

## Bureau, Secretariat meet virtually to consider options for OSCE PA's response to COVID-19



George Tsereteli addresses the Bureau.



Attilio Fontana addresses the Bureau.



Elona Gjebrea Hoxha addresses the Bureau.

The OSCE PA's leadership met remotely on Wednesday to discuss the Assembly's response to the coronavirus pandemic and options for upcoming statutory meetings and other activities. With 19 Bureau members participating in the online forum, it was announced that upcoming election observation missions have been postponed and that the spring Bureau meeting, scheduled for April 27 in Copenhagen, will be held remotely. A decision on the OSCE PA's Annual Session in July will be made at a later date, in consultation with the host parliament of Canada.

President George Tsereteli (Georgia) offered statements of support for members and staff of the Parliamentary Assembly, noting that everyone is adjusting to the new realities of the coronavirus pandemic while some countries are dealing with higher levels of crisis than others. It is important to make decisions on the way forward for the PA, he said. "We are ready to meet the challenges," the President stressed.

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella noted the importance of multilateral forums in dealing with this crisis.

Attilio Fontana, President of Lombardia Region of Italy, addressed the Bureau and provided a briefing about the situation in his region. He noted that the number of deaths continues to rise and that in order to combat the virus the authorities have prioritized social distancing. The decisions have been made in co-ordination with all the relevant authorities with the full understanding that the fundamental rights of citizens are being restricted, he said. He appealed for governments to assist with the deployment of doctors and necessary equipment to Italy.

Vice-President Kari Henriksen (Norway) stressed that parliamentarians have an important role to play in this crisis, and must be honest about the situation in their own countries. Focus must be placed on the plight of migrants, she said, and human rights should be at the forefront of the PA's response. First Committee Chair Richard Hudson (United States) stressed the need for transatlantic solidarity in response to the crisis.

Other issues raised by Bureau members included the need to set firm deadlines for making decisions on upcoming OSCE PA activities, the importance of combating fake news, promoting food security and addressing economic impacts of the crisis. Members offered updates on the situations within their countries and described measures taken by their governments to combat the virus.

In an online staff meeting Monday, it was announced that both the Copenhagen and Vienna offices of the International Secretariat will remain closed with telecommuting to continue at least until 13 April.



Richard Hudson participates in the Bureau meeting.

### #WeAreOSCEPA video challenge

OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella has launched a video challenge, calling on OSCE parliamentarians to post brief videos with messages of support to their constituents, governments and people of the OSCE area. Members can post the video on their favorite social media platform using the hashtag #WeAreOSCEPA and tagging @oscepa so that the PA can share the videos on its networks as well.

### Featured tweets @oscepa

OSCE PA President George Tsereteli (Georgia) tweeted on 22 March in support of the decision to renew the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine's mandate. "The extension of the @OSCE\_SMM's mandate is welcome news," he wrote. "I offer my full support to more than 1000 women & men who bravely do their job. In these uncertain times it is important to ensure that focus remains firmly on resolving conflict in E. #Ukraine."



George Tsereteli @GTsereteli · Mar 22

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