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Parliamentary Association



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Report of the Canadian Delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE)

23rd Winter Meeting

Vienna, Austria

From February 22 to 23, 2024

Report

From 22 to 23 February to 2024, a delegation of six Canadian parliamentarians participated in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly's (OSCE PA) 23rd Winter Meeting, which was held in Vienna, Austria. The delegation comprised:

- The Honourable Dr. Hedy Fry, P.C., M.P., head of delegation;
- The Honourable Senator Peter Boehm;
- The Honourable Senator David Wells;
- Mr. Charlie Angus, M.P.;
- Mr. Luc Berthold, M.P.;
- Ms. Christine Normandin, M.P.

Prior to the Winter Meeting, Dr. Fry, in her capacity as OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues, hosted a meeting with Hungarian non-governmental organizations on 20 February 2024, in Budapest, Hungary.

The delegation was assisted by Anne-Marie Therrien-Tremblay, Advisor, and Matthieu Boulianne, the Association's Secretary.

2024 OSCE PA WINTER MEETING

More than 230 parliamentarians from 54 OSCE participating States met in Vienna, Austria, for the OSCE PA's 23rd Winter Meeting. The Winter Meeting included a meeting of the Standing Committee, meetings of each of the three General Committees: Political Affairs and Security; Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and the Environment; and Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, as well as two joint sessions of the three General Committees. There was also a meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration.¹

As well, the Canadian delegation participated in various side events and bilateral meetings over the course of the Winter Meeting.

STANDING COMMITTEE

A. OVERVIEW

The Standing Committee – which comprises the OSCE PA's heads of delegation, the assembly's President, Vice-Presidents and Treasurer, as well as the officers of each General Committee – met on 23 February 2024. The meeting was opened by OSCE PA President, Ms. Pia Kauma (Finland), who then delivered her report outlining the recent activities of the OSCE PA.² Among other activities, she highlighted recent meetings of the OSCE PA Bureau, and a visit to Kyiv, Ukraine, by the OSCE PA Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine.

¹ The Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism and the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine also met during the 23rd Winter Meeting, but no Canadian delegates attended these meetings.

² For access to selected reports and remarks presented at the 23rd Winter Meeting of the OSCE PA see: OSCE PA, [Documents, 2024 Vienna](#).

The OSCE PA Treasurer, Mr. Johan Büser (Sweden), presented his report and the integrated financial and performance audit report of the OSCE PA for the 2022–2023 financial year. In highlighting some of the findings of the financial and performance audit report, Mr. Büser noted the strong financial management and cost efficiency of the OSCE PA. However, he also pointed out that the financial and performance audit report showed that the OSCE PA’s expenditures had surpassed its income for the 2022–2023 financial year, primarily because of the absence of the Russia’s contribution, which normally represents 6% of the OSCE PA’s total annual budget. Mr. Büser indicated that budget cuts and structural reforms would be considered when preparing the 2024–2025 budget.³

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella then presented his report on the activities of the International Secretariat for the November 2023 to February 2024 period. These activities included the support of election observation missions in Serbia and Azerbaijan, and the OSCE PA President’s visit to Ukraine with the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine. In addition, Mr. Pascal Allizard (France), Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on the Rules of Procedure, delivered its report. Mr. Allizard noted that the Sub-Committee is studying proposed amendments to the OSCE PA Rules of Procedure relating to Standing Committee voting rules and the mandate of the OSCE PA President.

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Senator Boehm represented the Canadian delegation at the Standing Committee on behalf of Dr. Fry.

OPENING JOINT SESSION OF THE THREE GENERAL COMMITTEES

A. OVERVIEW

During the opening Joint Session of the three General Committees held on 22 February 2024, members of the OSCE PA heard from President Kauma, the President of the Austrian National Council, Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of Malta, Mr. Ian Borg, and the Secretary General of the OSCE, Ms. Helga Maria Schmid. The presentations largely focused on Russia’s war in Ukraine and the importance of overcoming the institutional challenges facing the OSCE. President Kauma raised the issue of Russia’s decision to suspend its participation in OSCE PA activities, which was communicated to the OSCE PA leadership prior to the Winter Meeting. She stressed that Russia is still required to fulfil its obligations as an OSCE participating State and a member of the OSCE PA.

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

All members of the Canadian delegation attended the opening joint session of the three General Committees. During a question-and-answer session, **Senator Boehm** asked a question to the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Mr. Borg, relating to the OSCE’s approach to Russia. Senator Boehm noted that the OSCE had adopted a “no business as usual” approach, in an attempt to isolate Russia in the OSCE in the context of its ongoing aggression against Ukraine.

GENERAL COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL AFFAIRS AND SECURITY

³ The OSCE PA’s 2024–2025 budget was adopted at the 31st Annual Session in Bucharest, Romania.

A. OVERVIEW

The meeting of the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security was held on 22 February 2024. In the absence of the Chair of the committee, Mr. Richard Hudson (United States), the meeting was opened by the Rapporteur of the committee, Mr. Laurynas Kasciunas (Lithuania). Mr. Kasciunas noted that a copy of the Chair's remarks had been made available to members of the committee.

In his capacity as Rapporteur of the committee, Mr. Kasciunas then outlined ideas for the committee's report to be presented at the 31st Annual Session in Bucharest. His presentation focused heavily on how the OSCE could play a more effective role in restoring peace in Ukraine while ensuring full respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. Noting that the timing of the Winter Meeting marked two years since the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, he stressed the importance of increasing the OSCE's presence in Ukraine, including thought frequents visits by OSCE and OSCE PA leadership.

Next, members of the OSCE leadership delivered presentations. The Chairperson of the Security Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the OSCE, Ambassador Peter Burian, focused his remarks on the multifaceted implications of Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine for the OSCE region and the world. He underlined that, despite facing challenges, the OSCE and its institutions have remained functional and continue to hold Russia to account. As well, Ambassador Burian underscored that Russia's war in Ukraine overlaps with and exacerbates other security challenges – such as the polarization of society, the spread of disinformation, and the emergence of new trends in transnational crime – and noted the importance of strengthening the capacity of the OSCE community to understand and address these security challenges.

The Chairperson of the Forum for Security Co-operation and Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the OSCE, Ambassador Andreas Ignatiou, spoke about the “security dialogues” organized under Cyprus's chairpersonship of the Forum for Security Co-operation, which is the OSCE's forum for politico-military dialogue among participating States.⁴ The themes of the four security dialogues organized by Cyprus are: humanitarian mine action with a focus on victim assistance; human security in armed conflict with a focus on gender-based violence; security and the environment; and the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the integration of the gender perspective in the fulfilment of OSCE's politico-military commitments and activities. Ambassador Ignatiou also noted that a gender perspective was included in discussions for each security dialogue.

In his presentation Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), spoke about his mandate to monitor and respond to signs of rising tensions relating to national minority issues. For example, he noted his office's continued work in Ukraine to build the country's capacity to address minority issues. As well, Ambassador Abdrakhmanov drew attention to the HCNM's thematic recommendations and guidelines, indicating that, in October 2023, his office published its most recent collection of recommendations on the theme of “Effective Participation of

⁴ OSCE, [Forum for Security Co-operation](#).

National Minorities in Social and Economic Life.”⁵ He also noted a recommendation made by the OSCE PA in its 2023 Vancouver Declaration, which “reiterates previous OSCE commitments to protect and promote the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities.”⁶

The presentation by the Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, Ms. Catherine Fearon, focused on the work of the Conflict Prevention Centre in monitoring developments in the OSCE region and supporting the OSCE field operations and activities, which offer valuable opportunities for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. For instance, Ms. Fearon indicated that, among the field operations and activities it supports, the Conflict Prevention Centre manages the OSCE Secretariat Extra-budgetary Support Programme for Ukraine (SPU), which is the OSCE’s main presence in Ukraine.

The presentations were followed by an open debate on the theme of “OSCE work in Ukraine during Russia’s War of Aggression.” To launch the debate, the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office – Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, Mr. Marcel Pesko, addressed the committee by videoconference. Mr. Pesko was appointed to coordinate the Extra-budgetary SPU in Ukraine and lead dialogue with relevant stakeholders on the ground.⁷ In his remarks, Mr. Pesko stressed that the continued presence of the OSCE in Ukraine, through the Extra-budgetary SPU, enables the OSCE to contribute to strengthening the country’s resilience in the face of military aggression.

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Dr. Fry took the floor during the open debate on the “OSCE work in Ukraine during Russia’s War of Aggression.” She focused her remarks on Canada’s financial, military, humanitarian, development, security and stabilization and immigration assistance to Ukraine.

She highlighted the visit of Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs to Kyiv in February 2024, where she launched the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children. The coalition a joint initiative headed by Canada and Ukraine – and supported by several other OSCE participating States – to help address the issue of the unlawful deportation and forced transfer of Ukrainian children by the Russian government. Dr. Fry also drew attention to the importance of the full implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the OSCE region.

During the same debate, **Mr. Berthold** encouraged OSCE parliamentarians to maintain their support for Ukraine. Taking stock of the assistance provided by OSCE participating States since the beginning of Russia’s war in Ukraine in February 2022, Mr. Berthold asked OSCE PA parliamentarians to encourage their respective governments to respect their commitments to support Ukraine’s victory and to restore peace in Ukraine while ensuring full respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also stressed the importance of maintaining strong and constant pressure on Russia.

⁵ OSCE, [Thematic Recommendations and Guidelines](#).

⁶ OSCE PA, [Vancouver Declaration and Resolutions Adopted by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at the Thirtieth Annual Session](#), 2023.

⁷ OSCE, [OSCE Secretariat Extra-Budgetary Support Programme for Ukraine](#).

GENERAL COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

A. OVERVIEW

The meeting of the General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment took place on 22 February 2024. In delivering opening remarks, the Chair of the committee, Mr. Azay Guliyev (Azerbaijan), drew attention to security challenges facing the OSCE region, including climate change and the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI). Noting the potential security risks associated with AI, Mr. Guliyev welcomed the work of the OSCE PA on the issue, including through the Lisbon Conference of the OSCE PA on Security in the Age of Artificial Intelligence, taking place on 20 May 2024 in Lisbon, Portugal.

The Rapporteur of the General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment, Ms. Gudrun Kugler (Austria), presented some of the topics that will be examined in the committee's report to be presented at the 31st Annual Session. These topics included accountability for potential environmental war crimes, in particular relating to Russia's war in Ukraine; the development of a legally binding treaty on the use of AI, including measures to regulate AI-guided autonomous weapon systems and AI-generated misinformation; and human trafficking and the misuse of technology to enable human trafficking.

The Chairperson of the OSCE's Economic and Environmental Committee, Ambassador Florian Raunig, spoke about the ongoing and future work of the committee. Among other topics, Ambassador Raunig noted the committee's work on developing the digital skills of youth and women; combating corruption; enhancing food security; and improving climate change resilience and disaster management. He also noted that many of these topics have increased in importance in recent years, particularly in the context of Russia's war on Ukraine.

The Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Ambassador Bakyt Dzhusupov, then provided an overview of his office's priorities for 2024. Among other priorities, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities will continue to support OSCE participating States in their efforts to implement OSCE commitments in several areas, including corruption and money laundering; trade and transport facilitation; disaster risk reduction; management of hazardous waste and chemicals; energy security; and climate change.

The next part of the meeting focused on the theme of "Artificial Intelligence: A Technological Breakthrough with Security Implications," and began with presentations from experts. Mr. Nikolas Ott, Senior Manager of Government Affairs at Microsoft, spoke about the potential economic opportunities AI offers its impacts on the labour market and AI governance. Dr. Jean-Marc Rickli, Head of Global and Emerging Risks at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy – an international foundation based in Geneva, Switzerland – focused his presentation on the security implications of AI. He drew attention to the use of AI for espionage and surveillance, as well as to security risks posed by the rapid development of generative AI, which includes the use of "deep fakes." Dr. Isabell Claus, Co-founder and Managing Director of Thinkers.ai – a tech company based in Vienna, Austria – also focused her presentation on the security risks of AI. In particular, she

suggested that states are not adequately prepared or equipped to face threats posed by generative AI and encouraged countries to learn from the international community's response to AI-enabled disinformation in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine. An open debate followed the presentations.

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Senator Wells took the floor during the open debate on “Artificial Intelligence: A Technological Breakthrough with Security Implications.” He underlined that, while the emergence of AI technologies in everyday applications – such as Internet search engines, image and text generators and healthcare solutions – has shown the wide range of possibilities AI offers, it has also raised concerns. In particular, he noted concerns regarding the use of AI in defence and security, highlighting the development of autonomous weapons, cyber capabilities and the integration of AI into combat systems.

GENERAL COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

A. OVERVIEW

The meeting of the General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, held on 22 February 2024, was opened by the Chair of the committee, Lucie Potůčková (Czech Republic). In her opening remarks, Ms. Potůčková expressed concerns about the erosion of democratic standards and institutions in some parts of the OSCE region. She then provided an overview of her recent participation in OSCE activities, including the 2023 OSCE Warsaw Human Dimension Conference.

Mr. Malik Ben Achour (Belgium), Rapporteur of the committee, then provided an overview of his plans for his report to be presented at the 31st Annual Session in Bucharest. He explained that the report would focus on the ongoing humanitarian situation in Ukraine and human rights violation in the context of the war. Mr. Ben Achour identified other issues to be explored in the report, such as the rights of migrants and displaced individuals, including in the context of conflicts in the OSCE region; the safety of journalists and political dissidents; accountability for human rights abuses committed by law enforcement forces; and the humanitarian impacts of the situation in the Middle East.

Following these remarks, the committee heard from members of the OSCE leadership. Mr. Matteo Mecacci, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), expressed concerns about increasing pressures on human rights defenders, and discussed ODIHR's work to better monitor and address the persecution they face in some areas of the OSCE region. Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, Representative on Freedom of the Media, spoke about the treatment of journalists and independent media in parts of the OSCE region, citing evidence of threats, intimidation and violence against journalists. Ms. Ribeiro provided an overview of her office's work, through the project on the Safety of Journalists,⁸ to promote the protection of the right to freedom of expression across the OSCE region. Next, Ambassador Anne-Marie Callan, Chairperson of the Human Dimension Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Ireland to the OSCE, said that the situation in Ukraine will remain the focus of the OSCE's Human Dimension Committee's work in 2024. As well, she spoke

⁸ OSCE, [Safety of Journalists](#).

about the committee's work on political dissidents, drawing attention to cases of forced exile, arbitrary detention, intimidation, and threats facing human rights defenders.

The special debate on "Political Dissidents and Political Prisoners" was introduced by Belarusian opposition leader Ms. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who urged the OSCE PA and the international community to demand the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Belarus, and to support a democratic Belarus. During the special debate, several delegates underlined the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny on 16 February 2024. A moment of silence was observed in his memory.

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Members of the Canadian delegation attended the meeting of the General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions.

CLOSING JOINT SESSION OF THE THREE GENERAL COMMITTEES

A. OVERVIEW

On 23 February 2024, President Kauma opened the closing Joint Session of the three General Committees. The closing Joint Session featured reports by Chairs or Vice-Chairs of OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committees and working groups: Ms. Daniela De Ridder (Germany), Chair of the ad Hoc Committee on Migration; Mr. Kamil Aydın (Türkiye), Vice-Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism; President Kauma (Finland), Chair of the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine. Artur Gerasymov (Ukraine) took the floor to express his appreciation for the work of the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine.

Heads of OSCE PA Election observation missions spoke about recent missions in which the OSCE PA had participated. Ms. Farah Karimi (Netherlands) reported on the mission to Serbia for the December 2023 early parliamentary election, and Mr. Gerasymov (Ukraine) reported on the mission to Azerbaijan for the February 2024 early presidential election.

These reports were followed by a general debate on the subject of "European Security Today and Tomorrow: Parliamentary Perspectives on the Future of the OSCE."

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Ms. Normandin took the floor during the general debate on the subject of "European Security Today and Tomorrow: Parliamentary Perspectives on the Future of the OSCE." She focused her remarks on the sanctions imposed by several OSCE participating States in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Noting that various techniques are being used to circumvent these sanctions, she encouraged OSCE participating States to maintain severe sanctions against Russia in the long term and to take measures to prevent sanctions evasion.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

A. AD HOC COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

On 22 February 2024, **Dr. Fry** attended the meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration. Members of the Ad Hoc Committee listened to a presentation on "Combating trafficking in human beings in the context of mixed migration flows and the role of parliamentarians in combating trafficking" from Dr. Kari Johnstone, OSCE Special

Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. The Committee also reviewed its upcoming activities and the plans for its next meeting.

B. SIDE EVENTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

On 21 February 2024, immediately before the Winter Meeting began, Canadian delegates attended a briefing by Ms. Jocelyn Kinnear, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE. Ambassador Kinnear provided an overview of the OSCE, including its mandate and the challenges it faces, and spoke about Canada's role and priorities at the OSCE.

Canadian delegates attended the following side events over the course of the Winter Meeting:

- A side event on “The OSCE RFoM Safety of Journalists Toolbox – closing the implementation gap” co-organized by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media, Ms. Ribeiro, and the Chair of the OSCE PA General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, Ms. Potůčková (Czech Republic).
- A side event on “Enforcing the Sanctions against Russia” co-hosted by the delegations of Norway, the United States and Ukraine, in cooperation with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

As well, Canadian delegates participated in a bilateral meeting with delegates from the Delegation of Armenia to the OSCE PA.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE HONOURABLE DR. HEDY FRY, OSCE PA REPRESENTATIVE ON GENDER ISSUES

On 20 February 2024, in her capacity as OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues, **Dr. Fry** hosted a meeting with Hungarian civil society organizations in Budapest, Hungary. The objective of the meeting was to gain a better understanding of gender issues in the country and the role played by local civil society organizations in supporting the realization of gender equality. The discussions also provided broader insight into the relationship that exists between freedom and democracy and the independence of civil society. Findings relating to this activity were included in the 2024 annual report of the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues released at the 31st Annual Session in Bucharest.⁹

On 21 February 2024, **Dr. Fry** met with Dr. Lara Scarpitta, OSCE Senior Adviser on Gender Issues. They discussed the work of the OSCE and the OSCE PA in advancing gender equality, including the implementation of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality.¹⁰

On 22 February 2024, **Dr. Fry** met with Mr. Mecacci, Director of ODIHR. Their discussions focused on the work of ODIHR, including its election observation missions, as well as on the challenges relating to appointing new heads of OSCE institutions, or extending the

⁹ The Honourable Dr. Hedy Fry, OSCE PA, [Fostering Free and Inclusive Societies: The Role of Civil Society in Fostering Democratic and Inclusive Societies](#), Annual Report of the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues, 2024.

¹⁰ OSCE, [2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality](#), Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/04, 7 December 2004

mandates of those already in office. The three heads of OSCE institutions are the Director of ODIHR, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Dr. 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
ACTIVITY	23 rd Winter Meeting
DESTINATION	Vienna, Austria
DATES	From February 22 to 23, 2024
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Peter M. Boehm Hon. David Wells
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Hon. Dr. Hedy Fry Charlie Angus Luc Berthold Christine Normandin
STAFF	Matthieu Boulianne Anne-Marie Therrien-Tremblay
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 35,610.18
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 8,574.32
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 4,816.21
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 1,040.72
TOTAL	\$ 50,041.43