



Press Release

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28th Annual Session of the OSCE PA

Member of Parliament Frederick Azzopardi participated in the 2019 Annual Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE PA) between 4 and 8 July. Around 300 parliamentarians from the 57 OSCE participating states came together, in Luxembourg, to discuss the role of parliaments in advancing sustainable development to promote security. The 28th Annual Session comprised a meeting of the Standing Committee, three plenary meetings as well as four meetings of each of the three General Committees.

Opening the OSCE PA, Fernand Etgen, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg, noted that in times of climate change, energy issues and scarcity of natural resources, sustainable development has become a key factor to promote security. Recalling the Helsinki Final Act, OSCE PA President George Tsereteli called for enhancing the role of the United Nations in strengthening international peace and in promoting solutions to international problems, highlighting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Xavier Bettel, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, spoke about the rule of law as an essential European value, emphasizing the importance of human rights and the need for parliamentarians to promote respect for diversity. Congressman Steny Hoyer, US House Majority Leader and Founding Member of the OSCE PA, emphasized the need to strengthen multilateral institutions to protect democracy.

The three General Committees discussed the reports which underpinned the draft resolutions proposed by each committee and discussed 13 supplementary items that had been proposed by members of the parliamentary assembly. The topics of these ranged from the situation in Georgia and Ukraine, energy security, private military and security companies, foreign terrorist fighters, climate change, science and technology, human trafficking, neonatal care and religious freedom. Participating in the meetings of the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security, MP Azzopardi spoke of the challenges surrounding returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to their home countries and the need for countries to have systems in place for rehabilitating any returning FTFs, arguing that such structures must take into account the FTFs' own rhetoric and vision of themselves, their worldview and their role in community. During the meeting of the General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, MP Azzopardi spoke of the use of social media by human traffickers and the role of schools in educating children to protect themselves from human trafficking and to detect the signs that their students have fallen victims to trafficking. MP Azzopardi also highlighted the importance of the freedoms of belief, religion and expression, emphasizing that persons who embrace minority faiths share these same rights and should not be persecuted or shamed for exercising these rights.

A further three supplementary items were discussed during the Plenary Sessions, on the themes of dignified and sustainable migrant returns, corruption and the role of civil society in achieving the OSCE's aims. Speaking on migration, MP Azzopardi underlined the need for host countries to provide reintegration assistance to migrants returning to their home countries, claiming that this is key to ensuring the sustainability of returns. He also recalled parliamentarians' role in supporting countries with significant emigration to develop adequate policies and structures which address the specific needs of their nationals once they return. MP Azzopardi also spoke on corruption, claiming that its effects permeates the entire democratic system, undermining good governance, the rule of law and human rights, while endangering the stability and validity of democratic institutions. He called for trans-party and multi-lateral cooperation on the anti-corruption agenda.

During the Closing Plenary Sessions on 7 and 8 July, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajcak said that the OSCE can uniquely contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing the role of Parliamentarians as the link between the OSCE and the people it serves, informing and inspiring the work of the Organization. Urging greater momentum on the sustainable development agenda, OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger reminded Parliamentarians of their ability to contribute by passing laws, allocating financial resources and holding governments to account, as well as by raising awareness and exercising leadership. The Secretary General highlighted the crisis in and around Ukraine, cyber security and climate change as priorities for the OSCE. PACE President Liliane Maury Pasquier discussed issues of common concern between the OSCE and Council of Europe and their role in promoting international norms and sustainable development. MP Azzopardi highlighted the trans-boundary nature of security challenges, which thus require not only well-functioning national parliaments but also international cooperation, since the systematic imperfections of one country may result in severe repercussions in other countries. Arguing that security was a multi-stakeholder issue, MP Azzopardi called for the establishment of an international code of conduct for business transactions.

The annual session also included the election of a number of officers of the OSCE PA. During the Standing Committee meeting, on 4 July, heads of delegations voted for the reappointment of incumbent Secretary General Roberto Montella for a second five-year term in office. On 7 July the Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Rapporteurs of the three General Committees were appointed. On 8 July OSCE PA President George Tsereteli was re-elected for another one-year term. MP Azzopardi personally congratulated the newly-elected officers.

MP Azzopardi also participated in three side events organised in the margins of the 28th Annual Session. These included a commemoration of the centenary of Georgian Parliamentarianism, organised by the Head of the Georgian delegation, Ms Sofio Katsarava; a working lunch on improving gender equality in areas affected by conflict, in migration and in STEM education, organised by the OSCE PA Special Representative on gender issues and Head of the delegation of Canada, Dr Hedy Fry; and a seminar on educating children to avoid becoming victimised by human traffickers, organised by the OSCE PA Special Representative on human trafficking issues Congressman Chris Smith and OSCE PA Vice-President and head of the delegation of the USA, Senator Roger Wicker.

At the end of the Annual Session, the assembly adopted the Luxembourg Declaration, comprising 18 resolutions, which will be presented to the Ministerial Council of the OSCE in December.

The next meeting of the OSCE PA will take place in Marrakech, Morocco, on 4-6 October 2019.