

Humanitarian impacts of conflicts in focus at OSCE PA web dialogue



With more than 125 participants, the OSCE PA held a webinar on 12 March entitled “Humanitarian protection and human rights in conflict zones,” which focused on how to strengthen the response to the long-term consequences of conflicts. The event included the participation of parliamentarians from several countries impacted by conflicts and was addressed by OSCE PA President Peter Lord Bowness (United Kingdom), Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik, Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine; and Third Committee Chair Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus). In his opening remarks, Hadjiyianni urged parliamentarians to work on behalf of all those who are impacted by war.

Highlighting the conflict in Ukraine and unresolved conflicts in the Caucasus, the Balkans and Moldova, ICRC President Maurer described serious humanitarian impacts particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict last year, he said, the ICRC received reports of indiscriminate shelling and

other alleged unlawful attacks using explosive weaponry in cities, towns and other populated areas.

Presenting the work of the SMM and sharing his observations regarding the impact of the conflict on civilians, Ambassador Çevik noted that the security situation on the ground has improved since the parties to the conflict agreed on strengthening the ceasefire on 22 July last year, but the humanitarian situation is still dire. The Chief Monitor underlined that political will and progress during negotiations are essential for maintaining an improved security situation and creating the conditions for further improvements in the humanitarian situation. He pledged that the SMM will continue to work with all actors to contribute to tangible progress for the benefit of civilians on the ground.

In the discussion, OSCE parliamentarians stressed the need for greater international co-operation to improve the situation in conflict zones. The OSCE PA has a role to play in developing a multilateral approach to conflict resolution and improving international humanitarian law, participants said, including by strengthening legal frameworks. Parliamentarians highlighted issues including involving young people in conflict resolution and reconciliation. Ensuring respect for religious freedom and other fundamental freedoms in conflict zones was also emphasized.

As Rapporteur of the human rights committee, OSCE PA Vice-President Kari Henriksen shared her efforts in the Norwegian parliament to highlight conflict-related humanitarian issues and urged her colleagues to do the same. OSCE parliamentarians have a duty to make sure that OSCE commitments are fulfilled by governments, she underlined.

Participants in PA discussion stress that consensus rule shouldn't obstruct OSCE work

In the second meeting of the “Call for Action – Helsinki +50 Process” on 10 March, OSCE parliamentarians, representatives of OSCE executive structures and experts discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the consensus-based procedure in the OSCE’s decision-making bodies. The consensus principle has long been seen as important for providing legitimacy to decisions, but is also easily abused leading to an obstructive and even destructive impact on the Organization, participants said.

Moderated by OSCE PA High-Level Expert Lamberto Zannier, the event was part of a series of meetings focusing on specific challenges facing the OSCE and involved more than 100 OSCE officials and parliamentarians. Head of the Office of Legal Affairs of the OSCE Stephen Walsh addressed the event along with OSCE PA President Peter Lord Bowness (United Kingdom), several OSCE PA leaders, former PA Presidents and Chairs-in-Office, and representatives of various OSCE institutions. Participants offered a variety of perspectives on the question of the OSCE consensus principle and priorities for possible reform, emphasizing in particular the need for greater political involvement by national governments to build political will to make the Organization more effective.

In the discussion, participants agreed that political



questions facing the OSCE should be addressed, but said this is very closely linked with the issue of accountability and transparency. Participants said that for the OSCE to succeed it must be empowered to use its entire toolbox, and if the consensus principle stands in the way of this, it should be reconsidered.

At the very least, participants said, some consideration should be given to prevent the blocking of procedural decisions, for example by eliminating the never-ending budget cycle. In this regard, OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella called for looking in the direction of practical and feasible changes such as adopting a budget cycle of two years, and urged continued high-level political attention to the OSCE in order to overcome its challenges.