

OSCE PA

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's 23rd Winter Meeting



2024
22-23 February

Contents



Summary	3
Joint Session of the General Committees	5
General Committee on Political Affairs and Security ...	11
General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment	17
General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions	23
Joint Session of the General Committees	29
Standing Committee Meeting	33
Ad Hoc Committee Meetings	35

Summary

With more than 230 parliamentarians from 54 OSCE countries in attendance, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly held its 23rd Winter Meeting from 22 to 23 February in Vienna. The Russian Federation's war against Ukraine, artificial intelligence and political prisoners topped the agenda, with debates held in meetings of each of the OSCE PA's general committees and two joint sessions of the general committees. The Standing Committee of heads of national delegations also met to discuss the Assembly's ongoing work.

At the opening joint session, OSCE PA President Pia Kauma (Finland), President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka, OSCE Chair-in-Office Ian Borg, and OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid delivered speeches emphasizing the importance of a strong OSCE to meet current challenges, followed by a Q&A with the assembled parliamentarians.

The general committees met to hear from independent experts and representatives of the OSCE's governmental side, and to discuss presentations from committee rapporteurs on their ideas and intentions regarding reports and draft resolutions being prepared for the 31st Annual Session in Bucharest.

The First Committee met 22 February and heard from several OSCE officials, including High Commissioner on National Minorities Kairat Abdrakhmanov and Director of the Conflict

Prevention Centre Catherine Fearon, as well as Marcel Pesko, the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office – Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine. The Second Committee heard from experts representing the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Microsoft, and Thinkers.ai. In the Third Committee, members heard from OSCE/ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro, and Chair of the Human Dimension Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council Anne-Marie Callan. The special debate on "Political Dissidents and Political Prisoners" was introduced by Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

In the closing joint session on 23 February, dozens of parliamentarians took part in a special debate on "European Security Today and Tomorrow: Parliamentary Perspectives on the Future of the OSCE." In her opening remarks, President Kauma warned that the fabric of European security is being challenged by Russia's aggression against Ukraine and called for safeguarding the core values upon which the OSCE was established. The joint session also included reports of the OSCE PA's three ad hoc committees and recent election observation missions.

In the debate, OSCE parliamentarians raised points about the need to ensure the rule of law and accountability for war crimes in Ukraine, the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process, counter-terrorism, conflict prevention, and the need for protecting civilian lives in the Israel-Hamas war.



OFBURG

VIENNA

OSCE PA President Pia Kauma



Joint Session of the General Committees

At the opening joint session on 22 February, OSCE parliamentarians heard from OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Pia Kauma, President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka, OSCE Chair-in-Office Ian Borg, and OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid. The war in Ukraine, in flagrant violation of OSCE commitments, has shaken the European security environment and exacerbated the challenges facing the OSCE, namely the lack of agreed funding. Speakers underscored that, in the face of increasingly difficult times and limited resources, the OSCE has remained steadfast in upholding its fundamental principles and values and has achieved concrete results in promoting dialogue, security, and co-operation.

Joint Session of the General Committees


Address by the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Pia Kauma

President Kauma (Finland) noted in her opening remarks that the unilateral actions of a participating State, the Russian Federation, have jeopardized the security environment in Europe. The lack of funding and an agreed budget was highlighted as a clear challenge for both the executive and the parliamentary branches of the OSCE, which have been operating with fewer resources amid rising inflation. The President

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

In his remarks, President Sobotka emphasized the importance of the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly as key platforms for addressing today's challenges, the most significant since the end of World War II, as they threaten the shared legal and political order.

In expressing "shoulder-to-shoulder" soli-



We will remain a forum for frank and honest dialogue, rooted in our shared values and commitments.

- President Pia Kauma

pointed out that the Russian Federation's refusal to transfer its contributions to the Assembly stands as a clear testament to the OSCE PA's commitment to holding Moscow accountable for its violations of OSCE principles.

She concluded by reiterating that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is not an unrestricted platform for the propaganda and promotion of a war of aggression, stating that "we will remain a forum for frank and honest dialogue, rooted in our shared values and commitments."

solidarity with Ukraine, he said that "we must remain resolute in solidarity and step up our defences for our Western life model and security."

"It is our obligation to keep doors of diplomacy opened, to never close them," President Sobotka stressed, referring to diplomacy as a necessary tool particularly in times of crisis and conflict, to provide peace, security and stability, and commending the OSCE's efforts in this regard.

Referring to the Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023 as yet another affront to our value systems, and to the war in Gaza as a humanitarian disaster, Sobotka called for an end to violence and counterviolence and for concerted efforts to prevent terrorism. He also highlighted the key role of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in addressing artificial intelligence and transformative technologies, which pose another set of challenges to democracy if not implemented responsibly.

tional institutions and people, they have a remarkable ability to help the OSCE reach its potential.

Recalling his recent visit to Ukraine, Minister Borg spoke of the imperative of bringing the war to an end and called on the Russian Federation to withdraw its troops from the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine in accordance with OSCE commitments. The war in Ukraine and its various implications will remain a central priority for the Maltese Chairpersonship, he said, to-



It is crucial that we all make use of the platforms and instruments for facilitating dialogue provided by the OSCE.

- OSCE Chair-in-Office Ian Borg

Address by OSCE Chair-in-Office and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of Malta, Ian Borg

Minister Borg stated that his overarching priority as Chairman-in-Office is to safeguard the functioning of the OSCE, an organization needed precisely in present times of challenges, conflicts, tensions, and uncertainty.

“It is crucial that we all make use of the platforms and instruments for facilitating dialogue provided by the OSCE,” he noted. Addressing the assembled parliamentarians, he reminded them that as legitimate representatives of na-

gether with other regional conflicts such as the Transdniestrian Settlement Process and the South Caucasus, as well as other priorities for each of the three dimensions.

Commending the establishment of the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine and the Network of Young Parliamentarians, Borg praised the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and its “capacity to tailor approaches and activities according to the needs,” and looked forward to future co-operation during the Maltese OSCE Chairpersonship.

Joint Session of the General Committees

Address by the Secretary General of the OSCE, Helga Maria Schmid

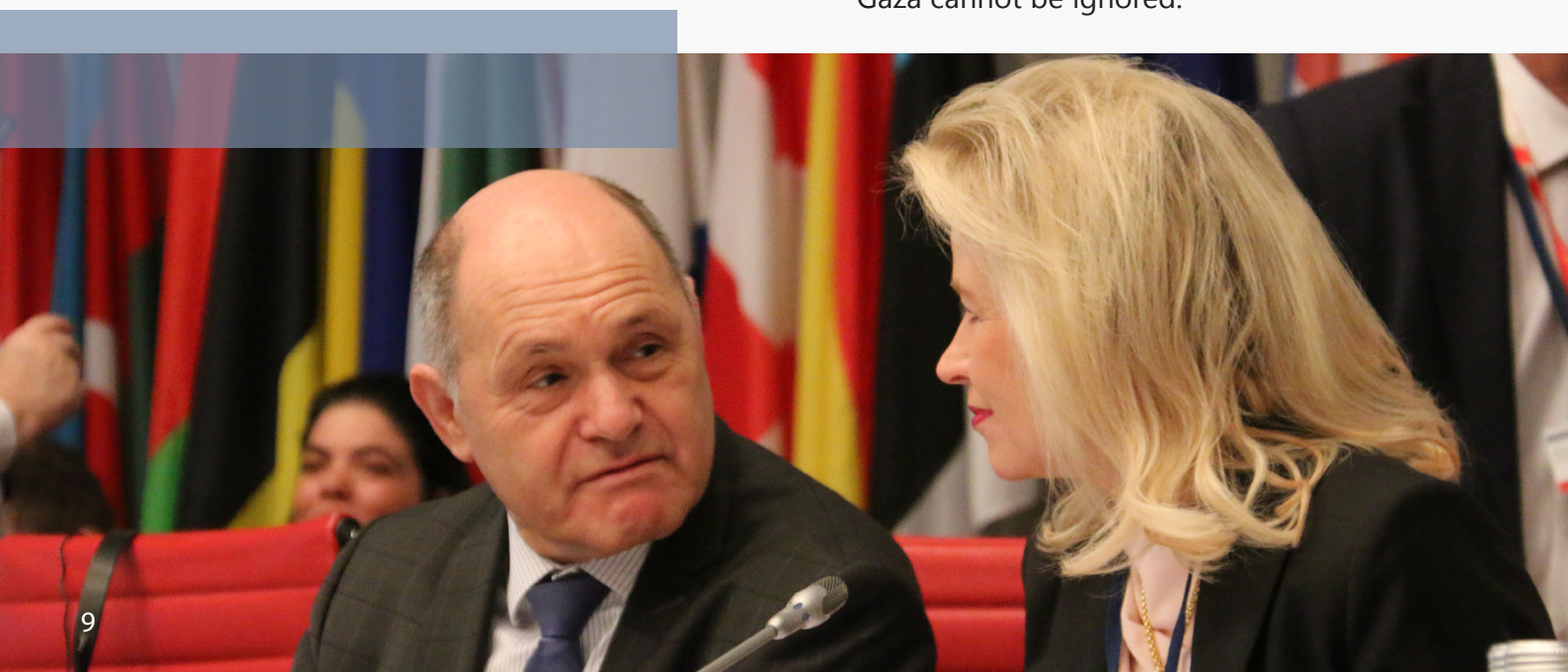
OSCE Secretary General Schmid said that the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine has taken a tragic death toll on civilians and polarized the dialogue within the organization. Regrettably, in 2022, the OSCE was forced to close its two missions in Ukraine and three former staff members of the Special Monitoring Mission are detained in Donetsk and Luhansk, Schmid said, calling for efforts to secure their release as a "matter of the most urgent priority."

She highlighted the OSCE's extensive work in all three dimensions and across various regions, noting that despite the challenges the organization continues to deliver tangible results. Notwithstanding this, she emphasized, the lack of an agreed budget remains a challenge. In this difficult moment for European and Eurasian security "the OSCE has an ever more critical role to play in supporting stability and sustainable peace," she said, adding that the work of the Parliamentary Assembly is an essential element.

Open Debate

During the Q&A, parliamentarians raised questions for speakers on the urgent need for adequate funding, relations with the Russian Federation in the new Maltese Chairpersonship, the security prospects and territorial integrity of Armenia, the migration issues faced by countries on the Mediterranean coast and how the OSCE plans to address them, and the Israel-Hamas war. Speakers highlighted the OSCE's projects in Ukraine and efforts to keep the perpetrators accountable, confirming a "no business as usual" approach to OSCE activities. They emphasized the importance of agreeing on a OSCE budget.

The Chair-in-Office expressed his willingness to maintain a positive engagement with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Migration was confirmed as a pressing issue for the entire European continent and Borg stressed the importance of addressing its root causes and building partnerships with the home countries. He condemned the Hamas attack and called for the unconditional release of hostages, while noting that the humanitarian situation in Gaza cannot be ignored.





Chair-in-Office Ian Borg greets Deputy Head of the Ukrainian Delegation and Vice-Chair of the Second Committee Artur Gerasymov



General Committee on Political Affairs and Security

The General Committee on Political Affairs and Security convened on 22 February, with Committee Rapporteur Laurynas Kasciunas (Lithuania) as its chair. Kasciunas's opening remarks were followed by the presentation of Ambassador Peter Burian, Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the OSCE; Ambassador Andreas Ignatiou, Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the OSCE; Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities; Catherine Fearon, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center; and Ambassador Marcel Pesko, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairmanship in Ukraine. The war in Ukraine, and the OSCE and its participating States' duty to uphold their values and commitments in the face of this conflict, were the central themes evoked.



LAURYNAS KASCIUNAS

RAPPORTEUR OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE

LITHUANIA

General Committee on Political Affairs and Security

Laurynas Kasciunas, Rapporteur of the OSCE PA's First Committee

Kasciunas opened his address by marking the two-year milestone of the war in Ukraine. He underlined the brutal nature of the war and denounced the targeting of civilians. A special international tribunal will be needed to investigate this, he proposed. Kasciunas called for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops and for reparations to be paid by Russia to Ukraine.

On this second anniversary of the war in Ukraine, Kasciunas asked whether all OSCE bodies and structures have put their full strength into doing all they can to restore peace. He called on the OSCE and its PA to visit Ukraine more often, and for all relevant projects to be applied to their full extent. He warned that the war in Ukraine was a test of the OSCE's credibility and viability in the future.

Peter Burian, Chairperson of the Security Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic

Ambassador Burian noted that Russia, by invading Ukraine, had violated its international commitments, and that its actions threaten the post-World War Two rules-based international system. He called for Russia to be held to account, and for its forces to be withdrawn from all illegally occupied territories in Ukraine.

Regarding the future work of the Security Committee, Amb. Burian stated that it will be used as a platform for bringing together actors from states, civil society, as well as women, to achieve the "strengthening resilience, enhancing security" motto. He called on members to find ways of keeping the OSCE relevant and credible, as well as for a holistic, people-centered approach in addressing transnational security threats.



Ambassador Andreas Ignatiou, Chairperson of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation and Perma- nent Representative of Cyprus

Ambassador Ignatiou began by stating that Cyprus had assumed the Chair of the Forum for Security Co-operation, adding that the Chairpersonship coincides with an undeniable and extended period of reflection due to Russia's war of aggression. He reiterated Cyprus's commitment to dialogue, as well as to gender equality under the Women, Peace and Security agenda, which Cyprus incorporates into all discussions. Ambassador Ignatiou stated that the OSCE remains the most comprehensive regional platform for security.

Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM)

Ambassador Abdrakhmanov saluted parliamentarians for the important role they play in their political system. He reminded them that the OSCE remains deeply divided, and called for placing people first in order to strengthen resilience and to enhance security. On the war in Ukraine, Abdrakhmanov stated that robust legislation would strengthen the integration of that country's minorities, and that his mandate focused on the post-conflict scenario.

Abdrakhmanov warned against the trend of instrumentalizing and securitizing national minorities. He expressed his concern over individuals feeling insecure to express key elements of their identities. Speaking on the work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, he stat-

ed that the objective is to make participating States' societies stronger, by promoting the interests of their constituencies and of minorities. He extolled the promotion of tolerance, and urged for inflammatory rhetoric to be aggressively countered.

Catherine Fearon, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center

Catherine Fearon opened by stating the CPC's purpose of striving to deliver comprehensive security. She outlined that the Conflict Prevention Center operates as an early warning focal point as well as a crisis simulation center. Fearon reiterated the body's staunch support of the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security agendas.

Fearon expressed the CPC's readiness to support both sides of any conflict as they strive for peace, building on the toolbox and extensive experience of the OSCE. She reiterated the CPC's commitment towards facilitating the secure exchange of military information, via the Vienna and Moscow mechanisms. Fearon expressed pride in the CPC's various programmes, such as the hazardous biological training course in Ukraine, or the regional housing programme for refugees in Eastern Europe.

Marcel Pesko, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairpersonship in Ukraine

Marcel Pesko began his address by commemorating the two-year anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. He recalled that it

General Committee on Political Affairs and Security



is important to maintain the OSCE's role and values, and to strengthen the resilience of Ukrainian institutions. Pesko thanked donors for the extrabudgetary support for Ukraine and lauded the OSCE's continued presence there.

Thanks to the contributions of 35 participating States, as well as the European Union, to the Support Programme for Ukraine, more than 20 different projects could be carried out there, Special Representative Pesko stated. These important projects have strengthened the resilience of the population and bolstered Ukraine's democratic institutions, he pointed out.

Lastly, Pesko underlined the continued need for funding, as well as the imperative to track the location and movements of missing Ukrainians.

Special Debate: "OSCE Work in Ukraine during Russia's War of Aggression"

During the discussions, parliamentarians reaffirmed support for Ukraine and their condemnation of Russia's aggression. There were calls for the OSCE to continue applying its skills and tools in favor of the conflict's victims, and towards its resolution. Ukraine called on parliamentarians to exhort their respective countries to continue offering support. Finally, there were warnings not to let "war fatigue" dampen resilience and support for Ukraine.

Exchanges on the conflict in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan reflected the still-tense nature of the situation, and preoccupations were expressed as to the plight of the conflict's prisoners and displaced peoples. Finally, several delegations expressed sadness over the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.



General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment

The General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment met on 22 February, with Azay Guliyev (Azerbaijan) chairing the meeting. Under the theme of advancing a common OSCE approach in promoting economic and environmental security, the committee heard from Rapporteur Gudrun Kugler (Austria), Chair of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Committee Florian Raunig, and Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities Bakyt Dzhusupov. This was followed by a special debate on artificial intelligence with presentations from Nikolas Ott, Senior Manager of Government Affairs at Microsoft, Jean-Marc Rickli from Geneva Centre for Security Policy and Isabell Claus, Co-founder and Managing Director of Thinkers.ai.



N KUGLER

General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment

Azay Guliyev, Chair of the OSCE PA's Second Committee

Azay Guliyev (Azerbaijan) opened the meeting by highlighting the critical global challenges, including the ongoing conflict in Ukraine entering its third year, and the profound humanitarian and geopolitical repercussions it has caused. He stressed the increasing severity of climate change, emphasizing the need for a transition to more eco-friendly practices across various sectors. He further underlined the committee's commitment to promoting green transition and environmental protection.

Emphasizing the importance of connectivity, Guliyev welcomed the recent agreement between the EU and Central Asian countries to develop the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor. This corridor, he stated, represents a significant step towards enhancing sustainable transport connections between Europe and Central Asia.

Furthermore, Guliyev underscored the committee's focus on artificial intelligence, recognizing its transformative potential and the responsibility to navigate its ethical, legal, and security dimensions. "With great innovation comes great responsibility, and we are dedicated to ensuring that our collective engagement with AI is guided by ethical principles and a commitment to the security of our nations," he said.

Gudrun Kugler, Rapporteur of the OSCE PA's Second Committee

Rapporteur Gudrun Kugler (Austria) shared her priorities for the report that she will present

at the 31st Annual Session in Bucharest. Her report, she said, will cover a range of critical issues, including environmental war crimes, demographic changes, digital divide, deindustrialization, as well as the urgent need for creating AI regulatory frameworks.

The rapporteur expressed her readiness to include the suggestions of the members of the assembly in her report and highlighted the collaborative nature of the committee's work. She reiterated that the active involvement of the participating States is vital in shaping comprehensive and inclusive policies that address the diverse needs and concerns of the OSCE region.

Florian Raunig, Chair of the OSCE's Economic and Environmental Committee

Ambassador Raunig presented the work plan of the Economic and Environmental Committee for 2024. The plan aligns with the priorities of the Maltese Chairpersonship, he said, and focuses on key areas such as youth and women's empowerment in digital skills, anti-corruption efforts, asset recovery, economic development in trade and transport, biodiversity, food security, and climate change resilience.

The EEC remains dedicated to addressing the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine and keeping the topic high up in the agenda, Amb. Raunig said. He stressed the significance of increasing existing synergies between the EEC and the OSCE PA with an aim to achieve common objectives effectively.

Bakyt Dzhusupov, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities

Ambassador Dzhusupov presented OCEEA priorities for 2024, focusing on good economic governance, combating corruption, and sustainable economic development. According to him, sustainable economic development remains pivotal in the OCEEA agenda, with initiatives to facilitate trade and transport, govern migration effectively, and develop human capital.

Dzhusupov underscored the commitment to address climate change through initiatives such as the High-level Conference on Climate Change and the Climate and Security Repository Fund. He expressed a firm commitment to actively participate in COP29, emphasizing the significant role the OSCE will play with its newly acquired observer status.

Nikolas Ott, Senior Manager of Government Affairs, Microsoft

Nikolas Ott provided a comprehensive overview of the economic challenges and opportunities associated with AI. He traced its evolution from the 1950s to the present day, explaining the concepts such as machine learning, deep learning, and generative AI. Addressing the impact of AI on the labour market, Ott specifically discussed the challenges posed by a declining workforce in the EU. He emphasized the paramount importance of responsible AI practices in enhancing security and resilience.

Furthermore, Ott delved into Microsoft's principles, governance framework, and a five-point blueprint for governing AI. He showcased Microsoft's ongoing efforts in combating abusive AI-generated content, collaborating with industry, governments, and civil society to promote public resilience and aware-

ness. He concluded by emphasizing the need for responsible and ethical governance in this rapidly evolving field.

Dr. Jean-Marc Rickli, Head of Global and Emerging Risks, Geneva Centre for Security Policy

Dr. Rickli presented insightful perspectives on the evolving landscape of AI and its implications for global security. He noted that the convergence of data explosion and the commercialization of AI is expected to significantly reshape our societies, emphasizing the transformative potential of emerging technologies that are leading to a redistribution of power within the digital domain.

Highlighting the rapid pace of technological advancements, Rickli noted that in our era, technology acts as a surrogate, which is particularly evident in the autonomy witnessed in 21st century warfare. He raised concerns about the evolving dynamics of conflicts and warfare strategies, with a specific focus on cognitive warfare, characterized by subversion as a primary weapon to undermine democracies. In conclusion, he reiterated the need for regulatory frameworks, norms and ethical guidelines in navigating the evolving landscape of AI.

Dr. Isabell Claus, Co-founder and Managing Director of Thinkers.ai

Dr. Claus shared significant insights into the rise of generative AI and its implications. She highlighted the exacerbation of data and information overload due to the proliferation of AI-produced content. She further shed light on ongoing initiatives to tackle AI-related security challenges, underlining the necessity for increased resources and societal preparation.

General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment



In the context of cybersecurity, Dr. Claus underscored the challenges posed by AI-enabled threats, particularly the rapid spread of disinformation. She emphasized the urgent need for addressing the impact of AI threats, especially from generative AI, which poses a multifaceted security challenge. Claus pointed out that existing regulations, often slower than technological innovation, limit the scope of data analysis, making early detection of emergencies difficult.

Special Debate - Artificial Intelligence: A Technological Breakthrough with Security Implications

Several OSCE parliamentarians took the floor to express their views on a range of global challenges.

Concerns were raised about the environmental and economic repercussions of the war in Ukraine. The climate crisis was identified as a top priority, urging a shift from traditional energy sectors to cleaner technology. During the debate, OSCE parliamentarians advocated for combating corruption, promoting good governance, and addressing issues in public administration systems. Economic diversification was encouraged to enhance resilience to external shocks.

At the centre of discussion was the urgency of regulating AI and protecting against its potential misuse. There were calls for increased collaboration on renewable energy, addressing data security, and adapting legislation to rapidly evolving technological advancements.



General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions

The General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights, and Humanitarian Questions convened on 22 February 2024. Chaired by Lucie Potuckova (Czechia), the committee heard a presentation from Rapporteur Malik Ben Achour (Belgium) on his intentions regarding his report for the 31st Annual Session. Guest speakers included Matteo Mecacci, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR); Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media; and Anne-Marie Callan, Chairperson of the Human Dimension Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Ireland to the OSCE. Subsequently, the meeting featured a special debate on “Political Dissidents and Political Prisoners,” with introductory remarks by the Belarus opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.



MALIK BEN ACHOU
RAPPORTEUR OF THE THIRD COMMISSION
BELGIUM

General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions

Lucie Potuckova, Chair of the OSCE PA's Third Committee

Chair Lucie Potuckova (Czechia) highlighted the concerning trend of threatened fundamental freedoms and democratic erosion across the OSCE region. Expressing condolences for the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, the Chair emphasized the urgent need for increased efforts to resist and fight against those threatening the foundational principles and values of the organization. Potuckova outlined several paramount challenges facing the OSCE, particularly the diminishing space for civil society and media, instances of ill-treatment and violence against migrants, and gross violations of international humanitarian law in Ukraine.

Acknowledging the responsibilities of lawmakers in the face of persistent and grievous human rights challenges, she praised the leadership of the committee for their work in the human di-

mension and emphasized their commitment for increased collaboration with OSCE and external partners, as well as with civil society and human rights defenders.

Malik Ben Achour, Rapporteur of the OSCE PA's Third Committee

Presenting his ideas for the report to be prepared for the 31st Annual Session in Bucharest, Rapporteur Ben Achour stressed the significance of addressing human rights challenges in alignment with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, also in reference to regional security. Ben Achour highlighted various issues currently affecting the OSCE region, including armed conflicts, violence, political repression, discrimination, and a disregard for human life and dignity.

Ben Achour proposed focusing the discussion in the upcoming report on a number of key issues



such as the situation in Ukraine, the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons, human trafficking, the impact of military operations in Karabakh, as well as police violence. Additionally, he addressed the Israel-Hamas conflict and its impact on civilians in Gaza, emphasizing the need to reject double standards and inconsistencies in safeguarding human rights.

Ben Achour concluded by urging representatives to collectively contribute to promoting societies where universal human rights can flourish.

Matteo Mecacci, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Director Mecacci recalled the tragic consequences of the Russian Federation's attack on Ukraine and urged the Assembly to remain resolute in facilitating accountability for human rights violations and an immediate end to hostilities. Additionally, Mecacci emphasized the escalating pressure on human rights and democracy across the whole OSCE region. He cited the unjust imprisonment and subsequent death of Navalny as indicative of the deteriorating situation, calling for immediate investigations into his death along with the release of unlawfully detained opposition figures in all OSCE participating States.

Highlighting the harsh reality faced by political opponents and human rights defenders, Mecacci underscored instances of repression, including imprisonment and torture, particularly in the Russian Federation and Belarus. He emphasized

that ODIHR offers participating States practical tools to support their work in protecting human rights defenders, including guidelines, assessments, and capacity-building initiatives.

In conclusion, Mecacci stressed the urgency of defending the right to participate in public life and the importance of maintaining unity in working towards the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy across the region.

Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), emphasized the escalating threats against those opposing autocratic regimes, with media freedom increasingly imperilled.

Ribeiro pointed out that the misuse of the media, the rise in populist and hostile rhetoric, online threats, and hate speech across the OSCE region all serve to undermine freedom of the media. Emphasizing solidarity with journalists facing intimidation, Ribeiro stressed their vital role in upholding democracy, accountability, and giving voice to the marginalized.

Additionally, she underscored the importance of a free press in combating misinformation and disinformation, which often lead to discord and mistrust. Ribeiro reiterated OSCE commitments to media freedom and the RFoM's capacity to assist participating States in their implementation. She called for collective action to defend OSCE principles and resist attempts to suppress media freedom.

General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions

Ambassador Anne-Marie Callan, Chair of the Human Dimension Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council

Ambassador Callan reflected on the somber two-year anniversary of the Ukrainian invasion and its severe consequences, underscoring the ongoing importance of addressing the humanitarian situation. Taking stock of last year's Human Dimension Committee meeting, Ambassador Callan highlighted three key areas emerging from the discussion: the dire human rights situation in Ukraine due to Russian actions, the role of gender inequality as a root cause of human rights issues, and the critical role of civil society in safeguarding human rights.

Callan expressed concern over Alexei Navalny's death and the detention of three OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) staff members, urging their immediate release. Other issues raised by the speaker included the arbitrary detention and criminalization of dissidents

and journalists, intimidation of rights defenders, and the worrisome trend of human rights violations in Belarus, evidenced by the recent death of Igor Lednik. She committed to collaborating with the OSCE PA to advance the Human Dimension Committee's work in 2024, emphasizing the collective responsibility to uphold human rights commitments and address serious violations.

Special Debate: Political Dissidents and Political Prisoners

Chair Potuckova introduced the special debate by highlighting the increasing number of political prisoners across the OSCE region, emphasizing the need for continued scrutiny and engagement. Acknowledging that "the fight for civil and political rights is far from over," Potuckova urged lawmakers to defend freedom of speech and expression, creating favorable environments for diverse political perspectives. Additionally, she addressed the urgent issue of the Russian Federation's unlawful detention





of OSCE SMM staff, calling for their immediate release and urging parliamentarians to prioritize their case.

Belarus opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya expressed her gratitude for the support of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for Ukraine and for a democratic Belarus. She stressed that the future of both countries will be critical for the defence of European values. Recalling the tragic deaths of Navalny and Igor Lednik, Tsikhanouskaya pointed at the interconnectedness of security and human rights. She called for decisive responses to the repression by Putin and Lukashenko regimes, including sanctions and international isolation.

Tsikhanouskaya appealed to the Assembly to reconsider the status of Belarusian parliamentary delegates appointed by the Lukashenko regime and to explore the possibility of involving representatives of the Belarusian democratic movement as observers. In her closing remarks, it was underscored that a democratic Belarus would be

a cornerstone for regional stability and international security.

In the debate, topics included the human rights situation across the OSCE area, media freedom, and the grievances stemming from conflicts. Members emphasized the universal importance of respecting human rights and international law, the targeting of journalists and the use of technology to silence dissent, with calls for accountability and the release of demonstrators. Additionally, the plight of political prisoners was highlighted as well as the importance of promoting political freedom and accountability across the OSCE region. Concerns were raised about the shrinking space for civil society and urgent attention was drawn to the human rights situation in Belarus ahead of elections.

Other issues included combatting disinformation and supporting human rights defenders, migration policies, violence against women, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and the need for continued support for Ukraine.

Joint Session of the General Committees


Pia Kauma, OSCE PA President

President Pia Kauma opened her address by stressing that the OSCE and the broader international order were facing a pivotal moment. She called on Members to safeguard the organization's values and exhorted parliamentarians to work towards building trust and confidence through dialogue. With the war in Ukraine continuing to dominate the OSCE agenda, President Kauma stressed that what was needed to prevent the escalation of conflict was to reinforce the principles of the Helsinki Final Act.

bates must serve to share experiences and forge alliances."

Reports on OSCE PA Activities

Daniela De Ridder (Germany), OSCE PA Vice-President and Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, reported on the work of the committee, including recent and upcoming visits. De Ridder pointed to the increase in irregular migrant arrivals being experienced in Italy, and called on measures to combat human trafficking, as well as special procedures for unaccompanied minors.



As Members of this Assembly, we must use such opportunities to bridge our points of view and find common ground.

- President Pia Kauma

President Kauma brought attention to the challenges to peace in Transdniestria, Karabakh, and Georgia. She also mentioned the need to strengthen the OSCE area's cyber security and to counter disinformation. Acknowledging that all OSCE countries have different cultures and histories, she pointed out that they also have different perceptions of threats and face different challenges.

"As Members of this Assembly, we must use such opportunities to bridge our points of view and find common ground," she said. "Our de-

Lord Alf Dubs (United Kingdom), who serves as Vice-Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, recalled that the issue of asylum seekers has distorted the politics of OSCE countries. The issue, he stated, is about human rights, as these are essential in defining the way in which we treat our fellow human beings.

Vice-Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism Kamil Aydin (Turkey) warned that malicious actors can manipulate information and disrupt our societies. He pointed towards the pressing challenges posed by deep

General Debate: European Security Today and Tomorrow: Parliamentary Perspectives on the Future of the OSCE



Joint Session of the General Committees



General Debate: European Security Today and Tomorrow: Parliamentary Perspectives on the Future of the OSCE

fakes and generative artificial intelligence. He also underlined that AI could help counter terrorist groups.

President Kauma, who serves as Chair of the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine, reported on the work of the PSTU, including its recent visit to Kyiv, and underlined the need to keep Ukraine at the top of the OSCE PA's agenda. She stressed that OSCE parliamentarians must advocate for accountability and justice. She also deplored the failure of Russia and Belarus to invite the OSCE to observe their respective elections.

Artur Gerasymov, Vice-Chair of the Second Committee and a Member of the Ukrainian Delegation, expressed gratitude for the OSCE PA's support for Ukraine during this difficult period in its history, and welcomed in particular the work of the PSTU. He thanked President Kauma for her visit to Bucha, and underlined this visit's contribution towards exposing the horrors of the war.

Farah Karimi (Netherlands), head of the OSCE PA observer delegation in Serbia, reported that the OSCE deployed 361 election observers on election day in Serbia. The elections, Karimi stated, were dominated by the decisive advantage of the president. She noted the high participation in the elections, as well as a lack in genuine analytical reporting by the media, hindering voters in making an informed choice.

Sandra Bozic (Serbia) stated that the Serbian government values the guidance of the OSCE. The recent elections in Serbia, she noted, were the most rigorously monitored in that country's

history. Regarding the transparency of Serbia's elections, she warned that deceptive narratives posed a threat to the democratic ethos of Serbia. She deplored the attempts at delegitimizing Serbia and its democracy.

Azay Guliyev (Azerbaijan), Chair of the Second Committee, commented on the presidential election in Azerbaijan, stating that the elections were conducted in an orderly, transparent manner. He noted that there had been a 70 per cent voter turnout.

A member of the Belarusian delegation deplored that Belarus's initiatives for election transparency had been blocked by denying Belarusian election observers visas for the Schengen area. He stated that Belarus would be ready to rethink its decision not to invite the OSCE as election observers if the West were to rethink its collective decision.

During the debate, several delegations expressed their unwavering support for Ukraine, and applauded the resilience of its people. A need for new solutions and renewed vigor for democracy was expressed by several parliamentarians, noting that without principled and effective leadership, citizens of the OSCE area could increasingly turn to authoritarianism.

Several attendees noted the convergence of crises that the OSCE and the wider world are facing, with pleas for more engagement to properly address these crises. The war in Gaza featured prominently in remarks, with the conflict's mounting death toll and destruction denounced by some Members. Calls were also made for international law to be strictly observed.

Standing Committee Meeting

The OSCE PA Standing Committee, consisting of the heads of national delegations and members of the Bureau, met on 23 February 2024 to hear reports and discuss ongoing Assembly work and its budget.

Pia Kauma, President of the OSCE PA

Chaired by President Pia Kauma, the Standing Committee opened with the agenda adopted by the delegates. President Kauma presented her report, which focused largely on the growing security challenges in the OSCE region and beyond, the related institutional crisis facing the OSCE, and the importance of seizing the occasion of the Winter Meeting to express the collective support for the work of the organization.

President Kauma reaffirmed the OSCE PA's unwavering solidarity with the people of Ukraine and advocated for accountability regarding the devastation caused by the Russian Federation's ongoing war. President Kauma furthermore highlighted the OSCE PA's continued engagement to achieving long-term peace and stability in the South Caucasus, and, finally, expressed regret over the escalating democratic backsliding in Belarus and the Russian Federation.

Report of OSCE PA Treasurer Johan Büser

Treasurer Johan Büser (Sweden) offered his report, as well as the audited accounts of the Assembly for the preceding financial year. He noted the overall strong financial management and cost efficiency of the Assembly, reflecting its ongoing commitment to transparency and accountability. He stressed, however, that the absence of the Russian Federation's contribution

continues to pose significant challenges to the work of the Assembly. In an open-floor debate, members highlighted the need to work towards a balanced budget while not impeding the principal activities of the Assembly.

Report of OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella

Secretary General Roberto Montella presented his report, emphasizing the significance of an effective Parliamentary Assembly contributing to European security by strongly supporting Ukraine, and the OSCE as a whole, against the Russian Federation's actions aimed at undermining both. To do so, SG Montella noted that the PA must make use of the flexibility it holds, especially compared to the OSCE governmental side, which is constrained by the consensus rule.

Montella highlighted the International Secretariat's efficiency in delivering on the priorities outlined by the Assembly, while in turn appreciating the support and trust provided by the parliamentarians to the Secretariat. He underscored the active role of the Secretariat in facilitating the core functions of the Assembly, including inter-parliamentary dialogue, for example through the gender network and the network of young parliamentarians, regional visits, including President Kauma's visits to the South Caucasus as well as the recent visit of the Parliamentary Support Team to Ukraine, high-level visits of Special Representatives and Committee Chairs



Johan Büser



Roberto Montella

to Vienna, Brussels, Iceland and others, and the recent election observation missions to Serbia and Azerbaijan.

Report of the Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on the Rules of Procedure, Pascal Allizard

The Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on the Rules of Procedure, Pascal Allizard (France), reported on the formal meeting of the Sub-Committee, which focused on the proposed amendment to the Rules of Procedure, specifically related to the consensus decision-making procedures, put forward by the Head of the Latvian Delegation, Rihards Kols, during the Autumn Meeting in Yerevan.

The members of the Sub-Committee agreed during the meeting, that neither the adoption,

nor the non-adoption of the amendment proposal would result in any changes.

The Sub-Committee moreover took note of suggestions to re-examine the duration of mandates of Assembly Officers, notably to extend the presidential term to two years, and consider putting forward an amendment proposal ahead of the Annual Session in Bucharest.

Reports on preparations for future OSCE PA meetings in 2024

The President informed the Standing Committee that a meeting of the Bureau would take place in Copenhagen on 28-29 April, that the 31st Annual Session of the OSCE PA would meet on 29 June – 3 July in Bucharest, and that the 22nd Autumn Meeting of the OSCE PA would take place in Dublin on 1-4 October.

Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism Meeting



The 17th Meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT) opened with an audio of a deepfake speech, generated by artificial intelligence using a cloned voice sample of the Chair of the CCT Reinhold Lopatka (Austria). Following the opening audio, Lopatka welcomed all members of the CCT and thanked them for their continuous engagement in the work of the committee.

He noted that the previously played deepfake speech was exemplary of how AI is used to create false content online, and how it could potentially be weaponized by malicious actors, including terrorist groups. At the same time, he noted, AI can positively contribute to the fight against terrorism, underlining the need for a comprehensive discussion of the topic, involving experts from all sides of the issue. To do so, Lopatka introduced the three expert speakers, Thomas Wuchte, Founder Multilateral Collaboration and Cooperation Leadership, Adam Hadley, Executive Director at Tech Against Terrorism, and Dina Hussein, Global Head of Policy Development and Expert Partnerships in Counterterrorism and Dangerous Orgs Policy at Meta.

Wuchte offered a brief overview of the history of AI and continued to delve into the positive and negative impacts of AI on the fight against terrorism. Wuchte called on international organizations,

including the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly, to place the threats and chances of AI at the forefront of their security agendas.

Hadley explained how AI can be used to disrupt the terrorist misuse of the internet and identified major emerging threats related to the use of AI by terrorist organizations, including the weaponization of disinformation, generative AI content and chatbots, and terrorist operated websites. He emphasized the need for a dedicated legislative framework around countering the use of AI for terrorist purposes.

Hussein noted that the many layers of available AI technologies require literacy programs aimed at creating a discussion infrastructure based on knowledge rather than fear. Several interventions by CCT members conveyed the eagerness to actively engage in this important discussion – within the committee and at home.

Looking ahead, Chair Lopatka informed the members of the upcoming official visit of the CCT to Türkiye, which will take place on 6 and 7 May in Ankara. The official visit will be directly followed by the Fifth Counter-Terrorism Co-ordination Meeting of Parliamentary Assemblies, chaired by the OSCE PA and organized jointly with UNOCT, and the Third Parliamentary Policy Dialogue, taking place in Istanbul on 8 and 9 May, respectively.

Ad Hoc Committee on Migration Meeting

The Ad Hoc Committee on Migration met on 22 February. Members heard a presentation by Dr. Kari Johnstone, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, and discussed upcoming activities of the committee.

The Chair, Vice-President Dr. Daniela De Ridder (Germany), highlighted planned visits to Italy and Türkiye. De Ridder informed Members that the visit to Italy, scheduled for 6-8 March, would focus on combating human trafficking, smuggling and other forms of organized crime, while the trip to Türkiye in May would address irregular migration.

In her presentation, Dr. Johnstone emphasized the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Europe, particularly following the invasion of Ukraine. She emphasized the vulnerability of displaced people to exploitation and advocated for legislation to prevent, protect against, and prosecute trafficking in human beings (THB). Dr. Johnstone called for standardized procedures for identifying victims and highlighted the increased risks of exploitation over time for displaced populations and called for legal and economic safeguards. She also underscored the importance of effective leadership and political will in combating THB, advocating for comprehensive anti-trafficking laws and government accountability mechanisms.

Following this presentation, the discussion focused on best practices in adopting comprehensive laws against THB, the role of NGOs, the criminalization of aid workers, the prosecution of alleged smugglers who might themselves

be THB victims, as well as the potential use of technology in victim protection and in counter-ing THB.

Committee member Kemal Celik (Türkiye) presented the expected programme of the visit in May to Ankara and Adana. He also provided an overview of Türkiye's efforts to manage irregular migration, including through implementation of the 2016 agreement with the EU and border security measures. Celik also outlined Türkiye's legal framework for international protection, including special protection measures for Syrians and Ukrainians, and efforts to facilitate voluntary returns of Syrians. Stressing the importance of responsibility sharing with the European Union, Celik emphasized that Türkiye's reception capacity is overstretched.

The OSCE PA Special Representative on Combating Organized Crime, Eugenio Zoffili (Italy), outlined the agenda of the upcoming visit to be structured in two parts: institutional briefings in Rome with representatives of the Ministry of Interior and law enforcement agencies as well as briefings in Lampedusa, with a focus on procedures pertaining to migrant reception and combatting THB, human smuggling and other forms of organized crime.

Chair De Ridder also suggested two topics for the next online policy discussions: reforms under the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and addressing gender-based violence in migration contexts. Members suggested integrating best practices for refugee integration into the discussion, as well as examining current trends in migration policies.

Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine (PSTU) Meeting

The 23-member Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine met on 23 February with a focus on the first visit of the PSTU to Ukraine, which took place on 5-6 February, and to chart the course for forthcoming action. The Chair, President Kauma, opened the meeting by highlighting the relevance of the PSTU as a vital platform for demonstrating solidarity and with fellow parliamentarians from Ukraine.

President Kauma presented a detailed report on the February visit to Kyiv. She informed Members that the delegation engaged in fruitful discussions with high-level officials from various Ukrainian institutions and that she had the opportunity to personally address the Verkhovna Rada plenary. The delegation also met with the family of a former Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) staff member detained by the Russian Federation. During the visit, President Kauma reiterated the OSCE PA's unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Discussions centered on the humanitarian consequences of the conflict, including the widespread destruction of infrastructure, investigations into war crimes, accountability measures, and initiatives aimed at repatriating forcibly abducted children. Another crucial topic of discussion was the effectiveness of sanctions against the Russian Federation.

PSTU members engaged in a debate on future steps and focus areas leading up to the Annual Session in Bucharest. Co-Chair Mykyta Poturaiev (Ukraine) stressed the significance of firsthand information acquired during field visits and urged the PSTU to maintain this practice. Poturaiev emphasized the critical importance of addressing the enforced disappearance of civilian hostages

and children, prioritizing their safe return. He conveyed concerns regarding access to Russian camps holding civilian prisoners and advocated for innovative solutions to support Ukraine and exert pressure on the Russian Federation.

Suggestions from other Members included continuing field missions in Ukraine, addressing enforced disappearances of civilian hostages and children, including in occupied territories, setting up contact groups to lobby for continuous military assistance, and organizing psychological support and school-dialogue sessions for Ukrainian displaced persons. The need for better co-ordination, interacting with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and NGOs on war crimes prosecution and prioritizing the situation of Ukrainian refugees, were also emphasized.

Dr. Michael Fazekas, Executive Coordinator at the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI), addressed the PSTU with a presentation on SECI's humanitarian aid and recovery projects' activities supporting internally displaced people, schools, infrastructures development, and medical facilities in eastern Ukraine. Building on his experience, he underscored corruption and complex bureaucracy as major obstacles hindering the efficient delivery of humanitarian aid. Dr. Fazekas proposed that PSTU Members, as lawmakers, could contribute to easing the humanitarian consequences of the war by addressing these challenges and initiating support for development projects on the ground.

At the end of the meeting, committee members expressed their intention to have an additional meeting before the Annual Session to further discuss and co-ordinate next steps.













Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

www.oscepa.org
osce@oscepa.dk

OSCE PA International Secretariat

Tordenskjoldsgade 1
1055 Copenhagen K
Denmark

Tel: +45 33 37 80 40

Fax: +45 33 37 80 30