

Our common vision for the OSCE
Parliamentary Assembly:
Supporting OSCE principles and
facilitating parliamentary dialogue



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I. INTRODUCTION



In 2015 the OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly reflected on the future of the Organization and our role within it in the framework of the Helsinki +40 process. With the resulting ideas in mind, and on the occasion of the Assembly's 25th anniversary year, included here are some guiding principles for the work of the OSCE PA and its International Secretariat in the coming years.

As the parliamentary dimension of the Organization, composed of representatives of the OSCE's more than one billion people, the Parliamentary Assembly is a unique body within the OSCE family. As embodied in our Rules of Procedure, and built upon during the past 25 years, our primary responsibilities and objectives are clear:

- a. We are first and foremost a forum for parliamentary dialogue, and are the only inclusive, open and transparent forum among the 57 participating States and Partners for Co-operation;
- b. We contribute to strengthening international co-operation, the strengthening of democratic institutions and the implementation of commitments made by the participating States on political, security, economic and human rights issues as contained in the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent documents;
- c. We develop and promote dialogue-based mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as engage in mediation activities;
- d. We add transparency and accountability to the OSCE and increase its democratic legitimacy, while contributing to its development as an organization;
- e. We provide leadership to short-term OSCE election observer missions;
- f. We promote awareness of the OSCE and its tools among parliamentarians and the public, as well as co-operate with other parts of the OSCE family mutually strengthening each.

We should continue to be all these things and aim to streamline our activities and improve our tools to deliver on all these issues. Maintaining the flexibility to engage in the most relevant political issues has been a hallmark of the Assembly's first 25 years; we should continue to capitalize on this strength and use it to full effect.

II. KEY PRINCIPLES AND WORKING METHODS OF THE ASSEMBLY

The guiding principle that should inspire all actions of the Assembly is that we will strive to fully exploit our strengths to deliver concrete results for the end-users of OSCE “products”, i.e. improving people’s lives and strengthening human security and good governance in the OSCE participating States.



SPEAKING OUT: As a body that is not bound by the OSCE governmental side’s consensus rule, and composed of participants that are independent by virtue of their status as parliamentarians, the OSCE PA is in an excellent position to continue as a vocal supporter of OSCE principles. Indeed, as representatives of our populations, we have a responsibility to speak out and to hold OSCE countries accountable to the principles on which our Organization is founded and which are for the

benefit of all our constituents.

The Assembly’s Annual Declaration reflects the collective voice of the OSCE PA following thorough debate among the parliamentarians. It is our main message and input to the OSCE Ministerial Council. In our meetings we also interact directly with the OSCE Chairmanship and all components of the governmental side, and the President, the Committee Officers and the PA’s Special Representative in Vienna address the governmental side in their meetings. It is appropriate for the President of the Assembly, the Vice-Presidents as well as the elected leadership of our three General Committees, to speak out on issues of relevance within their fields of responsibility. In their active engagement with their domestic and international media, OSCE parliamentarians, and particularly the Assembly leadership, provide a high level of visibility for OSCE work, principles and objectives, and should continue to do so.

NON-PARTISAN PRINCIPLES: As politicians, we are naturally partisan in our work in each of our countries. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly however provides a privileged forum in which we can set aside our party affiliations and instead work for the principles of our Organization. The peaceful settlement of disputes, the inviolability of borders, the self-determination of peoples and respect for human rights are neither conservative nor liberal nor socialist ideas. They are principles around which our leaders rallied in 1975 regardless of their political ideology; in the true spirit of the OSCE, we must therefore continue to work for these principles.



ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY: Unity of purpose within the Parliamentary Assembly is critical if we are to have real and consistent impact. It is the duty of the President and the Secretary General to ensure that our organizational identity is preserved, while all Members should respect that work being done in the name of the Assembly must be based on the decisions and the organizational structure of the Assembly.

Our Assembly must continue to function as a unifying body within the OSCE overall. The various

bodies and institutions of the OSCE all exist to improve the implementation of our commitments, and intensified co-operation within the Organization will improve our delivery of services. Indeed, enhanced co-operation with other bodies of the OSCE will also enable OSCE parliamentarians to be better informed about and to act upon OSCE challenges and opportunities.

III. OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY'S TOOLBOX

ELECTION OBSERVATION CO-OPERATION: Observation of elections is one of our core activities, and it is a field in which our Parliamentary Assembly has significant advantages which we can capitalize on. We need to continue working together with the ODIHR and our parliamentary partners on election observation. Since 1997 we have had a modus operandi with the ODIHR that foresees an excellent division of labour: the ODIHR deploys long-term observers and offers the OSCE PA information and analytical and logistical support.

As a body of elected officials, we the OSCE PA observe elections and provide the leadership of the short term OSCE observer mission. The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office designates a political figure who should normally be the President of the OSCE PA or an OSCE PA senior official recommended by the OSCE PA President to deliver the preliminary post-election statement. This statement is delivered immediately after an election and contains a first assessment of its conduct, based on the input of all international observers in the Mission. In carrying out his/her duty, the Special Co-ordinator has the responsibility to ensure that the statement is solidly based on verifiable facts and that it serves as the OSCE observers' contribution to the implementation of all OSCE commitments. Because of their experience, Members of Parliament are used to assuming political responsibility and are therefore particularly qualified to express this kind of sensitive judgements. This is why the Chairmanship entrusts a political figure with the leadership of the short-term OSCE observer mission.



SUPPORTING FIELD MISSIONS: OSCE parliamentarians who have been fortunate enough to see first-hand the work being done in OSCE field missions quickly become these missions' strongest advocates. OSCE field missions are the Organization's most effective way of delivering services to the people. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly should continue to provide political support to the Organization's work in the field through our annual declarations and appropriate political interventions.

As a body, we must also remain vigilant in demanding that OSCE missions are empowered for effective work and that they receive adequate funding and effective mandates. Consideration should be given to conducting high-level parliamentary visits to field missions and to contributing to their planning work on a regional level. This may be done through greater project-based interaction with full-time field missions of the organization.



ENGAGING MPs ON THE GROUND: The OSCE PA should also continue to explore further opportunities to engage parliamentarians personally in the field. We must ensure that our political capital is spent appropriately. Our greatest resource is the 323 MPs' time and willingness to engage on issues of common interest. We are fortunate that we do not need a long decision-making process subject to a single-country veto

like the governmental side of the OSCE; we can rapidly deploy teams of MPs to hot spots in the OSCE region and be present where things happen. The President and other Assembly leaders should continue high-level diplomacy on behalf of the Assembly. All we need is the willingness of engaged MPs to deploy and the logistical/technical support of the International Secretariat, within its limited resources, to support our actions.

EFFECTIVE TOOLS: Our Assembly has developed a set of useful mechanisms, in the form of Ad Hoc Committees and Special Representatives that can be used to great effect. Such bodies address either geographic or thematic issues, and enable targeted work by parliamentarians on key issues. While Ad Hoc Committees are appointed by our Standing Committee to address long-term concerns, Special Representatives serve upon appointment of the President. To ensure the flexibility of this tool and that Special Representative mandates remain relevant, their appointment coincides with the mandate of the President, thereby enabling regular adjustment and when necessary, phasing-out. Taking into consideration the limited resources of the OSCE PA, the countries of origin of the PA Members who have volunteered for these posts are expected to provide them with the necessary support. OSCE PA Vice-Presidents, who have been personally selected by their parliamentary colleagues to serve the Assembly, should particularly consider offering their time and expertise in this regard.



PARLIAMENTARY CONFLICT RESOLUTION THROUGH DIALOGUE AND MEDIATION: By the very nature of its work, bringing together parliamentarians from many countries, the OSCE PA engages in conflict prevention and resolution. This will remain an inherent part of our statutory meetings and work in the field, and should be encouraged. However, the OSCE PA should also continue to organize parliamentary dialogue efforts focused on conflict prevention and resolution outside of our

statutory meetings when appropriate and possible. The Ukrainian-Russian dialogue, conducted under the OSCE PA President, as well as within the OSCE PA's Vienna Process is an example of the useful work that we can do in this regard. The Assembly should continue to encourage the OSCE governmental side, which has been strengthening its mediation capacity, to make full use of the expertise that OSCE parliamentarians have in this field. To this end the OSCE PA should consider appointing a Special Representative on Mediation to coordinate the Assembly's work with other OSCE initiatives, as well as to make more concrete its mediation efforts.



EXAMPLES FOR FUTURE ENGAGEMENT:

As a basis for work in the future, we can look to a number of OSCE PA undertakings in recent years. Our multiple visits to Donetsk and Luhansk as well as our visit to Odessa just days after the tragic death of dozens trapped in an inferno were all important symbols of solidarity with the people of Ukraine. Our visits to and comments on the Guantanamo detention facility have been important engagements.

Our historic work in Tunisia during the first elections after the Arab spring was an important show of support. Similarly, our visits to hear first-hand accounts from refugees in Sanliurfa on the Turkey-Syria border, on Serbia’s southern border, in Czech asylum centres and in Lampedusa all leave a mark. They provide comfort to the citizens of places affected by a particular problem, and provide visibility to the work of the OSCE through the presence of prominent political figures in sensitive environments.

IV. OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY AS A FORUM FOR DIALOGUE



OSCE PA MEETINGS: As an inclusive forum that engages in open and transparent dialogue in the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly keeps the original spirit of the OSCE alive. We will continue to hold our regular meetings. It is incumbent upon the Parliaments of the OSCE States that have not yet hosted OSCE PA events to come forward with an offer to do so in the near future. This is a priority we should all bear in mind. The OSCE PA’s primary focus will remain parliamentary dialogue through the

following statutory meetings:

- a) Annual Session (early July)
- b) Winter Meeting (February)
- c) Fall Meetings (typically in October)
- d) Bureau Meetings (typically three times a year, in April, July and December)
- e) Mediterranean Forum (preferably in conjunction with one of the other statutory meetings)

PROVIDING IDEAS: Our meetings serve not only as fora for dialogue on OSCE concerns, but also as excellent fora for exchanges of best practice among parliamentarians. With this in mind, our statutory meetings should be streamlined with an aim to make them as efficient and result-oriented as possible. Being open to ideas and maintaining flexibility in our agendas to enable us to engage on the most topical issues is critical if we are to remain a relevant and responsive forum for dialogue.



FOLLOW-UP: The actual impact of the declarations we adopt will always remain limited unless all of our delegations are willing to put more effort into follow-up efforts. Previous efforts to institutionalize follow-up procedures within the Assembly have not received sufficient support from parliamentarians. However, the practice in some parliaments of having regular plenary discussions on OSCE PA work and OSCE issues is particularly welcome. Greater exchange of ideas on how national parliaments and governments can effectively follow-up on our recommendations should be encouraged within the context of our meetings.

PARLIAMENTARY EXPERIENCE: Advice offered from a parliamentary colleague who has personally been through the sensitive work of crafting and amending laws is valuable. Collectively, Members of the OSCE PA have many decades of parliamentary experience. Consideration should be given to harnessing this legislative experience in such a way that parliamentarians can contribute their expertise when other parliaments are engaging in legal reform processes implementing OSCE commitments. The International Secretariat should work to develop a database recording fields of experience of OSCE parliamentarians.

V. STRONGER CO-OPERATION WITH THE OSCE EXECUTIVE BRANCH



DEMOCRATIC OVERSIGHT OF THE OSCE: As the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, we will continue to provide democratic oversight of the Organization, particularly because OSCE activities often have a direct impact on the people that we parliamentarians represent. We must, therefore, remain true to our principles as parliamentarians and continue to provide and advocate for greater transparency and accountability. Nonetheless, this should not stand in the way of close and fruitful co-

operation with the governmental side as well as the independent institutions in the interests of the people that the Organization serves. This will make the work of the Assembly more efficient and our Organization stronger.

By focusing on delivery of real and concrete work to the “customers” of the OSCE “product” (the people of the OSCE participating States and their institutions) we can make a real difference in people’s lives.