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APOSCE

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

24th Winter Meeting

Vienna, Austria

February 20 and 21, 2025

Report

- The Honourable Dr. Hedy Fry, P.C., M.P., head of delegation;
- The Honourable Senator Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia;
- The Honourable Senator David Wells;
- Ms. Rachel Blaney, M.P.; and
- Ms. Marilène Gill, M.P.

Prior to the Winter Meeting, Dr. Fry, in her capacity as OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues, hosted a meeting with Slovak non-governmental organizations on February 18, 2025, in Bratislava, Slovakia.

The delegation was assisted by Grégoire Gayard, Advisor.

2025 OSCE PA WINTER MEETING

More than 220 parliamentarians from across the OSCE region met in Vienna, Austria, for the OSCE PA's 24th 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 OSCE PA heads of delegation, the Assembly's President, Vice-Presidents and Treasurer, as well as the officers of each General Committee – met on February 21, 2025. The meeting was opened by OSCE PA President, Ms. Pia Kauma (Finland), who delivered her report outlining the recent activities of the OSCE PA.² Among other activities, she highlighted a recent visit to Kyiv, Ukraine, by members of the OSCE PA Bureau and OSCE PA Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine. Following this presentation, Special Co-ordinators of the OSCE PA election observations missions to Moldova, Georgia, Uzbekistan and the United States presented their respective reports relating to missions held in fall 2024.

The OSCE PA Treasurer, Mr. Johan Büser (Sweden), presented his report, as well as the results of Deloitte's integrated financial and performance audit report of the OSCE PA,

¹ The Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism also met during the 24th Winter Meeting, but no Canadian delegates attended this meeting.

² For access to selected reports and remarks presented at the 24th Winter Meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly's (OSCE PA) see: OSCE PA, [Documents](#), 2025 Vienna.

for the 2023–2024 financial year. Mr. Büser noted that for the second consecutive year, Russia did not pay its annual contribution, which normally represents 6% of the OSCE PA's total annual budget. However, he explained, due to extrabudgetary contributions and the implementation of cost efficiency measures, the OSCE PA ended the 2023–2024 financial year with a surplus of €20,000. Regarding the budget proposal for the 2025–2026 financial year, which is due to be adopted at the 32nd Annual Session in Porto, Portugal, Mr. Büser indicated that the first priority is to ensure funding for the Assembly's political goals and activities, including the statutory meetings and other commitments such as the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine and Ad Hoc committees.

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella then presented his report on the activities of the International Secretariat for the November 2024 to February 2025 period. Mr. Montella also talked about ways to develop follow-up activities related to election observation missions and emphasized the importance of strengthening the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). In addition, Mr. Pascal Allizard (France), Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on the Rules of Procedure, delivered his report and noted that the Sub-Committee is not scheduled to meet until the 32nd Annual Session.

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Dr. Fry represented the Canadian delegation at the Standing Committee.

OPENING JOINT SESSION OF THE THREE GENERAL COMMITTEES

A. OVERVIEW

On February 20, 2025, during the opening Joint Session of the three General Committees, delegates heard from President Kauma; the President of the Austrian National Council, Mr. Walter Rosenkranz; the Secretary General of the OSCE, Mr. Feridun Sinirlioğlu; and the Permanent Representative of Finland to the OSCE, Ambassador Vesa Häkkinen, who spoke on behalf of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office. The presentations largely focused on security in the OSCE region in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine and other geopolitical challenges. President Kauma reflected on the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and underscored the importance of the OSCE and the OSCE PA in the face of challenges to stability such as cyberattacks, critical infrastructure vulnerabilities, the weaponization of migration, artificial intelligence, and climate change.

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Members of the Canadian delegation attended the opening joint session of the three General Committees. During a question-and-answer session, **Dr. Fry** asked Ambassador Häkkinen, about the OSCE chairpersonship's approach to fostering dialogue between participating States during a time of conflict and heightened tensions within the OSCE region.

GENERAL COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL AFFAIRS AND SECURITY

The meeting of the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security was held on February 20, 2025. The meeting was opened by the Vice-Chair of the committee, Mr. Costel Neculai Dunava (Romania). He emphasized the importance of enhanced cooperation between the parliamentary and the intergovernmental dimensions of the OSCE. He also mentioned on-going institutional challenges within the OSCE, including a lack of consensus on the annual budget and difficulties in appointing individuals to leadership positions. Regarding Russia's war in Ukraine, he insisted that any negotiations about Ukraine's future must involve Ukraine and must respect its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Finally, the Vice-Chair noted that 2025 marks the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and urged participants to view this milestone as an opportunity to reaffirm the OSCE's commitment to the Helsinki principles.

The committee's Rapporteur, Mr. Tobias Winkler (Germany), presented his plans for his report for the 32nd Annual Session in Porto. He asserted that 50 years after the Helsinki Final Act, the spirit of Helsinki is under attack, and stated that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine must remain at the forefront of the OSCE PA's agenda until the war ends and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity are fully restored. His presentation also addressed nuclear security and the protection of critical infrastructure in the OSCE region.

Next, the committee heard presentations from members of the OSCE leadership. The Chairperson of the Security Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the OSCE, Ambassador Neil Holland, focused his remarks on various threats faced across the OSCE region, such as hybrid warfare, organized crime, and terrorism and violent extremism. He emphasized that, while emerging technologies can enable these threats, they may also be harnessed to enhance security. Ambassador Holland also noted the important role that the Security Committee can play in helping to understand these threats and share best practices.

The Chairperson of the Forum for Security Co-operation and Permanent Representative of Spain to the OSCE, Ambassador Cristóbal Ramón Valdés, emphasized the importance of the OSCE's founding principles and encouraged efforts to reinforce a comprehensive, rule-based security framework that upholds international law.

The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Christophe Kamp, stressed that dialogue with parliamentarians was essential to his office's efforts to assist participating States in developing and implementing policies and legislative frameworks that foster cohesive, stable and resilient societies. He said that promoting policies that facilitate integration was one of the most effective strategies to prevent conflict in diverse societies. Ambassador Kamp also mentioned that his work prioritizes the rights of girls and women from national minority communities, and promotes the women, peace and security agenda.

The Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, Ms. Catherine Fearon, highlighted the breadth and depth of the work done by the Conflict Prevention Centre through its programs and support for OSCE field operations across the region. Among other examples, she noted that the Centre manages the OSCE Secretariat Support Programme for Ukraine and supports the Forum for Security Co-operation. Ms. Fearon also mentioned that the Conflict Prevention Centre has an early warning focal point network, to identify emerging tensions or conflicts across the OSCE region.

These presentations were followed by a special debate on the theme of “Nuclear Security, Escalation Risks, and the Protection of Critical Infrastructure in Times of Conflict.” The special debate was opened by Ambassador Tibor Tóth, Executive Secretary Emeritus of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization. In his remarks, Mr. Tóth observed that society is currently undergoing a transition from one technological era to the next. This transition period, he argued, is complicated by climate change, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), and the existence of nuclear weapons. Mr. Tóth expressed the view that international collaboration through the creation of an interparliamentary panel could help countries to navigate this transition more smoothly.

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Dr. Fry took the floor during the special debate on “Nuclear Security, Escalation Risks, and the Protection of Critical Infrastructure in Times of Conflict.” She focused her remarks on the risk of nuclear war and the need for concrete efforts to prevent it. She noted that the 2023 Vancouver Declaration encouraged “all OSCE participating States to redouble international efforts to achieve the global elimination of nuclear weapons within a timebound framework, including by negotiating a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention or framework of agreements.”³

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 February 20, 2025. In his opening remarks, the Chair of the committee, Mr. Azay Guliyev (Azerbaijan), drew attention to the economic and environmental consequences of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. He stated that, in the context of the disruptions to global supply chains caused by the war, the Middle Corridor linking Europe and Asia through the South Caucasus and Central Asia constitutes a strategic imperative for energy security, trade diversification and regional stability. Mr. Guliyev also highlighted the New Collective Quantified Goal for climate finance that was agreed upon during the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29), which was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in late 2024.

The Rapporteur of the General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment, Ms. Paula Cardoso (Portugal), presented some of the topics that will be examined in the committee’s upcoming Annual Session report. The report will focus on three main areas: climate change and migration, energy security, and economic development. She also spoke about the continued relevance of the Helsinki principles, 50 years after the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act.

³ OSCE PA, [Vancouver Declaration and Resolutions Adopted by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at the Thirtieth Annual Session](#), 2023.

The Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Ambassador Bakyt Dzhusupov, then provided an overview of his office's priorities for 2025. Among other priorities, Ambassador Dzhusupov said that his office was focused on fighting corruption and money laundering; connectivity; environmental cooperation and energy security. In his speech, he highlighted the OSCE extra-budgetary project on mitigating climate change threats to critical energy infrastructure, as well as the OSCE flagship project on climate and security in Southeastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Ms. Nataša Zajec Herceg (Slovenia), Minister Plenipotentiary and Deputy Head of the Slovenian Delegation, spoke on behalf of Ambassador Melita Župevc, Chairperson of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Committee. She said the priorities of the Economic and Environmental Committee for 2025 are aligned with the Finnish Chairpersonship's objectives. Among other areas, the committee's work will focus on the water-food-energy nexus, sustainable economic growth and good governance, and the concept of smart and resilient cities in the context of enhancing security.

The next part of the meeting focused on the theme of "Climate Migration in the OSCE Region," and began with three presentations. Professor Patrick Sakdapolrak, Professor of Population Geography & Demography at the University of Vienna and Research Scholar in the World Population Program at the International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis, spoke about climate migration, with a focus on understanding the crisis and shaping the response. He stressed the importance of putting the emphasis on human security to acknowledge the special vulnerabilities of migrants, and the need to recognize the potential of migration to enhance resilience to climate change at the national level. Mr. Pere Pons (Spain), Vice-President of the OSCE PA and Special Representative on Climate Change, focused his presentation on the role of the OSCE PA in relation to climate change. He noted that the OSCE PA was present at COP 29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. Dr. Daniela De Ridder (Germany), Vice-President of the OSCE PA and Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, focused her presentation on some of the challenges faced by the international community in managing the issue of climate migration. She argued that the absence of a universally accepted definition of climate refugees hinders the effective protection of climate migrants. An open debate followed the presentations.

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 February 20, 2025, was opened by the Chair of the committee, Lucie Potůčková (Czechia). In her opening remarks, Ms. Potůčková expressed concerns about the erosion of democratic standards and institutions in some parts of the OSCE region. She also stressed the importance of OSCE PA activities in this context, including election observation missions.

The Rapporteur of the committee, Ms. Carina Ödebrink (Sweden), then outlined ideas for the committee's report to be presented at the 32nd Annual Session in Porto. She emphasized the relevance of the Helsinki principles and of the idea that democracy and

human rights are fundamental to peace, stability and prosperity in the OSCE region. In her presentation, Ms. Ödebrink listed various pressing human rights challenges. Among these, she identified the abduction of Ukrainian children by Russia, the worsening situation in the Middle East, and threats to democracy in the South Caucasus, notably in Georgia and Azerbaijan. She also talked about the targeting of civil society organizations (CSOs) in several OSCE participating States.

Next, members of the OSCE leadership delivered presentations. Ms. Maria Telalian, Director of ODIHR, presented her priorities in her new role. She noted that cooperation between ODIHR and the OSCE PA has enabled progress in the areas of parliamentary integrity, the prevention of violence against women, including against women in politics, the rule of law and addressing intolerance and discrimination. She also highlighted the importance of election observation missions and discussed how election monitoring can help safeguard election integrity.

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Jan Braathu, stressed that the foundation of election integrity rests on an informed electorate that has access to accurate, diverse and impartial information. Mr. Braathu discussed some of the challenges and opportunities brought by social media and digital platforms in this context. He raised concerns about major tech companies recently moving away from content moderation and fact-checking, and the consolidation of interests between political actors and unelected corporate interests. He also called for transparency in election related media spending.

The Chairperson of the Human Dimension Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Sweden to the OSCE, Ambassador Anna Olsson Vrang, presented her committee's priorities. Delegates were informed that the Human Dimension committee's work will reflect the priorities of Finland's OSCE chairpersonship. Among other issues, the committee will also focus on combating torture; tolerance and non discrimination; the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; media freedom and the safety of journalists; democratic elections; challenges for human rights defenders; gender equality; and international humanitarian law and human rights.

The presentations were followed by a special debate on the theme of "New Technologies and Social Media: Effects on Elections." To launch the debate, the Head of the Multilateral Cooperation Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, Mr. Victor Lăpușneanu, detailed some of the hybrid attacks carried out against Moldova during its 2024 presidential elections and constitutional referendum. These attacks included cyber attacks, vote buying schemes, and the spread of disinformation on social media.

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Dr. Fry took the floor during the special debate on "New Technologies and Social Media: Effects on Elections." Her remarks focused on the necessity of analyzing the benefits and risks posed by new technologies. She pointed out that women are specifically targeted for harassment on social media, a trend that could be amplified by the growth of AI, and which can discourage women from participating in politics and public life.

CLOSING JOINT SESSION OF THE THREE GENERAL COMMITTEES

A. OVERVIEW

On February 21, 2025, President Kauma opened the closing Joint Session of the three General Committees. The closing Joint Session featured reports by the 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 Aydin (Türkiye), Vice-Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism; President Kauma (Finland), Chair of the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine. Mr. Mykyta Poturaiev (Ukraine) also took the floor to warn that a peace agreement to the war in Ukraine built on concessions to Russia would not be a reliable peace and would let Russia's war crimes go unpunished.

At the joint session, delegates also heard from special guest Mr. Vladimir Kara-Murza, a political activist and journalist in Russia who was imprisoned from 2022 to 2024 after speaking out against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. During his career, Mr. Kara-Murza has also received several awards, including the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize and the 2024 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary. In his presentation, he stressed the link between democracy and peace by pointing out that Russia has shown that where there is no democracy, there will be neither security nor peace. He evoked several examples of acts of repression in Russia and called for the release of Russian political prisoners.

The joint session also included a general debate on the subject of "Priority Challenges to European Security."

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Dr. Fry took the floor during the general debate on "Priority Challenges to European Security." She focused her remarks on what she referred to as the most serious crisis facing the OSCE region and the OSCE PA: the trend of large countries walking away from the rule of law and international treaties. While recognizing the institutional challenges it faces, Dr. Fry nonetheless underscored the need for the OSCE PA to develop a concrete strategic plan to guide its activities going forward.

During the same debate, **Senator Ravalia** spoke about shifts in transatlantic security, and emphasized Canada's commitment to NATO, the OSCE and European security. He reiterated Canada's support for Ukraine, as well as its commitment to work with allies to reinforce the principles of a rule-based international order.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

A. AD HOC COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

On February 20, 2025, **Dr. Fry** attended the meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration. Members of the Ad Hoc Committee listened to presentations on the topic of "Recent Developments in Syria and Impact on the Situation of Syrian Refugees in the OSCE Region" by Dr. Muriel Asseburg, Senior Fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs; Ms. Gabriela Wengert Habab, Senior Protection

Research and Information Officer at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Bureau for Middle East and North Africa; and Ms. Geraldine Salducci, Senior Protection Coordinator ad interim at the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe. The Committee also reviewed its upcoming activities and the plans for its next meeting.

B. SIDE EVENTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

On February 19, 2025, prior to the beginning of the Winter Meeting, Canadian delegates attended a briefing by Ms. Véronique Pepin-Hallé, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE. Ambassador Pépin-Hallé provided an overview of the OSCE, including its mandate and the challenges it faces, and spoke about some of the current geopolitical tensions across the OSCE region.

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

- A side event on “Confronting Political Imprisonment,” co-hosted by the delegations of Norway and Sweden, in cooperation with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee;
- A side event on “Responding to the Demographic Crisis,” hosted by Gudrun Kugler (Austria), OSCE PA Special Representative on Demographic Change and Security;
- A reception at the Austrian Parliament hosted by Mr. Walter Rosenkranz, President of the Austrian National Council.

As well, all members of the Canadian delegation participated in a bilateral meeting with delegates from the Delegation of Ukraine to the OSCE PA. Delegates discussed the current situation in Ukraine, and Canada’s support to Ukraine.

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

On February 18, 2025, in her capacity as OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues, **Dr. Fry** hosted a meeting with Slovak civil society organizations in Bratislava, Slovakia. 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 and defending the rights of women and LGBTQ+ persons. Participants shared concerns about the ongoing issue of limited legal access to medical abortion in Slovakia and about challenges that CSOs face in securing sustainable funding for their programming. The discussion also emphasized the need to involve men in supporting gender equality and countering gender-based violence.

On February 21, 2025, **Dr. Fry** met with Ms. Maria Telalian, who was appointed Director of ODIHR in December 2024. Their discussions focused on the work of ODIHR, including its election observation missions, and on the need for OSCE participating states to support ODIHR’s activities. They also discussed opportunities for future collaboration between ODIHR and the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues.

On February 21, 2025, **Dr. Fry** also met with Mr. Johan Büser (Sweden), OSCE PA Treasurer. They discussed his annual report, and the challenges posed by the nonpayment of contributions by the Russian Federation.

Travel Expenses

Travel expenses associated with this activity can be found in the delegation's financial report. This report is available in the [Financial Disclosure](#) section of the Parliamentary Diplomacy website.

Respectfully submitted,

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