

Human rights and democracy in focus during webinar on COVID-related states of emergency



OSCE PA webinar on states of emergency on 8 May

An OSCE PA webinar on 8 May encouraged participants to address the question of how states of emergency and other extraordinary measures may curb fundamental freedoms and limit parliamentary oversight. More than 50 OSCE parliamentarians participated in the event, entitled, “Respecting human rights and maintaining democratic control during states of emergency.”

The webinar featured remarks from Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus), Michael Georg Link (Germany), and Kari Henriksen (Norway) – the Chair, Vice-Chair and Rapporteur, respectively, of the OSCE PA’s Third Committee. Keynote speakers included the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Ingibjorg Gisladottir, and the President of Freedom House, Michael Abramowitz.

Gisladottir noted that while the crisis is exposing and widening the pre-existing cracks that have been weakening democracies for years, a number of parliaments across the OSCE region have proven able to adapt quickly and respond effectively to the pandemic. In his remarks, Abramowitz

stressed that the pandemic is not a time to make dramatic permanent changes limiting the rights of individuals. He particularly highlighted concerns related to violations of freedom of expression, the holding of elections, and surveillance.

Hadjiyianni noted the complexity of current challenges. “We must address the health of our population without forgetting the health of our democratic systems,” he said, acknowledging that some measures challenge basic aspects of parliamentarism. Vice-Chair Link said that states of emergency must be used with restraint, emphasizing the need to combat fake news and curb the trend of domestic violence in relation to COVID-19.

Henriksen noted that after the crisis, there will be opportunities to strengthen democracies. Societies must move forward with a focus on how to rebuild with increased respect for human rights to ensure they are more sustainable and can better address future crises, she said.

A range of practical examples adopted by parliaments to ensure their continued effectiveness were presented by MPs participating in the discussion. Several speakers reiterated the general standards that apply to emergency restrictions: being limited to the situation and being proportionate; being consistent with other legal obligations; and being non-discriminatory in nature. The importance of emergency measures being limited in duration was also underlined.

OSCE PA President George Tsereteli (Georgia) welcomed participants to the event, which was the second in a series of webinars planned by the OSCE PA. Attended by MPs from more than 30 countries, it was moderated by OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella.

Secretaries of Delegations meet virtually with Secretariat staff for discussions on PA work

Meeting online Tuesday, OSCE PA Secretaries of Delegations exchanged views with the International Secretariat on the work of the Assembly during the COVID-19 crisis. Secretaries from across the OSCE region expressed appreciation for the International Secretariat’s work to adapt the activities of the Assembly and continue providing a forum for inter-parliamentary debate, while also raising questions about various issues, such as the prospects for resuming election observation activities.

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella briefed

the delegation staff on what the Secretariat has been doing during this period to ensure that a quality service is provided to OSCE parliamentarians. He noted that with cancelled statutory meetings this year, the ongoing series of webinars are intended to offer a forum for debate and an exchange of best practices for ensuring a co-operative multilateral response to the pandemic. He also reported that no election observation missions are envisaged for the summer but that the Secretariat hopes to resume this activity in the autumn, depending on the public health situation.

Parliamentary Web Dialogue to focus on COVID’s impact on conflicts in the OSCE region



An OSCE PA webinar on Friday 15 May will provide an opportunity for parliamentarians to discuss the topic of “COVID’s impact on conflicts in the OSCE region.” Policymakers will hear about recent developments in conflict-affected areas in the OSCE region, share their views and engage

in discussions, with a particular focus on the humanitarian and security aspects of the pandemic in conflict zones.

The event will feature remarks by Chair of the OSCE PA General Committee on Political Affairs and Security Richard Hudson (United States), Vice-Chair Costel Neculai Dunava (Romania), and Rapporteur Laurynas Kasciunas (Lithuania), as well as presentations by Ambassador Tuula Yrjölä, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, and Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik, Head of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

The webinar will livestream on the OSCE PA’s Facebook page and at www.oscepa.org.