



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

SUMMARY

OF THE

COVID-19 SPECIAL MEETING

Wednesday 18 November 2020

By videoconference

183 JOINT 20 E | Original: English | 30 November 2020

ATTENDANCE LIST

NATO PA BUREAU MEMBERS

President	Gerald E. CONNOLLY (United States)
Vice-Presidents	Mimi KODHELI (Albania) Karen MCCRIMMON (Canada) Joëlle GARRIAUD-MAYLAM (France) Marietta GIANNAKOU (Greece) Attila MESTERHAZY (Hungary)
Former Vice-Presidents	Karl A. LAMERS (Germany) Osman Askin BAK (Turkey)

MEMBER DELEGATIONS

Albania	Myslim MURRIZI Nimet MUSAJ
Belgium	Philippe Didier G. COURARD Rodrigue DEMEUSE Annick PONTHER Orry VAN DE WAUWER
Bulgaria	Plamen MANUSHEV
Canada	Pierre-Hugues BOISVENU Pierre J. DALPHOND Brenda SHANAHAN
Estonia	Andres METSOJA
France	Jean-Jacques BRIDEY Marianne DUBOIS Françoise DUMAS Nicole Monique DURANTON Philippe FOLLIOU <i>(Former Vice-President of the NATO PA)</i> Anissa KHEDHER Sonia KRIMI Jean-Charles LARSONNEUR Philippe MICHEL-KLEISBAUER Patricia MIRALLÈS Laurence TRASTOUR-ISNART
Germany	Peter BEUTH Gerold OTTEN
Greece	Athanasios DAVAKIS Anastasios DIMOSCHAKIS Marios KATSIS Andreas LOVERDOS Nikolaos MANOLAKOS Marios SALMAS Christos SPIRTZIS Theodora TZAKRI Manousos Konstantinos VOLOUDAKIS
Iceland	Njall Trausti FRIDBERTSSON Thorgerdur K. GUNNARSDOTTIR
Italy	Andrea CANGINI Luigi IOVINO Andrea Giorgio ORSINI

Latvia	Gatis EGLITIS Ojars Eriks KALNINS Aleksandrs KIRSTEINS Ivans KLEMENTJEVS
Luxembourg	Nancy ARENDT KEMP Lydia MUTSCH
Netherlands	Toine BEUKERING Sven KOOPMANS
Norway	Marianne MARTHINSEN Tellef Inge MORLAND Sverre MYRLI Liv Signe NAVARSETE Christian TYBRING-GJEDDE
Poland	Joanna KLUZIK-ROSTKOWSKA Rafal SLUSARZ Michal Roch SZCZERBA
Portugal	Lara Fernandes MARTINHO Marcos PERESTRELLO DE VASCONCELLOS
Romania	Nicu FALCOI
Slovakia	Ludovit GOGA Jan SZOLLOS
Slovenia	Andrej CERNIGOJ
Spain	Zaida CANTERA Fernando GUTIERREZ Manuel MESTRE Begona NASARRE
Turkey	Kamil AYDIN Utku CAKIROZER Ahmet Berat CONKAR Fikri ISIK Mevlut KARAKAYA Ilhan KESICI Faik OZTRAK Kamil Okyay SINDIR Sirin UNAL Zehra TASKESENLIOGLU Ahmet YILDIZ Taner YILDIZ
United Kingdom	Stuart ANDERSON Harriett BALDWIN Alun CAIRNS Lord CAMPBELL OF PITTENWEEM <i>(Former Vice-President of the NATO PA)</i> Angela CRAWLEY Jeffrey DONALDSON Nusrat GHANI Kevan JONES Lord JOPLING Alec SHELBRooke Bob STEWART
United States	Neal Patrick DUNN Brett GUTHRIE Rick LARSEN

ASSOCIATE DELEGATIONS

Austria	Andreas MINNICH
Azerbaijan	Ziyafat ASGAROV Kamran BAYRAMOV
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Nikola LOVRINOVIC Asim SARAJLIC
Georgia	Kakha KUCHAVA
Serbia	Zarko MICIN Dragan SORMAZ
Sweden	Kenneth G. FORSLUND
Switzerland	Josef DITTLI Pierre-Alain Roger FRIDEZ Werner SALZMANN
Ukraine	Mauro TUENA Solomiia BOBROVSKA Yehor CHERNIEV

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

European Parliament	Kris PEETERS
---------------------	--------------

REGIONAL PARTNER AND MEDITERRANEAN

Algeria	Youcef MESSAR
Israel	Zvi HAUSER

PARLIAMENTARY OBSERVERS

Assembly of Kosovo	Arberie NAGAVCI
Australia	Patrick GORMAN Andrew WALLACE
Japan	Hideki NIIZUMA
Kazakhstan	Abay TASBULATOV

I. Opening remarks by Osman Askin BAK (Turkey), NATO PA Vice President

1. **Osman Askin Bak** (TK) welcomed his colleagues to the COVID-19 Special Meeting. Mr Bak stated that the Assembly's five committees – as well as the Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group (GSM) – prepared reports on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. He explained that the draft reports were discussed at the online committee meetings in July 2020 and subsequently revised for the Annual Session. Mr Bak noted that the reports examine the various security implications of the COVID-19 crisis and offer recommendations for the future. He noted that there would not be voting on the reports during this meeting and that the reports would be adopted at the meetings of respective Committees. He then yielded the floor to the Rapporteurs.

II. Consideration of the Revised Draft Special Reports followed by a discussion

2. **Joëlle Garriaud-Maylam** (France) presented the CDS report on [*The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on the Civil Dimension Of Security*](#).

3. The rapporteur noted that regimes in China, Russia, and Iran responded to COVID-19 outbreak by curbing the fundamental freedoms of their citizens. In contrast, NATO's democracies had to find legitimate measures to address the crisis. She emphasised that democratic responses must be proportional, time-limited, and implemented under parliamentary and civil society oversight.

4. Ms Garriaud-Maylam expressed concern over the increased spread of disinformation and propaganda connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, both through the traditional media and social networks. The Committee's report details NATO's efforts to deal with these disinformation campaigns.

5. The rapporteur explained how the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated the pre-existing social challenges, such as migration. She stressed that implementation of measures to limit travel should not undermine the positive contributions of migration to Western societies. She also drew attention to challenges faced by children, especially the interrupted access to education.

6. Ms Garriaud-Maylam highlighted the need to strengthen the resilience of NATO's societies. It is imperative that not only Euro-Atlantic institutions but also societies are prepared to respond to a future crisis, whatever its nature, the rapporteur said.

7. **Attila Mesterhazy** (HU) introduced the report on [*NATO's Essential Role in the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#).

8. Mr Mesterhazy stated that NATO showcased effective crisis response capabilities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that Allies supported each other by donating medical supplies, providing essential personnel, transportation, and repatriation assistance. He counted hundreds of missions executed by over half a million people in NATO's armed forces.

9. The rapporteur described NATO's preparations for the second wave of COVID-19 infections. He noted that the Allies increased prepositioned equipment stocks, established an emergency fund to assist with supply purchases, and activated NATO's vast scientific network to look for innovative solutions to the various COVID-19 challenges.

10. Mr Mesterhazy argued that – throughout the pandemic – the Allies maintained a robust defence and deterrence posture in a turbulent international environment. NATO has faced

complex challenges. Specifically, he criticised Russian and Chinese propaganda and disinformation connected to the COVID-19 crisis.

11. The rapporteur summarised the report's recommendations. First, he called on the Allies to showcase the strength of their democratic systems. Second, he recommended that the Allies improve their self-sufficiency at both national and NATO levels. Third, he encouraged the Alliance to look for ways to counter disinformation by NATO's competitors. Fourth, he emphasised the need to maintain burden sharing and keep defence investments on an upward trajectory. Fifth, he encouraged the strengthening of NATO's cooperation with the European Union (EU), specifically, in facilitating military mobility and combatting disinformation.

12. **Christian Tybring-Gjedde** (NO) summarised the report on [*The Economic Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#).

13. Mr Tybring-Gjedde stressed that the virus has put a sudden stop to entire categories of human and economic activity. He referred to a statement made by the OECD Secretary General at the NATO PA meeting in February 2020 where he warned that the second wave of the pandemic could lead to serious, long-term economic challenges.

14. The rapporteur said that pandemics are not only medical emergencies but also economic shocks. Pandemics affect output, investment, employment, and trade, while lockdowns undercut economic growth. The economic challenges are exacerbated by large budget deficits, which the governments must run to help citizens and businesses.

15. Mr Tybring-Gjedde explained that specific economic sectors were particularly hurt by the pandemic. The collapse in travel hit the airlines industry and the aeroplane manufacturers, with spill-over effects elsewhere. The energy sector was affected by the collapse in international trade as well as the Russian-Saudi oil price war.

16. The rapporteur pleaded for deeper international cooperation in dealing with the economic and public health crises. The Allies need to do more to develop greater resilience to better react to future pandemics. They need to find credible strategies for monetary, fiscal, and trade cooperation. The Allies should also reduce their reliance on a single supplier for vital medical equipment, particularly when that supplier is considered a strategic rival.

17. Mr Tybring-Gjedde requested smarter collective approaches to defence procurement and investments. He spoke on the need for adequate defence spending: 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) to defence and 20% of defence spending to equipment procurement and defence research. The Rapporteur concluded by announcing two changes in paragraphs 15 and 57 of the report.

18. **Lord Campbell of Pittenweem** (UK) outlined the report on [*COVID-19 and Transatlantic Security*](#).

19. Lord Campbell opened by stating that the COVID-19 pandemic is a once-in-a-century crisis with far-reaching effects on transatlantic security. The COVID-19 lessons need to be examined carefully, in light of the ongoing NATO 2030 reflection process.

20. The rapporteur noted that – early in the pandemic – some thought that the authoritarian Chinese regime was better equipped to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. Instead, he proposed that the Alliance's liberal democracies can yet emerge stronger from the crisis. For example, NATO has demonstrated its usefulness and agility by facilitating relief assistance. Besides, the Allies cooperated extensively on a bilateral basis. Throughout, NATO's commitment to defence and deterrence stayed credible.

21. Lord Campbell congratulated the EU on providing similarly valuable assistance. The EU's EUR 1.8 trillion assistance package will be indispensable for the economic recovery. He noted that EU-NATO cooperation increased during the pandemic, particularly in combatting disinformation.

22. The rapporteur argued that the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to revisit the global order and rectify some of its deficiencies. In particular, the international system would need to adapt to the realities of the 21st century, including a fairer distribution of the benefits of globalisation and addressing existential challenges such as climate change. The Euro-Atlantic community needs to take an active part in these efforts.

23. Lord Campbell pointed out that the post-pandemic global security environment will likely be characterised by increased geopolitical competition. It is therefore important that the Alliance reaches adequate levels of funding for defence. NATO's parliamentarians have an essential role to play in this regard.

24. Lord Campbell stressed that the Alliance must adopt the "whole-of-society" approach to security and promote resilience. NATO should upgrade its partnerships in the Asia-Pacific, with no return to "business as usual" with China. The Allies need to diversify their supply chains in strategic areas. They need to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention by endowing it with a verification mechanism, the rapporteur said in conclusion.

25. **Kevan Jones** (UK) reviewed the report on [COVID-19, International Security, and the Importance of NATO's Science and Technology Network](#).

26. Mr Jones stated that science and technology are of crucial importance in fighting against COVID-19. Robotics, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, big data, and advanced analytics are already used in crisis responses. Such technologies will grow increasingly important. As an example, he alluded to knowledge-sharing tools, such as the World Health Organisation's (WHO) "chatbot." These technologies offer innovative approaches to tackling the pandemic and help ordinary people prepare for the second wave.

27. The rapporteur stressed the need to consider significant ethical, legal, and policy issues that arise with the rapid advancement these technologies. Regulations and safeguards are needed to protect ourselves against the misuse of technology. Parliaments are well-positioned to play a key role in this regard.

28. Mr Jones turned to analysing what NATO's science and technology community is doing to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that NATO presides over the largest collaborative research forum in the field of defence and security. NATO has launched several initiatives to support the international efforts in combatting COVID-19, such as the "NATO Chief Scientist Challenge."

29. The rapporteur highlighted the role of NATO's Science and Technology Organisation (STO). The STO has acted as a collaborative platform where scientists from the Allied and partner nations have shared scientific knowledge and technological expertise.

30. Mr Jones summed up the report's recommendations. The most important concerns the need to strengthen Allied resilience against future pandemics. NATO's science and technology network should be expanded. Cooperation with other partners, such as the EU, should also be strengthened, the rapporteur said.

31. Following the presentations, Mr Bak opened the floor for questions and comments.

32. **Theodora Tzakri** (GR) agreed that democratic systems can come out of the COVID-19 crisis more resilient. However, this requires adequate defence expenditures. She directed her question to Mr Tybring-Gjedde: with the current COVID-19 pressures on Allied budgets, is the 2% of GDP still an appropriate reference point for defence spending?

33. Mr Tybring-Gjedde stated it was difficult to foresee the long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the speed of recovery. Some countries or sectors will suffer more than others. With such limited information, he suggested it was too early to speculate on the post-pandemic feasibility of the 2% spending target. He also noted that not only the defence sector but other sectors as well will be expecting adequate funding in the wake of the pandemic.

34. **Irakli Sesiashvili** (GE) thanked all the international observers who attended the recent Georgian parliamentary elections conducted amid the pandemic, including the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's delegation. He directed his remarks to Ms Garriaud-Maylam, emphasising that human security issues are of paramount importance. On behalf of the Georgian delegation, he proposed specific amendments to the paragraph 33 in her report, relating to disinformation in the context of the pandemic.

35. Ms Garriaud-Maylam found the proposed amendments acceptable. She reiterated the importance of addressing the problem of disinformation and fake news: she noted that France 24 identifies some 300,000 fake news items on a monthly basis. She said that the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security will prepare a report on this subject in 2021.

36. **Ziyafat Asgarov** (AZ) drew attention to the May 2020 summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Azerbaijan holds the presidency. Azerbaijan used its presidency to have the United Nations (UN) hold a special meeting on the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2020. He directed his question to Mr Mesterhazy, asking about NATO's cooperation with the UN on the pandemic.

37. Mr Mesterhazy highlighted the activities of the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), which cooperates with the UN. NATO has also cooperated with the EU on the COVID-19 responses. Mr Mesterhazy expressed hope that NATO, the UN and the EU will collaborate on future vaccine distribution.

38. **Ahmet Yildiz** (TR) highlighted the Turkish contributions to the Alliance's COVID-19 response. He described several amendments he would like to see reflected in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's reports. He stated that a vaccine is necessary to defeat the pandemic. He expressed hope that wealthy countries will help the less wealthy ones in acquiring the vaccines. He also emphasised the need for fairer burden-sharing within the Alliance during the COVID-19 period and after the pandemic.

39. **Ivans Klementjevs** (LV) stated that lawmakers play essential roles in addressing the economic impacts of COVID-19. He talked about the issues of distance-learning and the pandemic's effects on the tourism industry.

40. **Yegor Cherniev** (UA) regretted that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NATO PA Session in Kyiv, Ukraine, could not take place in May 2020. Mr Cherniev offered his perspective on how NATO has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the role of the Alliance's scientist networks. He emphasised Ukraine's willingness to cooperate with NATO on the COVID-19 challenge.

41. Ms Garriaud-Maylam raised the issue of Taiwan joining the WHO. She stressed the importance of learning from Taiwan's success in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

42. **Bob Stewart** (UK) echoed Ms Garriaud-Maylam's thoughts on Taiwan. Taiwan should have at least an observer status within the WHO, Mr Stewart said.

III. Closing remarks by Osman Askin BAK (Turkey), NATO PA Vice President

43. Mr Bak thanked the Rapporteurs, all Members, the staff of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and the interpreters. He declared the meeting closed.
