



Report by President Tsereteli

Online Standing Committee Meeting, 12 November 2020

As delivered

Let me now kick-off our internal business with my report. Before I begin, I propose that any question about the next three agenda items be grouped and taken following the update by Secretary General MONTELLA.

ADAPTING THE WORK OF THE OSCE PA

Firstly, as you will recall, following our last meeting, we published a comprehensive report on the Parliamentary Web Dialogues, and the work of our committees. I encourage you to continue to refer to this document, which is a useful resource for our Delegations and our national parliaments to share their experiences, learn about best practices, and together promote wide-ranging responses to COVID-19 challenges.

Since we last convened online in July, the OSCE PA has transitioned to what we could call a **“hybrid” plan of activities**: we have continued to organize online events, while trying to participate in in-person meetings whenever possible.

I, for example, had the opportunity to travel to Denmark in early September to visit our International Secretariat and meet the Danish Speaker and Foreign Minister.

Importantly, we gathered a group of OSCE experts to analyze the Organization’s and discuss next steps.

I have since then been mostly occupied by a very busy electoral campaign in Georgia, which in some ways is still ongoing, but I did as much as possible to stay on top of the issues and participate in online events.

Last July, we had hoped for additional meetings in-person, for instance the Leinsweiler seminar. However, given the health situation in many of our countries, it remains more cautious to maintain most of our discussions online.

The Ministerial Council Meeting next month will itself take place online. And looking forward, it remains to be seen how our Winter Meeting in 2021 will take place.

This autumn, we have strived to deploy robust delegations to **fulfill our important mission to support democratic development throughout the OSCE region.**

Just a short while ago, we deployed two election observation missions to the United States and to Georgia, totaling 77 observers. At the end of August, we also had a small mission in Montenegro.

Despite all the complications, I want to sincerely thank you all for your continued active engagement in our work and our mission.

I am fully aware that it can sometimes put you in an uneasy situation while our governments and parliaments are enacting measures to curtail our citizens' ability to travel. But we have seen since the summer **how important it is that the OSCE and the international community remains active and engaged in the field of election observation.**

THE OSCE REGION PLAGUED BY CONFLICTS AND CRISES

I have closely followed developments in Kyrgyzstan following the recent parliamentary elections. In the months to come, it is crucial that the international community show **full support for Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary democracy** and prevent further turmoil.

This is why I think we should consider observing in some capacity the early parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan and the early presidential election in Kyrgyzstan on 10 January 2021. I look forward to your opinion on this.

As we are on the topic of elections, I want to congratulate all our Members who have been re-elected in recent weeks. We are lucky to keep important Members on board.

Since the summer, we have had numerous exchanges with Members and Delegations regarding **post-election developments in Belarus.** The OSCE PA has been very active on this issue.

There also we continue to monitor the situation very closely. I want to thank our colleague from Belarus, Mr. Andrei SAVINYKH for regularly participating in our online discussions. Despite some tough conversations, this has been a precious line of communication with the authorities.

We are also grateful for your readiness to participate in a meeting with leading opposition figure Svetlana Tikhonovskaya. It was extremely interesting to hear from both sides and figure out ways out of this situation.

In addition to these exchanges, I have written to both Speakers of the Belarusian parliament to support the offer of the OSCE chairmanship to visit Minsk and encourage an open and inclusive dialogue. I have also offered to lead an OSCE PA delegation to visit Minsk. This offer remains on the table.

I have encouraged Minsk to **make full use of all OSCE tools to peacefully solve this crisis,** including the Moscow Mechanism. I find it very unfortunate that the OSCE expert was denied a visa to travel to Belarus, forcing him to investigate from outside the country.

I remain convinced that **it is in Belarus's best interest to be more transparent on human rights issues.** It would have been a good opportunity to use this mechanism to build confidence between the authorities and the opposition.

Dear colleagues,

What these crises reveal is that some **deep-rooted tensions** are being brought to the fore by the coronavirus pandemic. In our Web Dialogues, we had highlighted increased risks for social unrest and armed conflict.

After a serious escalation of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in July, **we have witnessed full out war** this autumn.

I truly hope that the agreement signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Russian Federation earlier this week will finally offer an opportunity for long-lasting peace.

Of course it was very painful to see these military operations, but now a new process is starting.

I exchanged on several occasions with the Delegations from Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the Speakers of parliament from these two countries, regarding military operations on the ground and their impact on civilian lives and livelihoods.

I have been shocked by the bloodshed in the conflict zone and beyond. Given the present situation on the ground, it is now crucial that all sides fully commit to the latest ceasefire agreement to protect the lives of civilians.

As I noted in a statement a few days ago, **the road to peace can be harder than war itself**. Although tempers are still running high, the sides must also urgently recommit to peaceful negotiations, in good faith, to allow the safe return of internally displaced persons and refugees and reach a long-term and comprehensive settlement.

I have firmly condemned the violent assault on President Mirzoyan. **Such an attack was an attack on democracy itself, and it is inexcusable**. On behalf of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I want to wish him a full and speedy recovery.

The situation is no doubt painful for the Armenian people, it is an emotional moment, but I also want to urge them to **maintain confidence in their democratically-elected institutions** to steer their country and nation in these challenging times.

Throughout this period, I want to note the work of countries of the Minsk Group in encouraging high-level discussions between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

As it is the case in the conflicts in Ukraine and in Georgia, **we need to see discussions at the highest level** to facilitate peaceful breakthroughs that can alleviate the pain and suffering of civilians on the ground.

This also requires some measure of mutual trust and understanding. Our Assembly continues to **encourage parliamentary dialogue**, which can play an important role in rebuilding communication lines and fostering a common future for the people of the region.

On a more hopeful note, it may be worth recalling the event we co-organized with the High Commissioner on National Minorities on the topic of territorial autonomy. In Moldova, we can see that despite setbacks in the settlement process – the coronavirus crisis is one of them – steps

taken in the right direction, through **local ownership and political courage, can lead to real progress for citizens.**

And that ultimately, open and honest dialogue remains the best instrument to detect, defuse, and overcome conflict.

CRISIS IN THE OSCE

In this turbulent context, it is damaging that we have had to endure a crisis of leadership in the OSCE. The inability to reach an agreement on the term extensions of the OSCE's top four executive positions, or even to agree on an interim solution, left **a vacuum that has damaged our collective security.**

Since July, the Albanian Chairmanship has worked diligently to interview suitable candidates for all four positions. **Some good friends of the OSCE PA are candidates for these positions.**

Let me salute Ditmir BUSHATI, who is online with us today, and is a candidate to become the new OSCE Representative on Media Freedom. A former Bureau Member, Matteo MECACCI, is candidate for Director of ODIHR, while Amb. ABDRAKHMANOV from Kazakhstan is candidate for High Commissioner on National Minorities – many of us have had the pleasure to work with him as Ambassador to the OSCE and as Foreign Minister. We wish them all luck!

In the meantime, together with Secretary General MONTELLA, we have worked to develop an OSCE PA contribution to solving the crisis in the OSCE.

When I mentioned our recent discussion in Denmark, it was precisely dedicated to this. Roberto will brief you in greater detail on this project, but I will give you some broad lines of our analysis.

We first need to realize that the leadership vacuum is not a crisis in itself – it is another symptom of the long-standing and widespread crisis that continues to affect the OSCE, which is largely caused by a **total lack of interest for the OSCE at a political level in the vast majority of participating States.**

This crisis is purely political: the ability to rapidly deploy the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine proves that the OSCE can be operational when there is political will.

Outspoken support for the OSCE's mediation capabilities in Belarus and in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh also underline this. As recent months have demonstrated, **the OSCE garners attention at the highest political level especially in times of crisis.**

In order to refocus attention on the OSCE, we must therefore continue to **demonstrate what participating States gain their from membership.**

In this effort, it is crucial that together we **reinforce multilateralism and maintain the work of the OSCE at the top of our domestic and international agendas** in our home parliaments, in conversations with governments and foreign ministers, and in our exchanges with the international community.

It is only through **greater co-operation** that we can together deal with the COVID-19 crisis, and all the other major challenges we have to face: radicalization and terrorism – which in recent weeks have struck France and Austria -, the migrant crisis, or climate change.

I believe it is also important for our Assembly to be able to **rely on the goodwill and experience of former Members**, who may have moved on to other positions in government, in non-governmental organizations, in academia, or the private sector.

On several occasions, I have shared with you our ideas on how to involve these people more actively in our work.

Finally, and as part of our contribution to revitalizing the OSCE, this year has encouraged us to **take a deep look at our Rules of Procedure**. This is needed not only to close loopholes that have been exposed by the pandemic, but also to continue our efforts to modernize our working practices and make our work – and the use of your time – more effective. I look forward to the report by Vice-President BOWNESS on this issue later in our agenda.

This concludes my report.

As indicated earlier, we can group comments and questions after the report by the Secretary General.