

OSCE parliamentarians gather in Vienna for the 19th Winter Meeting

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is gathering this week in Vienna for its 19th Winter Meeting, taking place 20-21 February at the Hofburg Congress Centre. Nearly 300 participants from more than 50 countries are attending the event, including parliamentarians, OSCE officials, and high-level representatives of governments and international organizations.

The opening session will feature keynote addresses by President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka, OSCE PA President George Tsereteli, OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger, and Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania Etjen Xhafaj, representing the OSCE Chairmanship.

The three OSCE PA general committees will hear from relevant experts including United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet Jeria, Heads of OSCE Institutions, and government representatives of OSCE countries. Members will 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.

The general committees will also hear presentations by the rapporteurs regarding their ideas and intentions for the reports and draft resolutions being prepared for the 2020 Annual Session in Vancouver.



The closing joint session of the three general committees will include a special debate on combatting anti-Semitism, discrimination and intolerance in the OSCE region. The session will also feature reports by Special Representative on Gender Issues Hedy Fry (Canada), leaders of recent election observation missions to Ukraine, Belarus, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, followed by discussions.

There are numerous side events taking place on the margins of the Winter Meeting dealing with a wide range of topics. Today, OSCE PA Special Representative on Civil Society Engagement Pia Kauma (Finland) hosted a roundtable discussion on civil society space in the OSCE region featuring the participation of several NGOs.

Recent videos highlight OSCE PA activities in Azerbaijan and the United States

In recent days, the PA has produced videos documenting a presidential visit to Washington and election observation in Azerbaijan. The videos can be found on the PA's Facebook page and YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/oscepa

Special Representative on Fighting Corruption Charalambides addresses OSCE EEF meeting

OSCE PA Special Representative on Fighting Corruption Irene Charalambides (Cyprus) spoke Monday at the first preparatory meeting of the OSCE's 2020 Economic and Environmental Forum, noting that political will is key to bringing about change in fighting corruption, and therefore a change in mentality at all levels is urgently needed.

Parliamentarians have a vital role to play in preventing corruption, she said, highlighting in particular the importance of effective legislation and public oversight. Parliamentarians must strive to hold authorities accountable, Charalambides stressed, to ensure governments that fulfill their obligations, and to detect and prevent any abuse of power.

"Good legislation is key to providing law enforcement and judicial authorities with the appropriate tools and resources to combat corruption," Charalambides said. "For instance, laws establishing and adequately mandating specialized corruption investigation agencies have clearly proven their added value."

She also highlighted whistleblower protections and establishing clear operational frameworks to report corruption as urgent priorities for the OSCE region, as well as ensuring safeguards for press freedom to ensure that "the media environment remains pluralistic and protected from and undue influence, to be able to retain its important informative function in our free societies."

"It is equally crucial to formulate legislation duly aligning



corporate behaviors to anti-corruption norms, as corruption in private businesses remains a pressing issue in all our countries," she added.

Charalambides highlighted the work of international organizations and the importance of parliaments benefiting from their expertise in regards to the establishment of institutional structures that can help build political will.

"I personally often rely on international organizations and their experts to spot problems and suggest solutions," she said. "However, it is also up to governments and executive structures to ensure that international institutions engage parliaments more actively and systematically."

The first preparatory meeting of the 2020 Economic and Environmental Forum took place 17-18 February under the theme "Promoting security, stability and economic growth in the OSCE area by preventing and combating corruption through innovation, increased transparency and digitalization."