

PA responds to coronavirus with rescheduling, telecommuting and policy recommendations



Secretary General Roberto Montella working from home this week.

In line with advice and guidelines from the World Health Organization and national authorities regarding the coronavirus outbreak, the OSCE PA International Secretariat is working remotely at least until the end of the month.

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella sent a letter last week to all Members of the Assembly describing actions being taken by the PA to help mitigate the crisis, including closing the offices in Copenhagen and Vienna until 30 March. Staff members are continuing to perform duties by means of telecommuting and the use of ICT tools, he said.

A number of upcoming activities, including the OSCE PA's election observation missions to North Macedonia and Serbia, have been postponed until further notice, Montella announced. The Secretary General stressed, however, that the Secretariat is continuing to support the activities of the Assembly.

Work on the OSCE PA budget is ongoing, with a video conference taking place Tuesday between Montella, Deputy Secretary General Gustavo Pallares, and Chief of Administration and Finance Marieta Samac. The Secretariat is also in constant contact with PA President George Tsereteli.

Senior Adviser Marco Bonabello and Administration and Logistics Officer Dimitrije Todoric are representing the PA in the OSCE's Crisis Management Team, which is in charge of developing a common preventive response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Bonabello and Todoric keep the Secretariat informed in real time of the Crisis Management Team's recommenda-

tions and other developments. The OSCE's governmental side has suspended most meetings, cancelled conferences, and has implemented telecommuting policies.

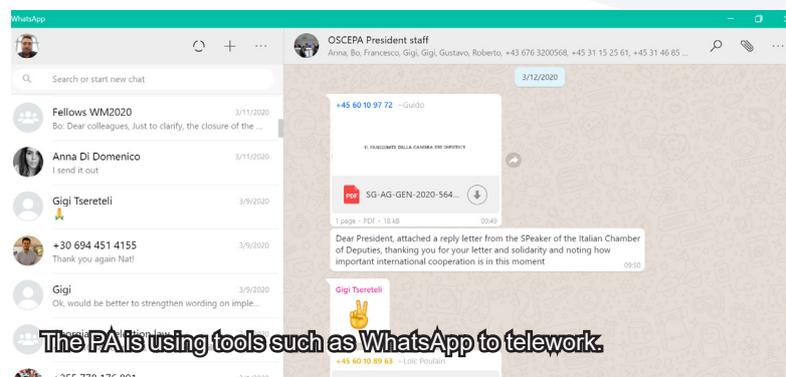
On Tuesday, President Tsereteli issued a statement noting the need for close international co-ordination, solidarity, respect for human rights, and emergency economic measures.

"As we cope with the global threat of the coronavirus pandemic, we are all struggling to make the right decisions, whether as individual citizens or as policymakers in parliament and government," Tsereteli said. "I hope that while we deliberate and make these tough calls, we all keep certain principles in mind. One is that in order to be successful, we must pursue the highest level of co-ordination possible."

Last week, OSCE PA Special Rapporteur on Disinformation and Propaganda Oscar Mina (San Marino) said that due diligence must also be shown in countering the spread of disinformation about the crisis.

"Conspiracy theories, bogus medicines and cures, false regulations and fake claims about vaccines are circulating on the internet and on social media platforms," Mina said on 11 March. "This disinformation is hindering efforts to contain the outbreak itself, spreading panic, confusion and discrimination, in times when solidarity and co-operation among countries are essential to save human lives."

Mina welcomed the prompt reaction of the WHO and various governments that are working closely with social media platforms to counter misinformation about the virus.



The PA is using tools such as WhatsApp to telework.

Update on OSCE PA activities

The PA's election observation missions to Serbia and North Macedonia and the Anti-Corruption Conference that was scheduled to take place in Cyprus on 12-13 May have been postponed. Presidential visits to the EU and France, and participation in the OSCE SEE Early Warning Focal Points meeting and an OSCE Central Asia HoD meeting have been cancelled. The OSCE PA Bureau Meeting and Leinsweiler Seminar, scheduled for 27 April and 15-18 May, respectively, are under scrutiny. The PA's co-ordination meeting on counter-terrorism on 27 March will take place via video link.

Featured tweets @oscepa

OSCE parliamentarian and member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration Alf Dubs (United Kingdom) tweeted on 12 March in support of providing assistance to refugee children. "Who could be more deserving of compassion and our help than unaccompanied refugee children stranded in appalling conditions - alone - in Europe? Surely we are better than this?" he wrote.

Alf Dubs @AlfDubs · Mar 12
Who could be more deserving of compassion and our help than unaccompanied refugee children stranded in appalling conditions - alone - in Europe? Surely we are better than this?

Safe Passage @safepassageuk · Mar 12

As the Dubs scheme nears its end, @AlfDubs asked the UK gov if it will welcome child refugees from Greek islands through the new Global Resettlement Scheme. He got no straight answer.

The gov must stop dodging the issue & start giving children sanctuary bit.ly/2vfnTNP