noted that significant challenges remain and must be addressed. She informed members about this year's 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the UNSCR 1325, emphasizing that efforts towards gender equality should continue and reinforced.

Fry described the need for achieving equality in media representation as a matter of democracy and integrity, highlighting this year's report focusing on gender-based violence against women in politics and journalism. She highlighted in particular violence against women, including a rise of violence against female journalists and politicians. "Gender-based violence affects all women, regardless of position or status, but can manifest in dangerous and alarming ways for women in the public eye," she noted.



Ben Cardin, OSCE PA Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism and Intolerance (Video Message)

OSCE PA Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism and Intolerance Ben Cardin (United States) addressed the joint session by video link from Washington, noting that hatred and intolerance pose threats to democracy. He highlighted troubling trends of discrimination against minorities and migrants. "It is our responsibility as leaders to safeguard our democracies by speaking out and using our tools and voices as legislators against those who would divide our societies," he said.

In his message, Senator Cardin underlined the timely nature of the debate on anti-Semitism and discrimination, following up on the work done during the Luxembourg Annual Session and in light of tragic events which took place in 2019 on the basis of intolerance and discrimination. Cardin iterated a message to all delegations to challenge permissive environments of hate while continuing building on the PA efforts towards combating anti-Semitism and discrimination, praising the Assembly's close cooperation with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Debate

In the debate, members focused on the need to preserve and strengthen the values built during the period after the Second World War as well on the importance to address discrimination and intolerance at the online sphere. A call for a peaceful courage against anti-Semitism was emphasized by Doris Barnett (Germany). Vice-President, Pascal Alizard (France) stressed the need to keep the memory of Holocaust alive through strengthening educational efforts across the OSCE region.

Preservation of memory was raised by many PA members through working on good practices already observed across the OSCE region such as the preservation of archives, the organization of educational visits to Holocaust memorial sites and the consideration of the introduction of legislation on hate speech. The debate also focused on the cultivation and propagation of stereotypes regarding migration, a point raised by Jean Claude Micallef (Malta).

Closing Joint Session of the General Committees



Election Observation Activities

Margareta Cederfelt (Sweden) reported on the parliamentary elections in Belarus, held on 17 November 2019. The elections were reported to receive significant coverage by the deployed observation mission while shortcomings observations were made over information provision to the electorate through media as well as procedures in vote counting.

Ilkka Kanerva (Finland) reported on the parliamentary elections in Ukraine, in July 2019. Conclusions stated that elections were competitive while fundamental freedoms were respected throughout the process. Challenges observed during the two election rounds were related to vote-buying, lack extensive discussions on issues of public interest and misuse of funds at the local level.

Artur Gerasymov (Ukraine) reported on the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan held on 9 February 2020. Observations shared, reported a level of restrictive competition, pressure of the electorate by candidates and lack of useful information shared ahead of the elections. President Tsereteli reported on the parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan held on 22 December 2019, highlighting this was the first time an election observation mission by the OSCE PA operated in the country. The President praised the adoption of a new election code by Uzbekistan while reporting on novelties introduced in the pre-electoral procedure, such as live-streamed debates. The elections were reported to receive extensive coverage by the international community while convictions were shared that ongoing efforts would continue despite observed irregularities.







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