

OSCE parliamentarians meet in Vienna for discussions on security at 23rd Winter Meeting



Pia Kauma addresses the closing joint session, 23 Feb. 2024

With more than 230 parliamentarians from 54 OSCE countries in attendance, the OSCE PA 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 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 for reports and draft resolutions being prepared for the 31st Annual Session in Bucharest this summer.

Chaired by Rapporteur Laurynas Kasciunas (Lithuania), 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-ordina-

tor in Ukraine. Kasciunas presented ideas for his report and draft resolution, focusing on how the OSCE can play a more effective role in restoring peace in Ukraine in full respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

The Second Committee was chaired by Azay Guliyev (Azerbaijan) and heard from representatives of the OSCE's governmental side, as well as experts from the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Microsoft, and Thinkers.ai. Second Committee Rapporteur Gudrun Kugler (Austria) spoke about the need to recognize environmental crimes during conflict as war crimes and the imperative for a legally binding instrument on artificial intelligence.

In the Third Committee, chaired by Lucie Potuckova (Czech Republic), 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. Rapporteur Malik Ben Achour (Belgium) highlighted several themes of the report and draft resolution he is preparing, stressing the need to renew dedication to the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. 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.

Photos and videos of the Winter Meeting available online

Photos from the OSCE PA's 23rd Winter Meeting are available for public use at the OSCE PA's Flickr page: <https://bit.ly/3P2YaOb>
Video of the Winter Meeting is available on the OSCE PA's YouTube and Facebook pages, as well as here: <https://bit.ly/3H9ZvOF>

Side events and bilateral meetings explore priority issues for the OSCE PA

Chaired by President Pia Kauma, the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine met on 23 February to discuss the ongoing war and announced the appointment of Carina Ödebrink (Sweden) as human rights rapporteur. The Ad Hoc Committee on Migration heard a presentation by OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Kari Johnstone and discussed upcoming visits to Lampedusa and Türkiye, while the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism explored the impact of artificial intelligence on counter-terrorism.

President Kauma and Secretary General Roberto Montella held a meeting with OSCE Chair-in-Office Ian Borg that explored avenues for intensified co-operation. Kauma, Montella and Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs Pascal Allizard (France) met with Israel's OSCE PA Delegation and Permanent Representative to the OSCE for discussions on the crisis in the Middle East. In addition, Allizard held meetings with the OSCE Permanent Representatives of France and Egypt for discussions on regional issues, as well as with members of Morocco's

OSCE PA Delegation. Special Representative on South East Europe Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus) met with parliamentarians and ambassadors from the Balkans, while Special Representative on Eastern Europe Kristian Vigenin (Bulgaria) met with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, as well as with Belarus's OSCE PA delegation.

Special Representative on Central Asia Farah Karimi (Netherlands) met with the representatives of the Central Asian delegations to discuss co-operation on issues of mutual interest and her upcoming visit to the region. Special Representative on Climate Change Pere Joan Pons (Spain) held a number of bilaterals focused on the climate crisis, while Special Representative on Fighting Corruption Irene Charalambides met with delegations from Central Asia. Many other meetings were also held with a wide range of interlocutors.

Side events held during the Winter Meeting included one sponsored by the Norwegian Delegation focused on sanctions against Russia and one sponsored by the Representative on Freedom of the Media entitled "The OSCE RFoM Safety of Journalists Toolbox – closing the implementation gap."

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