



Spotlight on Parliaments in Europe

Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments - Institutional Cooperation Unit
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Preventive and sanitary measures in Parliaments

Following the COVID-19 outbreak and its consequences on the functioning of Parliaments, many national Parliaments followed the example of the European Parliament to adopt preventive and sanitary measures.

Spotlight No 28 focusses on sanitary preventive measures, changes in the work of the Parliament, travel and visitors, and the need for a statement and medical examination when entering premises. It is based on requests 4333 and 4350 submitted by the Polish Sejm on 26 February and 13 March 2020. In total 44 chambers replied to request 4333 and 39 chambers replied to request 4350.

Due to the rapidly changing context of this crisis, the current situation may vary from the one outlined in this document. For updates, please contact the editor.

General trends in national Parliaments

Cancellation of events, suspension of visits and travel were the main trends in most national Parliaments. 37 Chambers mentioned the introduction of hand sanitizers and 30 Chambers mentioned some form of communication to staff via email, posters or intranet.

Another general trend was the request to work from home, teleworking. In many Parliaments, a 'skeleton staff', only those who are essential for the core business, were required to go to work. Certain groups were allowed to stay at home, either because they were vulnerable to the virus (60+, medical history, pregnant) or because they had possibly contracted the virus (travelled to an affected area, in contact with a person who got affected, feeling unwell).

The measures taken by the European Parliament seemed to be at the top end, both in scope and in strictness.

Sanitary preventive measures

The disinfection or extensive cleaning of parliamentary premises' was set up by 16 Chambers. When it came to protective equipment, only eight Parliaments mentioned that they provided more equipment (see table at the bottom of the document). The Irish House of the Oireachtas, Italian Camera dei Deputati and Romanian Senate mentioned that on top of other measures, they have provided isolation rooms on the premises. In the Hellenic Parliament, an examination room has been installed outside the main building.

Travel and leaves

Most Parliaments restricted travelling. In the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the Hungarian National Assembly, indispensable travel was only allowed after some form of authorisation, for example by the Secretary General or Speaker.

In the European Parliament, strict measures were taken relating to leave of staff members. Requests submitted for leave for travel to affected areas were to be rejected following a communication to all staff on 3 March 2020. Exceptions were made if the request was duly

justified by specific family reasons and followed up by self-isolation for 14 days. In a further communication on 25 March, it was stated that leave outside the country of the place of work should not take place. Director-Generals were asked not to approve leave that involved travelling until further notice. Leave requests that were already approved until the end of June would be cancelled if travelling was foreseen. Leave requests starting on 1 July and onwards would be put on hold.

Visits

Most Parliaments restricted visits to their premises. The Georgian Parliament did not suspend visits, but called on citizens to abstain from visiting, clarifying that visits should only happen in case of urgency (19/3). The German Bundestag specified in their answer (17/3) that '*In rare cases of exceptional visits, it will be in responsibility of the host to make sure that nobody suspected to be infected or actually infected enters parliament buildings.*' The possible future decision of suspension will be coordinated with the risk-assessment of the federal crisis-response-team. The UK parliament also clarified that visits would be limited (16/3).

Media access to the Parliament

Some Chambers spoke about access of the media in parliamentary buildings. The Austrian Nationalrat stressed that only journalists would have access to parliamentary sittings, while others installed measures limiting accessibility for the media. In the Slovakian National Council, the press was allowed outside the buildings, the Albanian Kuvendi prohibited entrance to committee rooms and the Bulgarian National assembly restricted free movement as well as the places and times during which they could carry out their activities. The Slovenian Drzavni Svet set up a temporary press centre in the lobby. In the Moldovan Parliament, the activities of the media was exclusively allowed from the parliament's press room. The Finnish Eduskunta installed a separate interview location to conduct interviews under current safety recommendations.

Statement when entering parliamentary premises

The Hungarian National Assembly, the Romanian Camera Deputatilor, the Polish Sejm and the Moldovan Parliament installed a measure that MPs, civil servants and other visitors needed to submit a statement before entering the buildings. In the case of the Hungarian National Assembly, they had to declare the following:

- If they and/or their relatives recently (within two weeks) were abroad and to where.
- If they received foreign persons in their home and from which country.
- If they lived together with person(s) at increased risk from an epidemiological point of view (working in public transport, shop, school, etc.)
- If they contacted person(s) infected with coronavirus.
- Which means of transport they used to travel to work and for how long.
- If they attended within the last week mass event(s) with more than 100 participants.
- Where and under what conditions they had lunch during their working hours.

In Romania, they had to complete a declaration on their own responsibility, which was renewed every 14 days and each time they returned to the buildings. It contained information about trips abroad, the intention to travel, whether or not they had contact with someone who is or might be infected and whether or not they showed symptoms.

The Polish Sejm stated that any other visitor (other than MPs and Civil servants), was obliged to submit a statement that declared whether he/she did not visit affected areas during the last two weeks. Additionally, the Moldovan Parliament added that MPs and staff needed to complete a declaration on own responsibility regarding individual protective measures.

In the European Parliament, all persons except MEPs and staff working in the Parliament were requested to sign a declaration on honour, confirming that they had not visited risk zones during the past 14 days, when entering the EP premises.

Most of the Parliaments did not have such measures. However, the Czech Chamber of Deputies, Finnish Eduskunta, German Bundestag, Israeli Knesset, Italian Senato, Latvian Saeima, Portuguese Assembleia da República and Spanish Congreso de los Diputados referred to the duty or obligation to inform a relevant State authority or to abide by the measures adopted by the government installed for their respective country. The Estonian Riigikogu and the Swedish Riksdag stressed that all staff was asked to stay at home if they felt unwell or showed symptoms.

Medical examination when entering parliamentary premises

All Parliaments that have installed a medical examination mentioned measuring body temperature with a digital thermometer before entering the buildings/premises. The Bulgarian National Assembly, Israeli Knesset, Italian Camera Dei Deputati and Senato, Latvian Saeima, Luxembourgish Chambre des Députés, Romanian Camera Deputatilor reported on such measures.

Extensive cleaning and/or disinfecting	Protective equipment (rubber gloves, masks, etc.)
Bulgaria National Assembly Cyprus House of Representatives Czechia Chamber of deputies Estonia Riigikogu Finnish Eduskunta France Assemblée Nationale Greece Hellenic Parliament, Hungary National Assembly Ireland House of the Oireachtas Italy Camera dei Deputati Latvia Saeima Netherlands Tweede kamer Portugal Assembleia da República Romania Senat Turkey Grand National Assembly European Parliament	Bulgaria National Assembly France Assemblée Nationale Germany Bundestag, Hungary National Assembly Italy Camera dei Deputati Poland Sejm, Portugal Assembleia da República Switzerland Bundesversammlung

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