

Chairmanship: Sweden

1306th PLENARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

1. Date: Thursday, 18 March 2021 (via video teleconference)

Opened: 10 a.m.
Suspended: 1 p.m.
Resumed: 3 p.m.
Closed: 5.30 p.m.

2. Chairperson: Ambassador U. Funered

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Permanent Council, welcomed the new Permanent Representative of Turkey to the OSCE, Ambassador Hatun Demirer.

3. Subjects discussed – Statements – Decisions/documents adopted:

Agenda item 1: REPORT BY THE HEAD OF THE OSCE MISSION TO SERBIA

Chairperson, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia (PC.FR/7/21 OSCE+), Portugal-European Union (with the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia; the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area; as well as Georgia and Ukraine, in alignment) (PC.DEL/399/21/Rev.1), Russian Federation (PC.DEL/355/21), Albania (PC.DEL/357/21 OSCE+), Turkey (PC.DEL/353/21 OSCE+), Switzerland (PC.DEL/368/21 OSCE+), United States of America (PC.DEL/352/21), Norway (PC.DEL/366/21), United Kingdom, Serbia (PC.DEL/358/21 OSCE+)

Agenda item 2: REVIEW OF CURRENT ISSUES

Chairperson

(a) *Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea:* Ukraine (PC.DEL/364/21), Portugal-European Union (with the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia; the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway,

members of the European Economic Area; as well as Georgia and Moldova, in alignment) (PC.DEL/401/21), Switzerland (PC.DEL/356/21 OSCE+), Turkey (PC.DEL/391/21 OSCE+), United States of America (PC.DEL/354/21), Canada (PC.DEL/387/21 OSCE+), United Kingdom

- (b) *Situation in Ukraine and the need to implement the Minsk agreements:* Russian Federation (PC.DEL/362/21), Ukraine
- (c) *The aggression of Azerbaijan against Artsakh and Armenia with the direct involvement of Turkey and foreign terrorist fighters:* Armenia (Annex 1)
- (d) *Seventh anniversary of the reunification of Crimea with Russia:* Russian Federation (PC.DEL/360/21 Rev.1), Ukraine (PC.DEL/361/21), Portugal-European Union, United States of America (PC.DEL/359/21), United Kingdom, Georgia (PC.DEL/381/21 OSCE+), Canada (PC.DEL/390/21 OSCE+), Switzerland, Turkey (PC.DEL/392/21 OSCE+), Norway (PC.DEL/385/21)
- (e) *Peaceful protests and police violence in some Western European States:* Russian Federation (PC.DEL/373/21), Belarus (PC.DEL/386/21 OSCE+), Portugal-European Union, Netherlands (Annex 2), Germany (Annex 3), Belgium (Annex 4), Greece (Annex 5), Switzerland (Annex 6), United Kingdom
- (f) *The Russian Federation's intensifying campaign against independent media:* United States of America (also on behalf of Canada) (PC.DEL/367/21), Portugal-European Union (with the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia; the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area; as well as Georgia and Ukraine, in alignment) (PC.DEL/402/21), Switzerland (PC.DEL/369/21 OSCE+), United Kingdom, Ukraine, Russian Federation (PC.DEL/389/21 OSCE+), United States of America (PC.DEL/370/21)
- (g) *International Day to Combat Islamophobia, observed on 15 March 2021:* Turkey (Annex 7), Russian Federation (PC.DEL/372/21), Azerbaijan (PC.DEL/380/21 OSCE+), Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan
- (h) *Need for new dialogue in Belarus:* United States of America (PC.DEL/375/21/Corr.1), United Kingdom, Canada, Switzerland (PC.DEL/376/21 OSCE+), Portugal-European Union, Russian Federation (PC.DEL/377/21), Belarus (PC.DEL/388/21 OSCE+)

Agenda item 3: REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE
 CHAIRPERSON-IN-OFFICE

- (a) *Visit of the Chairperson-in-Office to Azerbaijan on 14 and 15 March 2021 and to Armenia on 15 and 16 March 2021:* Chairperson
- (b) *Ongoing consultations on a draft Permanent Council decision on extension of the mandate of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine:* Chairperson

- (c) *Extension of the assignment of Ambassador Y. H. Çevik as Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine: Chairperson*
- (d) *Launch of a photography exhibition on a gender-equal world by photographer Ms. A. Brolenius, to be held via video teleconference on 24 March 2021: Chairperson*
- (e) *Events in the human dimension in 2021: Russian Federation, Portugal-European Union, United States of America (PC.DEL/378/21), Canada, United Kingdom, Norway, Chairperson*

Agenda item 4: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

- (a) *Update on the COVID-19 situation across the OSCE executive structures: Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre (SEC.GAL/39/21 OSCE+)*
- (b) *Address by the Secretary General to a meeting of the OSCE Group of Friends of Youth and Security, held via video teleconference on 12 March 2021: Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre (SEC.GAL/39/21 OSCE+)*
- (c) *Opening remarks by the Secretary General at the first meeting of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group under the Chairmanship of Poland, held via video teleconference on 15 March 2021: Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre (SEC.GAL/39/21 OSCE+)*
- (d) *Opening remarks by the Secretary General at the Central Asian Forum on “The Role of Women in Fostering Peace, Trust and Security”, held via video teleconference on 16 March 2021: Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre (SEC.GAL/39/21 OSCE+)*
- (e) *OSCE social media engagement in connection with International Women’s Day, observed on 8 March 2021: Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre (SEC.GAL/39/21 OSCE+)*
- (f) *Participation of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings on 11 March 2021 in an ancillary meeting on “New approaches in addressing trafficking in persons for organ removal” during the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, held from 7 to 12 March 2021 in Kyoto, Japan, and via video teleconference: Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre (SEC.GAL/39/21 OSCE+)*
- (g) *Webinar on “Terrorist Use of the Internet: Designation of Illicit Content Online and Gaps in Regulatory Frameworks”, organized by the OSCE Secretariat’s Transnational Threats Department and External Co-operation Section, with the support of the Albanian Chairmanship of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 12 March 2021: Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre (SEC.GAL/39/21 OSCE+)*

- (h) *Announcement of the distribution of a written report of the Secretary General (SEC.GAL/39/21 OSCE+)*: Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre

Agenda item 5: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- (a) *International Francophonie Day, to be observed on 20 March 2021, and French Language and Francophonie Week, being observed from 13 to 21 March 2021*: France (PC.DEL/379/21 OSCE+), Romania (PC.DEL/396/21 OSCE+), Canada (also on behalf of Switzerland), Armenia (PC.DEL/432/21), Portugal
- (b) *Parliamentary election in Germany, to be held on 26 September 2021*: Germany (PC.DEL/382/21 OSCE+)

4. Next meeting:

Thursday, 25 March 2021, at 10 a.m., via video teleconference



1306th Plenary Meeting

PC Journal No. 1306, Agenda item 2(c)

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF ARMENIA**

Madam Chairperson,

After the 44-day war unleashed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh, with the direct involvement of Turkey and Turkish-backed foreign terrorist fighters, the visit by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde, to the region was a long-awaited signal from the Organization that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict continues to be a priority for the OSCE. It is worth recalling that a previously scheduled visit, which had been due to take place back in September 2020, was cancelled owing to the outbreak of the war. We hope that this recent visit provided the Chairperson-in-Office with a wide-ranging opportunity to receive first-hand information about the results of the aggression of Azerbaijan and its affiliates, and also about the challenging humanitarian situation on the ground.

Madam Chairperson,

The visit by the Chairperson-in-Office was also a good opportunity for Azerbaijan to demonstrate the sincerity of its declared aspirations for peace and reconciliation, which the authorities of that country and its delegation here at the OSCE have been talking about much lately. At this stage the only convincing and practical step in that direction would be the release of all the Armenian prisoners of war and civilian hostages still being held in Azerbaijan. Regrettably, but by no means surprisingly, it has proved to be yet another missed opportunity for Azerbaijan. Instead of rising to the occasion, the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister chose to repeat various ill-founded allegations in an attempt to disguise Azerbaijan's blatant violations of international humanitarian law and in defiance of their own signature. With his statement, the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister contradicted his own country's competent authorities, which have confirmed the presence in Azerbaijan of dozens of Armenian prisoners of war captured both during the hostilities and after the ceasefire was established.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan is withholding information about Armenian prisoners of war from the European Court of Human Rights, which is dealing with this issue in the framework of the inter-State case of Armenia v. Azerbaijan. The Court recently decided to notify the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in particular as regards Azerbaijan's failure to comply with the time limits set by the Court for the submission of information, or its provision of fairly general information of limited value otherwise. Interim measures are currently active in relation to 188 Armenians captured by Azerbaijan. It should be stressed

that non-implementation of interim measures amounts to a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. Let me also add that paragraph 8 of the trilateral statement signed on 9 November 2020 refers to all prisoners of war, captured civilians (hostages) and other detained persons. With declarations such as those of the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister a few days ago, the Azerbaijani side shows that it is deliberately not implementing the trilateral statement.

Needless to say, the continued detention of Armenian prisoners of war undermines the implementation of the agreements contained in the trilateral statement.

In addition, we are concerned about the statement disseminated by the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan claiming that there are no women of Armenian origin in Azerbaijani custody. This assertion is highly questionable and troubling, since, according to our information, Armenian women are still being detained in Azerbaijan, including the 76-year-old Elsa Sargsyan and the mother and daughter Varya and Anahit Tunyan, all of whom are residents of the Hadrut region of Artsakh.

Madam Chairperson,

It should be recalled that more than a month into the ceasefire, Azerbaijan attacked Armenian positions near Hin Tagher and Khtsaber, two villages in the Hadrut region that were under Armenian control. On 11 December 2020, the Azerbaijani armed forces launched an attack in the direction of these two villages in an attempt to wipe out their ethnic Armenian inhabitants so that the entire Hadrut region would come under *de facto* Azerbaijani control.

As a result of this unprovoked aggression, Azerbaijan captured 64 Armenian military personnel in violation of its commitment to a ceasefire under the trilateral statement signed on 9 November 2020. In an attempt to justify its actions in Hadrut, Azerbaijan is now trying to shift the blame onto Armenia by invoking a groundless narrative about a fictitious “anti-terrorist operation” against a “sabotage group” allegedly deployed by Armenia and by portraying the Armenian prisoners of war as “terrorists”.

Madam Chairperson,

Human Rights Watch has documented several cases in which Azerbaijani forces used violence against civilians, subjected them to torture, inhuman and degrading conditions of detention, ill-treatment and even to extrajudicial executions of protected persons. All of these cases clearly constitute war crimes under international humanitarian law. Human Rights Watch has called on the Azerbaijani authorities to investigate, without further delay, the credible allegations regarding the unlawful detention of civilians and their inhuman and degrading treatment, and the possible instances of extrajudicial execution of detainees, with a view to holding all the perpetrators to account. In issuing this appeal, Human Rights Watch has presented not just statistics, but the real stories of real people.

Let me also draw the Permanent Council’s attention to the fact that Human Rights Watch recently highlighted, on the basis of its own research, the unlawful attacks by Azerbaijani armed forces on medical facilities and personnel in Artsakh. Combined with the ad hoc report “On Azerbaijan’s crimes against humanity in the context of human-made

disaster during COVID-19” released by the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia and distributed to OSCE participating States by the delegation of Armenia (under reference number SEC.DEL/102/21), this serves as further evidence of the criminal nature of Azerbaijan’s actions during the war that it unleashed at the end of September, and which was accompanied by the use of prohibited weapons against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and by the forced displacement of the population, thereby exacerbating the pandemic situation. The report addresses the State policy of Azerbaijan in the context of the human-made disaster during the pandemic, which was aimed at accelerating the rapid spread of the deadly virus. Moreover, it reveals specific cases of deaths caused by the virus, further confirming that the Azerbaijani authorities have committed crimes against humanity.

Dear colleagues,

The barbaric destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage in the occupied territories of Artsakh attests to the fact that these are not isolated cases, but rather a pattern of behaviour dictated by specific instructions from above. As may be seen from satellite images of the area, the St. John the Baptist Church in Shushi, commonly known as Kanach Zham (Green Chapel), has been razed to the ground by the Azerbaijani forces and is now lying in ruins. In video footage of yesterday’s visit by the President of Azerbaijan to the occupied regions of Artsakh it could be seen how all the crosses had been removed from the Armenian churches. Moreover, according to media reports, President Aliyev personally gave additional instructions for the complete removal of all Armenian inscriptions on objects belonging to the Armenian cultural heritage, claiming that they were “fake”. He ordered that the so-called original “Albanian” inscriptions be reinstated. It is no coincidence that Azerbaijan is blocking and unduly delaying access to the region by the fact-finding mission from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The sole purpose of these manoeuvres is to create a *fait accompli*, as was the case with the cross-stones in the historical settlement of Jugha.

The staged visits by the President of Azerbaijan to the occupied territories of Artsakh and his anti-Armenian discourse, laden with extremely derogatory language, leave no doubt as to Azerbaijan’s real intentions and clearly demonstrate that it does not seek a peaceful settlement of the conflict, let alone peaceful co-existence.

Madam Chairperson,

Two extremely dangerous precedents have been set as a result of Azerbaijan’s aggression against Artsakh and its people: the attempt, on the one hand, to resolve a conflict by the use of force and mass atrocities, and on the other, the importing by OSCE participating States of foreign terrorist fighters and jihadists from other regions into the OSCE area of responsibility. Both of these should be a matter of serious concern for the relevant OSCE structures.

Regrettably, this is not what we are seeing. Moreover, in an attempt to legitimize the results of its aggression and use of force against the people of Artsakh, which were accompanied by numerous war crimes and gross violations of international humanitarian law, Azerbaijan seeks to involve the OSCE structures and certain participating States in the so-called “rehabilitation process”. The OSCE’s assistance mechanisms must not be misused

by Azerbaijan to share with the OSCE the heavy burden of its war crimes and deliberate violations of international humanitarian law. Any action to that effect would run contrary to the OSCE principles and the participating States' commitments. The OSCE should refrain from any activity that might be perceived as endorsement of Azerbaijan's illegal use of force against Artsakh.

Madam Chairperson,

The current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is the result of a flagrant violation by Azerbaijan of several core principles of the Helsinki Final Act, namely, refraining from the threat or use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. There should be no illusion that the results of the use of force, accompanied by war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law, can ever become the basis for a lasting and sustainable peace in the region. Durable and sustainable peace can only be achieved through a comprehensive settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which must include defining the status of Artsakh based on the realization of the inalienable right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination; ensuring the safe and dignified return of the recently displaced population to their homes; and preservation the region's cultural and religious heritage.

Madam Chairperson,

I kindly ask you to attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.

Thank you.



1306th Plenary Meeting
PC Journal No. 1306, Agenda item 2(e)

STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF THE NETHERLANDS

Madam Chairperson,

In response to the statement made by the Russian delegation and to the comments by my esteemed Belarusian colleague, and in addition to the statement delivered on behalf of the Member States of the European Union, I should like to briefly exercise my right of reply.

The OSCE is a forum where participating States are meant to engage in a dialogue on issues relating to the commitments that we have all agreed to. This applies to situations in all the participating States, including the Netherlands.

So I should like to thank the Russian delegation for raising this issue and for thereby giving me the opportunity to briefly elaborate on the situation in the Netherlands with regard to protests against COVID-19 measures, as mentioned by my Russian colleague.

As I said the last time that the Russian delegation brought up this topic, measures that restrict civil liberties, such as imposing a curfew or dispersing an unauthorized demonstration, are very exceptional tools. They are being applied to help to slow the spread of the coronavirus. These measures were and are the subject of intense political debate in the House of Representatives of the Netherlands.

A demonstration against the Netherlands Government – more specifically against the ongoing restrictions to curb the spread of the coronavirus – was planned to take place last Sunday in The Hague. Permission was granted for a maximum of 200 protesters. In the end, over 2,000 protesters turned up. The demonstration was broken up after the protesters failed to follow physical distancing rules and ignored repeated police calls to leave the area. The police intervened and dispersed the protesters. In the aftermath, 20 protesters who refused to leave were arrested.

As is standard practice in the Netherlands, the arrests and the level of force used by officers will be subject to a police investigation – and, if necessary, also to investigations by the National Ombudsman, the Public Prosecution Service and the judiciary. The police investigation is currently ongoing.

To give a full picture of the situation: at the same time as the aforementioned demonstration, one to protest against climate change was organized in The Hague as well. That demonstration ended as planned at 4 p.m. and the protesters left peacefully.

Madam Chairperson,

I kindly ask you to attach this statement to the journal of the day.



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Permanent Council**

PC.JOUR/1306
18 March 2021
Annex 3

ENGLISH
Original: GERMAN

1306th Plenary Meeting
PC Journal No. 1306, Agenda item 2(e)

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF GERMANY**

Madam Chairperson,

As my Russian colleague mentioned Germany in his statement, I should like to exercise my right of reply in addition to the statement on behalf of the European Union.

Freedom of assembly is constitutionally guaranteed in Germany. Simple laws shape this right – with the aim of enabling gatherings to take place. Restrictions are imposed only under very strict conditions. Restrictions may be imposed only to protect central legal rights, such as, for example, the protection of the life, health and freedom of the individual. If freedom of assembly is restricted, conditions are to be imposed as a matter of priority. Only if the aforementioned legal rights cannot be adequately protected in this way may the assembly be prohibited. Only then may the State use coercive measures to disperse an assembly, always on condition, needless to say, that these measures are reasonable. We have already commented here several times on the demonstrations against the German measures to combat the coronavirus. Last weekend, protests took place again in Dresden and Munich, among other places.

In Munich, the conditions imposed, namely to keep a distance and wear a mask covering the nose and mouth, were frequently disregarded. Nevertheless, the police reacted in a de-escalating manner and reminded people to follow the rules.

In Dresden, the assembly had been banned by the authorities because of high infection rates and the expected breaches of the hygiene regulations. This decision has been reviewed and confirmed by the courts in summary proceedings. The demonstrators defied the ban and, so far as is known, some even attacked the police and media. This is unacceptable and intolerable for all of us as a democratic country. So if there were such riots on the fringes of unauthorized demonstrations, such attacks on police officers, and in some cases also on journalists, then this is to be condemned.

This contradicts the right to peaceful demonstration. It is not acceptable and it is not to be tolerated.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Permanent Council**

PC.JOUR/1306
18 March 2021
Annex 4

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

1306th Plenary Meeting
PC Journal No. 1306, Agenda item 2(e)

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF BELGIUM**

Madam Chairperson,

Belgium aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. As the country I represent has been mentioned, I also wish to briefly exercise my right of reply in a national capacity.

Belgium is deeply committed to the protection of all fundamental freedoms, which are of vital importance in our democratic societies, and is constantly striving to maintain and strengthen the guarantees aimed at ensuring respect for such freedoms.

The policing of the demonstration of 13 March 2021 in Liège took place in compliance with the applicable rules and the philosophy of “negotiated management of public space”, notably in consultation with the organizers. The police were deployed discreetly on the margins of the demonstration to ensure that it went ahead peacefully.

Unfortunately, on 13 March, the police were also confronted with rioters whose sole aim was to attack the police and real and personal property. The seriousness of the damage caused by these violent actions and the significant risk of physical harm to the population and police officers made it absolutely necessary to adapt the authorities’ mode of conduct, while respecting the principles of legality, proportionality, appropriateness and subsidiarity. The violence of the rioters’ actions has been reported by a number of independent media, both Belgian and foreign. Unfortunately, 36 police officers were injured, with nine needing hospital treatment, and several shops and a police station were vandalized. The police took action only against the rioters – the perpetrators of the violence – and not against the demonstrators. These police actions took place incrementally and proportionally, never preventively, but only in response to attacks.

Furthermore, as mentioned at a previous Permanent Council meeting, any interested party who considers themselves to be a victim of police misconduct may file a complaint with the Standing Police Monitoring Committee. This mechanism was used effectively in the aftermath of the events of 13 March and any complaints made will be followed up.

As for the rest, it goes without saying that Belgium is willing to discuss further with our esteemed colleagues from the Russian Federation the various measures, frameworks and precautions in place in our country to fully guarantee the freedom of peaceful assembly.

Madam Chairperson, I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

Thank you.



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Permanent Council**

PC.JOUR/1306
18 March 2021
Annex 5

Original: ENGLISH

1306th Plenary Meeting

PC Journal No. 1306, Agenda item 2(e)

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF GREECE**

Madam Chairperson,

As my esteemed Russian colleague made reference to my country, I should like to exercise my right of reply.

First of all, allow me to emphasize that freedom of assembly is fully guaranteed by the Constitution of Greece. Prohibitions may be imposed only if there is an imminent serious threat to public security or, in certain circumstances, if there is a risk of serious disturbance to social and economic life, as specified by law.

In this regard, the Greek police act as a guarantor of social peace and public order and as a protector of the rights of all citizens, and of private and State property. The police authorities apply appropriate and proportionate measures, having always in mind general public and social interests, including the public health interest – all the more so during the current pandemic. It should also be noted that the Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection recently drew up a new National Action Plan on the Management of Public Assemblies. This new institutional framework is designed to protect peaceful gatherings, and to prevent the outbreak of violent events and vandalism. Special emphasis is accorded, among other issues, to communication with citizens exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and also to proportionate police response to any acts of violence.

Furthermore, all allegations concerning any kind of excessive use of force are, of course, duly investigated by the competent authorities in accordance with the relevant legislation.

To conclude, I should like to stress that Greece is fully committed to safeguarding the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly while also taking into account the need to protect public health in these extraordinarily challenging times.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Permanent Council**

PC.JOUR/1306
19 March 2021
Annex 6

ENGLISH
Original: GERMAN

1306th Plenary Meeting
PC Journal No. 1306, Agenda item 2(e)

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF SWITZERLAND**

Madam Chairperson,

As Switzerland was mentioned in the statement by the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation, I should like to exercise my right of reply.

On 6 March, an unauthorized demonstration of several hundred people did indeed take place in Zurich in the context of International Women's Day on 8 March. The police had indicated on social media in advance that they would enforce the ban on events, which is in place because of COVID-19. When, despite this, people assembled and the demonstration gathered pace, the police tried to disperse the gathering. An investigation has been launched following the release of a video allegedly showing a police officer hitting a participant while they are lying on the ground. Both criminal proceedings and possible disciplinary measures are to be clarified with the official concerned.

Freedom of assembly is protected in Switzerland by the Federal Constitution. Like other fundamental rights, freedom of assembly can only be restricted if there are legal grounds, if the restriction is justified by a public interest or the protection of fundamental rights of third parties and is also proportionate, and if the essence is preserved. In the aforementioned case of Zurich, freedom of assembly was restricted owing to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Police officers are trained to manage assemblies in public spaces. An important part of the training is the observance of fundamental rights and respect for human rights. If there is a suspicion of excessive use of force, a complaint can be filed with the competent authority. Any person also has the right to file a criminal complaint for personal injury or abuse of authority.

I ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.



1306th Plenary Meeting
PC Journal No. 1306, Agenda item 2(g)

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF TURKEY**

Thank you, Madam Chair.

In November 2020, the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation designated 15 March as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. As is known, 15 March 2019 is the date of the terrorist attack against two mosques in Christchurch.

Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. Deadly attacks against Muslims continue to occur, also in OSCE participating States. Everyday discrimination and stigmatization persist. Anti-migrant and anti-Muslim public discourse fuels prejudice and intolerance, creating a toxic atmosphere especially in Western Europe. Regrettably, some short-sighted politicians continue to add fuel to the flames. The coronavirus pandemic has served as yet another pretext to unleash hatred against vulnerable groups. All too often, hate speech paves the way for, or even turns into, hate crimes.

The 2019 annual report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) states that “[s]uch rhetoric is often only the first step towards exclusion of and discrimination against Muslims, which stands in sharp contrast to the universality of human rights. It also contributes to making Muslims wearing visible signs of their religion particularly vulnerable to intolerance, hate speech and even hate-motivated violence.”

In his message to mark the International Day, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres stressed that “diversity is a richness, not a threat”. Citing a recent report to the United Nations Human Rights Council, he highlighted how Muslim women may face “triple levels of discrimination” because of their gender, ethnicity and faith.

Anti-Muslim sentiments pose an ever-growing challenge for the entire OSCE area. Today, as the largest religious minority, Muslims constitute five per cent of the overall population in Europe. Current demographic trends indicate that their share could rise to 15 per cent in the year 2050. Therefore, we should be prepared for the intensification of existing challenges, including hatred against Islam and discrimination.

Madam Chair,

We need to address the rise in populist, xenophobic, anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic sentiments as well as right- and left-wing extremism also in our Organization. The scope is alarming. None of our societies are immune.

All these developments threaten the well-being and harmony of our societies and ultimately the security of the entire OSCE area. Our democracies and fundamental values such as human rights and freedom of speech and religion are being challenged.

We value the existing toolbox of the OSCE and in particular the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). We appreciate the ODIHR's work in this area. Still, we, as the participating States, have to collectively step up our efforts and enable our Organization to do even more.

Madam Chair,

Surely, we must grasp the broadness of the problem. However, avoiding an accurate diagnosis of the problem by referring to the universality of human rights amounts – in reality – to ignoring the problem.

We deeply regret that we were still not able to adopt a Ministerial Council declaration on this topic. It seems that some do not even wish this topic to be discussed. They feel uneasy. However, we must name specific challenges and needs. We must acknowledge the valuable contributions made by all the OSCE executive structures and by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. We must at least be able to reaffirm agreed language and commitments. Finally, we must connect to the realities on the ground. There has been an exponential increase in anti-Islam discourse, and this will not disappear simply by denying the existence of this fact here at the OSCE.

Our delegation strongly believes that these dangerous trends are very much related with our common security and that they are thus most relevant to the OSCE's work.

Turkey's active efforts and initiatives will continue with a view to keeping the fight against anti-Islam course high on the agenda of international and regional organizations. In addition, within the framework of a study initiated by our Ministry, annual reports on the countries where anti-Islamic, xenophobic and racist acts and discourses take place will be prepared and shared with the international public opinion.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

Thank you, Madam Chair.