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Parliamentary Association



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OSCEPA

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Report of the Canadian Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

20th Winter Meeting

By Videoconference

From February 24-26, 2021

Report

From 24 to 26 February 2021, a delegation of eight Canadian parliamentarians attended the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly's (OSCE PA) 20th Winter Meeting held by videoconference. The delegation included:

- The Honourable Hedy Fry, P.C., M.P., head of the delegation;
- The Honourable Senator Robert Black;
- The Honourable Senator Tony Loffreda;
- The Honourable Senator Marilou McPhedran;
- The Honourable Senator Terry Mercer;
- The Honourable Senator Lucie Moncion;
- The Honourable Senator Vern White; and
- Mr. Ziad Aboultaif, M.P.

The delegation was assisted by Laura Munn-Rivard and Julia Nicol, Advisors with the Library of Parliament, and Céline Ethier, the Association's Secretary.

2021 OSCE PA WINTER MEETING

Parliamentarians from across the OSCE region, together with representatives of the "Partners for Cooperation" states, met virtually for the OSCE PA's 20th Winter Meeting.¹ The Winter Meeting included a meeting of the Standing Committee; a joint session of the three general committees,² as well as meetings of each of the OSCE PA's three General Committees: Political Affairs and Security; Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and the Environment; and Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions.

STANDING COMMITTEE

The meeting of the Standing Committee, which comprises the OSCE PA's heads of delegation and members of the Bureau, included introductory remarks by OSCE PA President Lord Peter Bowness (United Kingdom). Reports were presented by the OSCE PA's President, its Treasurer and its Secretary General, as well as by the Sub-Committee on the Rules of Procedure and Working Practices, the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism and the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration. In addition, OSCE PA Special Representatives – including the Honourable Hedy Fry, P.C., M.P., Special Representative on Gender Issues – delivered presentations about their work. Lastly, the Standing

¹ Some of the remarks and reports presented at the 20th Winter Meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) are available at: OSCE PA, [2021 Winter Meeting, Vienna/Online](#), 24-26 February 2021.

² During in-person meetings, there are normally two joint sessions, but only one joint session was held due to the online format.

Committee heard reports on preparations for future OSCE PA meetings in 2021 and beyond. It was confirmed that the 29th Annual Session in July 2021 will be either hybrid or entirely virtual. Amending the Rules of Procedure to allow for the election of PA officers if statutory meetings cannot take place, as happened in 2020, was also discussed.

A. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION:

As Head of Delegation, the **Honourable Hedy Fry, P.C., M.P.**, represented the Canadian delegation at the Standing Committee's meeting. **Senators Black, Loffreda, Mercer, McPhedran** and **Moncion** also attended.

In her capacity as the Special Representative on Gender Issues, Dr. Fry presented her ideas for the 2021 Gender Report to be debated at the OSCE PA's 2021 Annual Session. She began her remarks by acknowledging recent positive developments related to gender equality within the OSCE and its operations, including the OSCE's *Third Gender Equality Review Conference* in October 2020 and the *OSCE Secretary General's Special Progress Report on the Implementation of the 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality* released in July 2020. Dr. Fry also celebrated the nomination of women in key OSCE leadership positions, such as Helga Maria Schmid who is the OSCE's new Secretary General, and the first woman to hold this post. She welcomed Sweden as this year's OSCE Chairperson-in-office. Dr. Fry agreed with the Chairperson-in-office's priority of achieving comprehensive security throughout the region through meaningful inclusion and empowerment of women.

Dr. Fry then informed the delegates that her forthcoming report would focus on violence against women politicians and journalists.³ She stated that, across the OSCE region and beyond, both men and women politicians and journalists are at risk of violence, but women in these positions face additional danger simply on account of their gender. Dr. Fry explained that women politicians and journalists are exposed to misogynistic and sexualized abuse – particularly online harassment – targeting their appearance, intellect, personal relationships, and professional credentials. Furthermore, Dr. Fry reminded delegates that women politicians and journalists may face intersecting forms of discrimination directed at their gender alongside their race, religion, and other characteristics. As part of her closing call for action, Dr. Fry asked parliamentarians to champion policies and laws that recognize and address the harms caused by violence against women politicians and journalists.

JOINT SESSION OF THE THREE GENERAL COMMITTEES

OSCE PA President Lord Peter Bowness (United Kingdom) opened the Joint Session of the OSCE PA's three General Committees, acknowledging the challenges of meeting virtually due to the global pandemic. President of the Austrian National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka, welcomed delegates to the joint session. His remarks focused on the important role of young people in addressing global problems, and in particular, the need to address

³ OSCE PA, "[2021 Address to the Winter Meeting: Violence against women politicians and journalists](#)," Address by Dr. Hedy Fry, Special Representative on Gender Issues to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, 20th Winter Meeting of the OSCE PA, by videoconference, 24 February 2021.

young people's role in combating crime and terrorism. He also expressed serious concerns over the recent attacks on the Capitol Building in the United States.

OSCE PA President Lord Peter Bowness spoke again, acknowledging the resilience of national parliaments, the OSCE PA, and parliamentary democracy in facing the challenges of the pandemic. He recognized the challenges facing the OSCE, including several ongoing conflicts in the OSCE region, the leadership vacuum that has affected the OSCE recently, and incidents of post-election unrest in some participating States. He called for concrete parliamentary action in response to these challenges, including advocating for the OSCE and the participating States of the OSCE PA to actively engage with their governments on matters relevant to the effectiveness of the OSCE.

Sweden's Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE and Foreign Affairs Minister of Sweden, Ms. Ann Linde, outlined the priorities for 2021, including advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda, supporting the Open Skies Treaty, promoting the modernisation of the Vienna Document, encouraging discussions on the environment and gender equality, fighting corruption, and resolving conflicts in the OSCE region.

OSCE Secretary General, Ms. Helga Maria Schmid, also delivered remarks. She said the OSCE wants to improve its efforts at engaging parliamentarians. According to Ms. Schmid, the OSCE must be prepared for challenges that are anticipated (such as climate change) and unanticipated (such as the current global pandemic). Furthermore, Ms. Schmid welcomed the OSCE PA's timely and important Call for Action initiative, which calls for higher-level engagement and support for the OSCE.

A question and answer session followed these remarks, during which time delegates had the opportunity to pose questions to the presenters.

ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION:

The Joint Session of the OSCE PA's Three General Committees was attended by **Senators Black, Loffreda, Mercer, McPhedran, Moncion** and **Mr. Ziad Aboultaif, M.P.**

During the question and answer session, **Senator McPhedran** thanked Sweden's Chairperson-in-Office for making human security within the OSCE region and the Women, Peace and Security agenda priorities for 2021. She noted that the Swedish program recognizes that security is not only about relations between states, but that security depends on the relationship between a state and its citizens. Senator McPhedran highlighted a third aspect of security that has a huge impact on the security of women and girls: violence within the family and from other private citizens in their communities. To conclude, Senator McPhedran asked Sweden's Chairperson-in-Office what actions she plans to take in 2021 to address gender-based violence against women and girls, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic and associated public health restrictions.

Sweden's Chairperson-in-Office, Ms. Ann Linde, responded by urging OSCE participating States to live up to their commitments to gender equality. She highlighted the steps the Chairperson-in-office will be taking to advance gender equality, for instance: 1) the decision to focus this year's economic and environmental forum on women's economic empowerment; 2) the continued support of the special representative of the OSCE

Chairperson-in-Office on Gender; and 3) the follow up work on the OSCE's survey on gender violence.

Mr. Aboultaif, M.P., asked how the OSCE aims to protect the values of democracy and freedom while certain countries are challenging these values and norms at the international level. He also asked how the OSCE plans to facilitate international cooperation to update digital policies for the safety and security of the region.

In response, Sweden's Chairperson-in-Office said that the OSCE will continue to uphold democratic principles agreed to by participating States and will support the independent mandates and work of the three autonomous institutions.⁴ She also explained that the Swedish Chairpersonship will advance cyber security in a number of ways, including by hosting a conference on this subject in May 2021.

GENERAL COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL AFFAIRS AND SECURITY

Opening remarks were delivered by Mr. Richard Hudson (USA), Chairperson of the Committee. His remarks acknowledged the importance of women's participation in political affairs and security, and celebrated the recent appointment of a number of women to important OSCE roles.

Following these remarks, a presentation was delivered by Mr. Laurynas Kasčiūnas (Lithuania), Rapporteur of the Committee, on his plans for his report for the 29th Annual Session in July 2021. In particular, he raised concerns that, in some OSCE participating States, fundamental OSCE principles have been violated. He cited many examples, including military aggression against neighbouring countries, illegal annexation of territories, violations of human rights, and the repression of political opponents and the media.

The next presentation, by Ambassador Neil Bush, Chair of the Security Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the OSCE, focused on transnational crime in the OSCE region. In his remarks, Mr. Bush spoke of the social, situational, economic, and psychological drivers of this type of crime, and indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic is empowering transnational crime networks. Mr. Bush also indicated that his committee would be focusing on cyber security and the cyber skills gap.

Next, Ambassador Philip T. Reeker, Acting Assistant US Secretary of State, US Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Co-operation spoke. His remarks included a discussion of the importance of military to military dialogue and the value of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. He also called for an update of the Vienna Document.

Following these remarks, Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, delivered a presentation, where he highlighted the importance of de-politicizing issues related to the rights of minority populations and developing policies that promote integrated and cohesive societies.

⁴ The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Finally, Ambassador Yasar Halit Çevik, Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine provided an overview of: 1) the security situation and its impact on civilians in eastern Ukraine; 2) the dynamics and developments in the working group on security issues of the Trilateral Contact Group; and 3) the continued impediments to the mission's freedom of movement. He called on the parties involved not to miss the window of opportunity for establishing a sustainable ceasefire.

ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION:

The General Committee on Political Affairs and Security was attended by **Senators Black, Loffreda, Mercer, McPhedran, Moncion, and White**.

Senator McPhedran intervened during the general debate period. She spoke of the importance of integrating the Women, Peace and Security agenda with the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. She reminded colleagues that it is critical to have a range of voices reflecting a diversity of life experiences when making decisions on peace and security. Senator McPhedran recommended using the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons as a model for the peace and security agenda, because that campaign incorporated civil society actors from all different backgrounds.

GENERAL COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Doris Barnett, Chair of the Committee, opened the session. She spoke of the health crisis of air pollution and the negative impact of the pandemic on populations already suffering from breathing difficulties due to pollution, stating that they are the populations most at risk of hospitalization or death due to COVID-19. She called for the collaboration of the global community in rolling out the vaccine and establishing a post-pandemic green recovery.

Next, Ms. Elona Hoxha, Rapporteur of the Committee, elaborated on her plans for this year's report. She described the pivotal role of parliaments in forging a post COVID-19 world order, which will have to balance development with protection of the environment. She called on parliamentarians to work together to prevent a worldwide long-term economic depression and to ensure that recovery efforts are inclusive. As well, Ms. Hoxha spoke on the importance of anti-corruption efforts, the value of women's economic empowerment, and the need to invest in science and technology.

Following these remarks, a presentation was delivered by Ambassador Florian Raunig, Chairperson of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Committee, Permanent Representative of Austria to the OSCE. Mr. Raunig spoke on the value of the economic empowerment of women and the need to combat corruption in OSCE participating States.

Lastly, Ambassador Vuk Žugić, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, delivered remarks which highlighted the economic and environmental challenges that impact security in the OSCE region. He also stated that gender and youth perspectives must be incorporated in the OSCE's work and that countries' economic recovery efforts be inclusive.

ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION:

The General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment was attended by **Dr. Fry and Senators Black, Loffreda, Mercer, McPhedran, and Moncion.**

Dr. Fry intervened during the general debate. She called on parliamentarians to take action to address the major challenges facing the world, like climate change, food insecurity, and this current pandemic. In her remarks, Dr. Fry described how women have been hardest hit by COVID-19. She stated that, following this pandemic, countries must be ready to build a new, fairer economy and argued that recovery plans must focus on providing opportunities to women and youth, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematic fields.

Senator McPhedran also intervened during the general debate. In her remarks, she spoke about the worsening economic marginalization of vulnerable groups in many societies due to the pandemic and called for recovery plans to focus on youth and women. As an example, she mentioned Canada's recovery efforts, which most recently included investments to counter gender-based violence.

GENERAL COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

Opening remarks were delivered by Mr. Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus), Chair of the Committee, who spoke of the importance of upholding human rights and maintaining democratic control during states of emergency. He acknowledged efforts over the past year by the OSCE to speak out strategically in support of human rights during these challenging times.

Next, Ms. Kari Henriksen (Norway), OSCE PA Vice-President and Rapporteur of the Committee, spoke about her ideas and intentions regarding her report for the 29th Annual Session in July 2021. She indicated that her report would examine: 1) the unique and dangerous situation of migrant women and children, particularly during the global pandemic; 2) effective healthcare as a human right; 3) solutions to address conflicts that lead to humanitarian crises; and 4) the negative impact of the pandemic on human rights, including on freedom of the media.

Following this presentation, Ambassador Anne-Kirsti Karlsen, Chairperson of the Human Dimension Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Norway to the OSCE, delivered her remarks. Ms. Karlsen said that committee's work will focus on human rights and the OSCE's concept of comprehensive security, with a particular focus on examining why a human dimension to security policy is needed and how human rights and democracy relate to security in a broader sense.

After these remarks, a presentation was delivered by Mr. Matteo Mecacci, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Mr. Mecacci celebrated the work of his office, stating that ODIHR was the first international institution to resume election observation during the pandemic. He said his office had been examining whether emergency measures across OSCE participating States had a negative impact on human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the function of democratic institutions.

Following this presentation, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, delivered her remarks. She stated that the global pandemic had become a crisis for freedom of the media. Her office found widespread misinformation and disinformation online, sometimes spread by state actors for their own political purposes, which at times led to distrust of the media. She called on countries to respect well-established, independent media institutions and to commit to supporting the delivery of fact-based, reliable and transparent information to their people.

Following this presentation, parliamentarians who led the missions delivered reports on the OSCE PA election observation missions in the following countries: Montenegro (30 August 2020), Georgia (31 October 2020), the United States of America (3 November 2020), Kazakhstan (10 January 2021), and Kyrgyzstan (10 January 2021).

ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION:

The General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions was attended by **Dr. Fry and Senators Black, Mercer, McPhedran, Loffreda, and Moncion.**

Senator Loffreda intervened during the general debate. He stated that parliaments must ensure that public health responses consider the needs of all segments of the population and that emergency government powers are subject to parliamentary oversight. He spoke of the important work of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, and its efforts to examine government expenses, particularly during the recent pandemic. Lastly, Senator Loffreda stated that the process of examining national finances is key to accountability and transparency and encouraged all parliamentarians to support their national finance committees.

Dr. Fry also intervened during the general debate. She stated that COVID-19 had exposed many existing vulnerabilities in our societies and institutions. She reminded parliamentarians that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on some population groups; for instance, racism against Chinese people has increased dramatically in Canada. She spoke out against some countries that have used COVID-19, and related public health measures, to repress populations and deny human rights. In concluding, Dr. Fry called on parliamentarians to build resilient societies that are prepared for the next pandemic.

During **Senator McPhedran's** intervention in the general debate, she stated that voting is a democratic right and examined strategies to keep people safe while voting during a pandemic. In particular, she recommended applying an intersectional analysis to any changes made to the voting process in order to ensure that there are no barriers to voting and to guarantee the integrity of the vote. As examples, signage can be provided in braille or written in Indigenous languages to increase access for these populations. Lastly, she spoke of the importance of voting at a young age, and recommended lowering the voting age to 16 years, pointing to a bill she introduced in the Senate as an example.

Respectfully submitted,

The Hon. Hedy Fry, P.C., M.P.
Director, Canadian Delegation to the OSCE PA

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA)
ACTIVITY	20 th Winter Meeting
DESTINATION	Videoconference
DATES	From February 24 to 26, 2021
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Vern White Hon. Tony Loffreda Hon. Marilou McPhedran Hon. Terry Mercer Hon. Lucie Moncion Hon. Vern White
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Hon. Hedy Fry Mr. Ziad Abouttaif
STAFF	Ms. Céline Éthier Ms. Laura Munn-Rivard Ms. Julia Nicol
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 0.00
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 0.00
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 0.00
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 0.00
TOTAL	\$ 0.00