

### These Weeks in European Parliaments #2 Responses · Status of Operating · Measures

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#### An Update on National Parliaments of the EU

##### The Hungarian Parliament

##### Status: Parliament will vote on extending state of emergency measures

Parliament of Hungary | 24. March 2020

- **How?** Currently the Parliament is still holding regular plenary sessions.
- **When?** The Parliament voted on an extension of the state of emergency on 23.–24. March 2020.
- **What's Next?** The [introduced bill](#) included the possibility to suspend laws and give the government the power to rule by decree. The bill did not pass because the governing party [did not](#) reach the necessary four-fifth majority in parliament. It will instead be voted on in an ordinary procedure next week.

##### The Finnish Parliament

##### Status: [Extensive option to work remotely](#)

Parliament of Finland | 24. March 2020

- **How?** Members of the parliament are now able to work remotely and participate in parliamentary work by using digital tools. Members may follow parliament's work and leave legislative initiatives digitally, but not vote. Working remotely is recognized as parliament work similarly to being present in parliament, if notified beforehand.
- Only necessary meetings of committees are held. Meetings of committees and parliamentary groups have been moved to larger spaces, including auditoriums, and expert hearings are executed remotely or through written statements.
- **When?** The decision was made by the Speaker's council on 24. March 2020 because of the current application of the Emergency power act and to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

## The Greek Parliament

**Status:** [Parliament operates under reduced functions](#)

Greek City Times | 18. March 2020

- **How?** The Greek Parliament's Conference of Presidents decided that only one draft bill shall be put to vote each week, in the context of the special conditions created by the spread of the coronavirus. According to the announcement, priority will be given to the introduction of bills relating to the management of emergency situations. Moreover, parliamentary debate will take place only once a week, every Thursday.
- The [swearing-in ceremony](#) for Greece's first-ever female president, Katerina Sakellariopoulou took place in a nearly empty parliament as a preventative measure to try to stop the spread of the virus.

## The Spanish Parliament

**Status:** [Parliamentary activity heavily reduced](#)

El Pais | 12. March 2020

- **How?** Due to the Corona crisis the parliamentary activity of the Spanish Congress and Senate was mostly suspended. One exception was the ratification of Macedonia's accession to NATO on 17. March 2020.
- **When?** On 25. March 2020 the Spanish Parliament will [decide](#) whether it approves the government's approval of extending the current state of emergency.
- **What's Next?** In accordance with this constitutional provision, parliamentary groups may present proposals on the scope and conditions in force during the extension up to two hours before the start of the session in which the granting of the requested authorization is to be debated. The session can be followed on YouTube ([Parliament Channel](#)).

## The German Bundestag

**Status:** [Parliament operates with fewer MPs attending the sessions](#)

Tagesschau | 25. March 2020

- **How?** Plenary sessions will continue but MPs have to hold a distance of at least 1.5m, only every third seat is occupied. The quorum of at least 50% of MPs being present in the plenary will temporarily be reduced to 25%. In an [interview](#), President of the Parliament Wolfgang Schäuble ensures that the parliament will maintain its control function throughout the crisis.
- **When?** The new rules will first apply during today's session 25. March 2020.

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**An Update on the European Parliament, Interparliamentary Assemblies,  
and National Parliaments of the EU**

## European Parliament

**Status:** [Extraordinary session on 26. March to take place in Brussels, with remote participation and voting possibilities](#)

Politico | 19. March 2020

- The EP is taking innovative measures in order to ensure its functionality and has introduced a system for MEPs to vote via email for the very first time.
- The [extraordinary plenary session on 26. March 2020](#) which was originally scheduled to be held in Strasbourg will instead take place in Brussels and given the travel restrictions MEPs will be allowed to vote by email.
- In order to vote remotely, MEPs will have to print out voting lists, fill them in, sign, scan or photograph them and send them back for manual counting by Parliament staff. The procedure aims to reduce possible weaknesses, including Parliament getting hacked, while still ensuring MEPs can object to any tallying mistakes.

## NATO Parliamentary Assembly

**Status:** [Meetings postponed but the Assembly and its Secretariat are operating](#)

NATO PA News | 12. March 2020

- **How?** President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and Member of the Open European Dialogue Attila Mesterhazy stated that *“The key to overcoming this crisis lies in each and every one of us acting responsibly and caring for the others as well as for themselves”*. Furthermore, he announced the cancellation of the Standing Committee meeting, originally planned from 27.-29. March in Luxembourg, and the postponement of other activities planned in March. Other NATO PA meetings have been postponed as well.
- **When?** So far, all meetings for the month of March are being postponed. Several meetings due in April have also been cancelled or postponed, and remaining meetings scheduled for that month are under active review.
- **What’s next?** The Assembly and its International Secretariat continue to closely follow developments about the COVID-19 outbreak. The Assembly’s response is guided by the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and relevant national authorities.

## OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

**Status:** [Activities postponed or cancelled but staff are continuing to perform duties by means of telecommuting and the use of ICT tools](#)

OSCE PA News | 17. March 2020

- **How?** OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella sent a letter to all Members of the Parliamentary Assembly describing actions being taken by the assembly to help mitigate the crisis, including closing the offices of the International Secretariat in Copenhagen and Vienna. Staff are continuing to perform duties remotely, he said.

Assembly President George Tsereteli urges coordination and solidarity in response to the coronavirus crisis, with emphasis on human rights and economic measures.

- **When?** Activities scheduled for March, as well as some of those scheduled for April, have been either postponed or cancelled. The annual meeting, scheduled for 3.-7. July 2020 in Vancouver, is not being affected yet. Offices are closed until the 30. March 2020.

## **The Polish Parliament**

**Status:** [Parliament is challenged through suspension of meetings and plenary sessions](#)

Poland In | 19. March 2020

- In Poland, distance proceedings or votes are forbidden by law which poses a real challenge for the Polish parliament, especially in the light of the government emergency package for the economy which implies legislative change which the Parliament will need to find a way of dealing with.
- There are no committee meetings or plenary sessions. Many of the staff are working from home. Journalists who do not have permanent accreditation are not allowed into the building. Everyone entering the building has his body temperature reading taken.
- Politicians from the main opposition party, the Civic Platform (PO) are pressing for a session of Parliament. They argue that as long as precautions are taken and agreements between the parties can be reached the sitting need not take long and that voting in the plenary session could be conducted in groups so that no more than 20-30 MPs are sitting in the chamber together at any one time.

## **The Parliament of the United Kingdom**

**Status:** [Parliamentary activities suspended](#)

UK Parliament | 19. March 2020

- Following a motion approved in the House of Commons Chamber on 19. March 2020, there will be no further debates held in Westminster Hall with effect from Friday, 20. March 2020.
- All visitor access to the Parliamentary Estate has been stopped since Tuesday, 17. March 2020. Access is restricted to passholders and those on essential Parliamentary business.
- Parliamentary officials are receiving daily briefings from Public Health England and are holding daily planning meetings to manage the situation in accordance with that advice.

## **The Dutch Parliament**

**Status:** [New measures, parliamentary process continues](#)

Tweedekamer | 14. March 2020

- **How?** The parliamentary process continues, but the number of physical meetings is limited to the strictly necessary debates. In principle, these are only the debates about the corona virus. The Chamber President Khadija Arib writes in a letter to the MPs: “MPs can ask written questions to the government and conduct written committee consultations. These are exclusive rights of MPs.”
- **When?** For the time being, the measures will apply until 6. April 2020.

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## In the world

### The Brazilian Senate

#### Status: [The first National Parliament to implement a remote voting procedure](#)

Senado Brazil | 20. March 2020

- The Brazilian Parliament is the first national parliament to implement a remote voting procedure. It sets an example of how a voting session can still occur thanks to online facilitation.
- On 20. March 2020, through a remote vote, the Federal Senate unanimously approved the draft legislative decree that recognizes that the country is in a state of public calamity due to the coronavirus pandemic.
- The voting session started at 11:00 am and lasted about two hours until [the result was announced](#).
- It was organized through the so-called Remote Deliberation System (SDR) which is a technological solution instituted by Act of the Steering Committee ([ATD 7/2020](#)), to enable discussion and voting on matters in the Senate, with the capacity to attend joint sessions of Congress National.
- Each senator voiced their vote by saying "yes" or "no" and the collection of votes was sorted by age, starting with the oldest MP.
- Remote voting passed the test, but senators reported occasional problems with audio and video or connection.

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## Resources

**[IPU Centre for Innovation in Parliament:](#)** The Centre for Innovation for Parliament is a partnership between the IPU and parliaments to support parliamentary innovation through improved use of digital tools which was established in 2018.

- The Centre does research on improving parliamentary work through measures like video conferences and delivers [hands-on assistance](#) to parliaments.

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#### European Parliament and Interparliamentary Assemblies

##### **The European Parliament**

**Status:** [Operations are reduced to core functions](#)

EP Press Room | 10. March 2020

- **How?** The aim is to enable the Parliament to exercise its core functions (legislative and budgetary powers, as well as plenary sessions and meetings of the institution's governing bodies), while complying with duty of care for its Members and staff and with a view to protecting public health.
- **When?** Committee meetings and other official activities initially foreseen for the week 16-20 March 2020 have either been postponed or cancelled. The Agenda for the following week has not been published yet.
- **What's next?** A cross-party group of [MEPs](#) called for Parliament to implement a virtual plenary, using the electronic "tokens" they already have at their disposal to verify MEPs' identities during votes.

##### **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**

**Status:** [All current events are cancelled](#)

Parliamentary Assembly News | 16. March 2020

- PACE President Rik Daems consulted the Bureau of the Assembly before taking the decision, which is aimed at protecting the safety and well-being of Assembly members, guests and staff.
- Exceptional measures may be proposed to the Assembly at a later stage in order to adapt its work plan for 2020.

##### **The Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC)**

**Status:** [All events postponed](#)

IPEX | 16. March 2020

- All COSAC events until May are being postponed to yet unknown dates.

## **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**

**Status:** [Meetings are cancelled but work will continue](#)

IPU News | 16. March 2020

- The IPU Assembly and related meetings, due to take place in Geneva, Switzerland, on 16-20 April have been cancelled.
- The IPU will be working remotely over the next few weeks to protect the health of our staff and in the interests of social responsibility to prevent the spread of the virus through human contact.

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## **National Parliaments of the EU**

### **The German Bundestag**

**Status:** [Capacity to act remains intact](#)

Tagesschau | 17. March 2020

- **How?** The last [plenary session](#) on 13. March 2020 was held regularly and without significant safety measures.
- **When?** Concerning the next week of meetings which are to be held from 25. March 2020, there are growing doubts in the Bundestag as to whether they can really take place as planned since 709 MPs are supposed to be in the same room.
- **What's next?** A kind of emergency parliament would be possible. Just like in Bavaria: in the state parliament, the six parliamentary groups decided by mutual agreement to meet with only a fifth of the members in the future. The faction strengths should be retained.

### **The French National Assembly**

**Status:** [Activities reduced to core functions](#)

Assemblée National News | 19. March 2020

- **How?** the Conference of Presidents, in agreement with the Government, decided to reduce parliamentary activity to the examination of urgent and essential activities linked to the crisis in order to control the action of the executive.
- **When?** The National Assembly will resume its work on 19. March 2020 with only speakers, group presidents or members of the government concerned by the questions present in the Chamber.
- **What's next?** Reduction of activity to the essential functions of the institution only, use of telework for Assembly staff whose presence on site is not imperative. Careful monitoring of the recommendations of the Regional Health Agency (ARS).

### **The Italian Parliament**

**Status:** [Working at reduced capacities](#)

La Repubblica | 14. March 2020

- **How?** The Italian Parliament is working at reduced capacity and all buildings close at 7 p.m. press conferences and visits have been suspended; spaces where parliamentarians and their staff meet or work together have been closed.
- **When?** The next seating of is currently scheduled for the 25th of March.
- **What's next?** The initiative "5x5" which consist of 5 MPs from 5 parties (Alessandro Fusacchia, Paolo Lattanzio, Rossella Muroli, Erasmo Palazzotto and Lia Quartapelle), launched an appeal under which the work of parliamentarians and their staff should continue remotely, to ensure citizen representation and support of the government work during these exceptional times.
- The referendum on the cut in the number of MPs moved to 19. September 2020 and municipal elections in seven regions moved to autumn.

## The Swedish Riksdag

**Status:** [Parliamentary sessions with heavily reduced number of MPs](#)

Riksdag | 18. March 2020

- **How?** The group leaders of the parties represented in the Riksdag have agreed to change work procedures so that just 55 out of 349 members of the Riksdag will participate in votes in the Chamber.
- All members of the Riksdag continue to be in service, just in somewhat different forms from usual and administration is cancelling guided tours, events, certain meetings, study visits and visits to the Democracy Workshop.
- **When?** The agreement applies between 16. – 30. March 2020.

## The Polish Sejm

**Status:** [Parliamentary work is reduced to the essentials](#)

Sejm | 16. March 2020

- **How?** Only persons whose presence in the Sejm is justified by ensuring the continuity of parliamentary work and the proper functioning of the Chancellery of the Sejm have access to them.
- The temperature is measured for all persons entering the Sejm and places with increased traffic in the Chancellery of the Sejm were equipped with disinfecting gels.
- **Whats next?** Speaker of the Sejm guaranties that there are no plans to postpone the presidential elections in May.