



**Remote Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
30 June – 6 July 2021**

**Report on the Activities of the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Peter Lord Bowness**

Dear Members,

Since our last meeting in February, and as it quickly became clear that we would be unable to hold a fully in-person Annual Session as planned in Bucharest, a great deal of effort has been devoted to ensuring that our Parliamentary Assembly be given the opportunity to discuss committee reports and elect a new leadership this July.

While most of us, including myself, will unfortunately find themselves unable to participate from Vienna in our 2021 Remote Annual Session, I am glad that we have taken the steps necessary to ensure that you will be able to engage in vigorous debates to advance the work of the OSCE.

I would like to thank the International Secretariat for the efforts undertaken since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to adapt the work of our Assembly to this unprecedented challenge. In the past 18 months, the wealth of experience gained through the organization of our *Parliamentary Web Dialogues* and Standing Committee, Bureau, and various other online meetings, including our latest virtual Winter Meeting, means that our Assembly will be able to fulfil its mission this July despite the complicated circumstances.

I also take this opportunity to thank the Bureau for our important discussions and collegial work in recent months. These have given the necessary guidance to carry on with our work in this emergency situation.

I am afraid that, despite some improvements, the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to impact our calendar of activities until 2022. Indeed, we will also be unable to organize our Autumn Meeting in person in Dublin. Nevertheless, I am grateful that the Delegations which had planned on hosting PA meetings unfortunately cancelled by the pandemic will be using them as a foundation for future conferences once the global health situation allows it. This already ensures that the OSCE PA will have host venues for its annual and autumn meetings for the next three years.

Despite all these logistical challenges, I am glad to report that the OSCE PA continues to provide an important platform for dialogue on key political issues. Our Winter Meeting allowed our Members to discuss issues such as protracted conflicts, the crisis in and around Ukraine, building economic and environmental security, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on security and democracy. Since then, online meetings hosted by our General Committees or as part of the *Call for Action* initiative have given ample opportunities to our Members to hear from experts and exchange on many key areas of activities of the OSCE,

including gender-based violence, climate change, youth engagement and empowerment, pollution, public health, and the right to healthcare, or military transparency and confidence-building measures. These conversations have been useful to share concerns, experiences, and best practices, and to inform the work of our Assembly in the preparation of this year's Annual Session.

Even though field travel remains complicated, our Ad Hoc Committees have continued to put the spotlight on issues of concern. The Migration Committee has discussed the plight of asylum-seekers and migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the challenges facing Greece through a series of virtual meetings. Our Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT) also carried an interesting hearing on the challenge of repatriating, prosecuting, rehabilitating, and reintegrating foreign terrorist fighters, which examined the experience of Kazakhstan as a case study for lessons learned and good practices. Both of our Ad Hoc Committees also reinforced valuable institutional synergies, as the migration committee conducted a series of web-conferences with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to address and understand the needs of unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable refugees, and the CCT held a joint session with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) as part of an international conference on terrorism and violent extremism organized by the Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS).

I would like to thank Members and staff for continuing to actively participate in our election observation missions, including in Bulgaria, Albania, and Armenia. Immediately after our Annual Session, we will also deploy two simultaneous missions to Moldova and Bulgaria, as a clear signal that our Parliamentary Assembly will continue to assist OSCE participating States in implementing their democratic commitments.

As I underlined during our Winter Meeting, it is the role of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to speak out and hold participating States accountable when core OSCE principles are trampled upon. Although we maintain open and honest communication channels with our colleagues in the Parliament of Belarus, it is also our collective duty to relay the concerns expressed by an overwhelming majority of PA Members regarding the clear escalation of violations of human rights and democratic principles witnessed since the last presidential election in August 2020, not least the grounding of Ryanair flight 4978 and the subsequent arrest of opposition activist and journalist Roman Protasevich. It is well within our role to regularly exchange with as many stakeholders as possible, including with leading opposition figures, which is why we have also met online on several occasions with Leonid Volkov, a close aide to jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, to hear about his detention conditions and discuss political developments ahead of the Russian parliamentary elections.

OSCE parliamentarians have an important role to play in keeping these specific issues, as well as many others, on the agenda of national governments. This was one of my key messages in a hearing on the work of the OSCE PA hosted by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET): while we can certainly raise issues, we need Ministers and Heads of State to address them to bring about the changes we seek. It is therefore vital that we carry on reinforcing synergies with our institutional partners and that

we work together to fully exploit our political role and generate interest in the work of the OSCE, both in our national parliaments and with our governments.

Finally, when I assumed the duties of President last December, I committed to handing over the Assembly in good order and without any commitments. For this reason, I have decided to terminate the appointment of all Special Representatives and Rapporteurs to ensure that my successor has an opportunity to consider the number of portfolios, the subject of their mandates, and who should fill these positions without being under any obligation to existing holders. I have also placed my chair of the Sub-Committee on Rules of Procedure and Working Practices at the disposal of the new President, to whom I wish every success in guiding our Assembly for the next year.

As a word of conclusion and considering the challenging environment we have been forced to deal with for over a year, let me once again underline my appreciation for the work of the International Secretariat under the leadership of Secretary General Roberto Montella. I would also like to thank you all for your assistance and for your continued engagement to meet our common challenges through honest international dialogue and strong multilateral co-operation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Bowness', written over a horizontal line.

Peter Lord Bowness