



Interoffice Memorandum

Date 06 March 2020
To OSCE PA Staff
From Roberto Montella, Secretary General *Roberto Montella*
Object COVID-19 – OSCE PA Temporary Preventive & Mitigation Measures

Since the COVID-19 outbreak in January 2020, I have been closely monitoring the situation having in mind, on the one hand, the well-being of all OSCE PA staff and, on the other, the need to ensure the continuity of our key mandated operations.

The overall situation with COVID-19 is currently very volatile. According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Situation Update of 5 March 2020, the risk assessment at global level is "Very High". Many countries are introducing sharp measures to prevent and mitigate the propagation of the new coronavirus among their citizens. This includes growing restrictions on international travel that may directly impact on our ability to perform our mandated tasks. As it is impossible to predict what will happen over the next weeks and months, the best way forward is prevention and mitigation, together with some good contingency planning.

As of 28 February 2020, I have appointed Marco Bonabello and Dimitrije Todoric to represent the OSCE PA in the OSCE taskforce in charge of developing a common preventive response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Due to rapidly evolving developments, the taskforce meets on a daily basis in the OSCE Secretariat in order to identify and recommend preventive responses, closely liaising with national and international stakeholders on this matter. All OSCE structures are encouraged to maintain close collaboration with the taskforce, address the preventive responses recommended by the taskforce and seek close coordination with relevant national and international stakeholders in their respective host countries. In case the situation further deteriorates, the OSCE Crisis Management Team will be activated and the work of the taskforce will be streamlined into the Crisis Management Team.

Consistently with the Inter-Office Memorandum issued by the OSCE Secretary General of 26 February 2020, following up on our internal correspondence dated 29 February 2020 and 02 March 2020, and building on the preliminary recommendations of the OSCE taskforce, I have decided to introduce the following preventive and mitigation measures on a temporary basis and with immediate effect:

- OSCE PA staff shall keep abreast of the **latest COVID-19 developments** from trusted official sources (e.g. WHO). Host countries (i.e. Denmark and Austria) responses to the outbreak should be duly monitored, as well as recommendations of relevant International Organizations.
- OSCE PA Staff shall implement the **basic protective measures** recommended by WHO (www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public) in order to minimize the risk of transmission of infectious disease in the workplace.

Additional information and guidance may be found on WHO's website. (www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019).

- All “non-essential” **duty-travel** to affected areas¹ is banned until further notice. All other duty-travel shall be reconsidered and, in so far as feasible, postponed or cancelled. The responsibility to determine whether a duty-travel is essential or not rests with the Secretary General, having consulted with the leadership of the Assembly and relevant senior staff as appropriate, and in line with relevant OSCE taskforce's guidance. The well-being of all OSCE PA Staff, the prevention of acquiring the COVID-19 within the OSCE PA and a sensible approach should prevail.
- All **private travel** to affected areas is discouraged. If not avoidable, it should be immediately announced/reported to Senior Management as it could lead to self-quarantine measures upon return.
- Senior management shall regularly reconsider all **official OSCE PA activities** planned until July 2020 (e.g. statutory meetings, EOMs, official visits, conferences, seminars, etc.) against the background of the evolving security and health situation in view of preventing and mitigating all possible concerns and consequences connected to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Whenever a duty-travel, or official activity, cannot be cancelled nor postponed, adequate **mitigation measures** should be put into place, including making pro-active use of video-links and other modern communication technologies, minimizing people-to-people contacts, implementing all required hygiene standards, etc.
- **Flexible working arrangements** shall be enacted to prevent the propagation of seasonal viruses/infections among OSCE PA staff. All employees facing early flu symptoms, returning from trips (both official and private) to affected areas and having particular situations at home (e.g. in case of schools closure, elderly/sick persons to take care of at home, etc.) shall submit a request for telecommuting to their direct supervisors, who will decide being mindful of the well-being of all OSCE PA staff and the need to ensure business continuity.

In moving ahead, the OSCE PA International Secretariat will also consider enacting the following measures in close coordination with our OSCE partners:

- Develop/update its **business continuity plan** to ensure continuation of key operations in case of a pandemic outbreak. This shall entail identifying essential operations and staff and ensuring that all personnel can operate from home (telecommuting) with the appropriate equipment.
- Establishing a rotational **officer-in-charge system** to ensure 24/7 handling of all requests for support by staff on duty.
- Setting up a **COVID-19 committee**, comprising the Chief of Administration and Finance, Security focal point, Staff Representatives and relevant colleagues to advise the Secretary General as appropriate.

With kind regards,

Roberto Montella

¹ According to the WHO, “affected areas” are considered those countries, provinces, territories or cities experiencing ongoing transmission of COVID-19, in contrast to areas reporting only imported cases.