



HELSINKI COMMISSION REPORT

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IN BRIEF

The Parliamentary Dimension of the Human Dimension

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) organizes the annual Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), and is known for its standard-setting work in election observation as well as programs that help countries improve their implementation of OSCE commitments in the Human Dimension. Other OSCE institutions also have a role to play in the Human Dimension and may participate in the HDIM debates.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), for example, is regularly represented in Warsaw by some of its leadership. In 2017, parliamentarian Marietta Tidei of Italy, one of nine OSCE PA Vice Presidents, was in Warsaw for the opening and followed by parliamentarian Kyriakos Hadjiyianni of Cyprus, who serves as Rapporteur for the Assembly's General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions. Staff from the Copenhagen-based OSCE PA Secretariat—Secretary General Roberto

Montella and Executive Office Chief Andreas Baker—were also in Warsaw.

The OSCE PA Can Speak When the OSCE Cannot

The Parliamentary Assembly was among the original institutions first established within today's OSCE, following a recommendation made in the 1990 Charter of Paris. While the other OSCE institutions are tied closely to the ongoing multilateral diplomacy of the OSCE, in which governments of the participating States are officially represented, the OSCE PA is considerably more independent.

The Assembly consists of 323 parliamentarians from the national parliaments of the OSCE participating States, each of whom is theoretically free to advocate their own views on issues in statements or in votes on resolutions un-

der consideration. Even within delegations, the parliamentarians are free to agree or disagree with each other.

“We must recognize that one of the most challenging issues that our democracies will face in the coming years will be on the front of integration, on our ability not only to recognize and protect those running away from wars and poverty, but also to make these people feel like an integral part of our communities, with full rights and duties.

Democracy in all countries represents a path that must first take place in people's consciousness, including strengthened respect for the convictions and identities of all. To this end, the importance of active dialogue with civil society by the OSCE, both in its governmental and parliamentary dimensions, must be underlined.”

– Marietta Tidei, Vice-President of
the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
September 11, 2017



The OSCE PA differs from the inter-governmental arm of the OSCE in that each participating State has not one voice, but anywhere from two to 17 depending on its population. Substantive decisions by the PA are generally made on the basis of a majority vote, in contrast with the consensus-based decision making of the OSCE itself, where each state has equal representation. Majority voting allows parliamentarians, reflecting the strong sentiment of the participating States, to adopt texts on critical issues that might not find the full consensus needed among the diplomatic representatives based in Vienna.

For example, for the past four annual sessions, the OSCE PA has adopted by overwhelming majorities strongly worded resolutions condemning what it has called clear, gross, and uncorrected violations of Helsinki Principles by Russia in its ongoing aggression against neighboring Ukraine, while the Russian representative to the OSCE regularly denies consensus to anything which would criticize or counter its current behavior at home or abroad.

Human Dimension Issues of Parliamentary Concern

The OSCE PA debates issues of current concern at meetings throughout the year, and it considers resolutions on such issues mainly at its

summer annual session. Many relate to democratic development and respect for human rights among the participating States. When adopted, these resolutions comprise the final declaration of an annual session.

Today's high-profile OSCE work on human trafficking, anti-Semitism, and media freedom began years ago with initiatives undertaken by the Assembly. More recently, Russia has consistently been taken to task for its deteriorating human rights performance at home, as well as for human rights violations associated with the conflict in Ukraine, including the harassment and mistreatment of minority groups in occupied Crimea and the abduction and illegal detention of Ukrainian citizens.

The 2017 OSCE PA Annual Session, held in July in Minsk, Belarus, also raised concern about the recent referendum conducted by Turkey; efforts to curtail academic freedom, including Hungarian Government attempts targeting of the Central European University; and ongoing ethnic tensions in the Western Balkans. While a resolution about specific human rights concerns in Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Russia unfortunately failed by one vote, it nevertheless had sufficient support to be considered and allow for a full debate giving these concerns considerable attention.

Migration and refugee flows and specific aspects of human trafficking remained high on the agenda, as they have for some years, while religious discrimination and intolerance as well as the challenges of new voting technologies found their place on the agenda. Parliamentarians attending the meeting in Minsk also engaged directly with civil society and opposition leaders who are working for greater openness and democracy in that country.

Concerns about United States performance in the Human Dimension occasionally have been raised at OSCE PA meetings, mostly in a genuine and credible way that has been at times shared by some members of the U.S. Delegation. Concerns about the treatment of detainees held at Guantanamo Bay has led the United States to allow OSCE PA visits to the facility, and the PA has called for greater cooperation in taking custody of remaining detainees so that the facility could be closed. More recently, concern about fatalities connected with law enforcement in the United States has also been raised.

In Minsk, European opposition to the death penalty remained clear and strong; the United States and Belarus are the only participating States currently to permit it although there is also concern that others might be considering its use. New U.S. measures on entry into the United States viewed as discriminatory were also raised with concern.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has participated in observation of U.S. General and Mid-Term elections, including the 2016 General Elections, which generally receive positive as-

essments despite several perceived shortcomings, including various state and local restrictions on foreign observation.

Like the HDIM, an Opportunity for Wider Dialogue

Unlike most debates of the OSCE, the OSCE PA generally opens its debates and consideration of resolutions for adoption to the public and provides both a live stream and a video archive of its proceedings.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) do not have a seat at the table like they do at the HDIM, but NGO representatives and human rights activists have been invited to make presentations at OSCE PA meetings, and some hold their own side events at these meetings, supported and attended by interested parliamentarians. The Winter Meeting takes place each February in Vienna to allow for interaction of parliamentarians with their representatives to the OSCE as well as a number of OSCE officials.

Additional OSCE PA Work in the Human Dimension

Operationally, the Parliamentary Assembly joins the ODIHR to form common OSCE election observation efforts, often coordinated with other international bodies like the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

Beyond its response to conflict situations like that in Ukraine, election observation is perhaps the activity for which the OSCE is most widely known. The ODIHR provides long- and short-term observation ability and logistical preparation in addition to its expertise.



Helsinki Commissioners Rep. Gwen Moore, Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, and Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Rep. Chris Smith at the 2017 OSCE PA Annual Session in Minsk. Credit: National Parliament of Belarus

The PA provides additional short-term observers from among parliamentarians who have their own, direct experience with elections, one of whom is appointed by the OSCE chairmanship to lead the overall observation effort and give added political support to the conclusions and recommendations made. According to the OSCE PA Secretariat, approximately 5,000 parliamentarians from its ranks have observed more than 140 elections since 1993¹. The U.S. Helsinki Commission and its staff have contributed regularly to these efforts.

The Assembly also has a number of Special Representatives and Ad Hoc Committees that visit countries or regions of concern, like Belarus, Moldova, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, or that address particular Human Dimension issues like gender discrimination, intolerance in society and human trafficking, both at the international level and through field visits.

The United States, through the Helsinki Commission, is particularly active in this area. Representative Chris Smith (New Jersey), the Commission's Co-Chairman, has been the OSCE PA Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues since 2004, and Senator Ben Cardin (Maryland) has served for more than three years as the Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism and Intolerance².

In 2017, Representative Richard Hudson (North Carolina) was appointed a Vice Chair of the newly established Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism, which has Human Dimension aspects to its mandate to thwart the growth of violent extremism. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (Texas) became a member of the very active Ad Hoc Committee on Migration which also has a heavy Human Dimension focus. Both Representative Hudson and Representative Jackson Lee are members of the Helsinki Commission.

Ongoing U.S. representation in OSCE PA leadership is an acknowledgement of the value to U.S. foreign policy of the Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE generally, including important work on Human Dimension issues. Senator Roger Wicker (Mississippi), the U.S. Helsinki Commission's current Chairman, today also serves as one of the OSCE PA Vice Presidents which help to guide the Assembly's work. High turnout for OSCE PA meetings and field activity throughout the year indicates other countries similarly value the Assembly's contribution to the Human Dimension, an area where the participating States continue to face significant challenges.

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The OSCE PA General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights, and Humanitarian Questions

Much of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's work on the Human Dimension takes place under the auspices of the General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, also known as the Third Committee. It meets each February during the course of the OSCE PA Winter Meeting in Vienna, Austria, as well as in late June or early July during the Annual Session, which was held in Minsk, Belarus, in 2017, and will be held in Berlin, Germany, in 2018.

In between, three officers represent the committee at other gatherings and within the OSCE PA leadership. They may also make public statements on Human Dimension issues.

The current officers are:

Chair: Ignacio Sanchez Amor of Spain was elected Chair of the General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions at the 25th Annual Session in Tbilisi in July 2016, and was re-elected in 2017 at the 26th Annual Session in Minsk. Sanchez Amor is a member of the Spanish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and serves as Head of the Spanish Delegation to the OSCE PA. Since 2012, he has also been the OSCE PA's Special Representative on OSCE Border Issues. Sanchez Amor was previously vice president of the Association of European Border Regions. He also held a seat in the regional Assembly of Extremadura and served as Deputy President of the government of the region, which is on the Spain-Portugal border.

Vice-Chair: Ivana Dobesova of the Czech Republic was elected Vice-Chair of the Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions at the 2015 Annual Session in Helsinki and re-elected at the 2016 Annual Session in Tbilisi and at the 2017 Annual Session in Minsk. Dobesova serves as the Head of the Delegation of the Czech Republic to the OSCE PA and has been a member of her national parliament since 2013. Within the Czech Chamber of Deputies she is Vice-Chair of the Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Youth and Sports and a member of the Committee on Petitions and the Sub-Committee on Migration. Dobesova also serves as a substitute member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. She has been an active participant in OSCE PA election observation activities since joining the Assembly, participating in missions to countries including Hungary, Ukraine, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Turkey.

Rapporteur: Kyriakos Kyriakou-Hadjjiyanni of Cyprus was elected Rapporteur of the General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions at the 2016 Annual Session in Tbilisi and re-elected at the 2017 Annual Session in Minsk. He has been a Member of the House of Representatives of Cyprus since 2006, where he serves as Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Educational Affairs and Culture. He is also a Member of the Committee on Refugees-Enclaved-Missing-Adversely Affected Persons. He has previously served on his parliament's Committee on the Environment; the Committee on Energy, Trade, Industry, and Tourism; the Committee on Foreign and European Affairs; the Committee on Internal Affairs, and the Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources. He was also a member of the Economic and Social Committee of the European Union from 2003 to 2004.



From left: Vice-Chair Ivana Dobesova, Chair Ignacio Sanchez Amor, and Rapporteur Kyriakos Kyriakou-Hadjjiyanni. Credit: OSCE PA

About the Helsinki Commission

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent agency of the Federal Government charged with monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords and advancing comprehensive security through promotion of human rights, democracy, and economic, environmental and military cooperation in 57 countries. The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. Senate, nine from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce.

Learn more at www.csce.gov.

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¹ “Fact Sheet on the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly,” the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, accessed September 15, 2017, <https://www.oscepa.org/documents/factsheet/669-factsheet-english/file>.

² For more information on Co-Chairman Smith’s work as Special Representative, see <https://www.oscepa.org/about-osce-pa/special-representatives/human-trafficking-issues>. For additional details on Senator Cardin’s work as Special Representative, see <http://www.oscepa.org/about-osce-pa/special-representatives/anti-semitism>.