



**INTERPARLIAMENTARY GROUP
OF POLAND**

Speech by Piotr Babinetz (Poland)

**Overcoming the pandemic today and building a better tomorrow:
role of parliaments**

1. The COVID-19 pandemic is a novel experience for all of us, including parliaments and parliamentarians. Pandemics is not only a health issue but also a social, economic, legal and political challenge and parliaments need to take concrete measures.
 2. From the perspective of parliamentary involvement, the role of representative assemblies in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic boils down to three key areas of action. First of all, parliaments needed to establish in their internal regulations the conditions for performing parliamentary activities in the context of the pandemic. In this respect, the Polish Sejm responded very quickly: already at the end of March/beginning of April 2020, the House adopted regulations which helped resume works remotely, with the aid of distance communication tools. Thanks to an attitude of openness to telework, the pandemic did not paralyze parliamentary works, and in some cases even led to improvements by removing traditional hurdles in the management of the sittings of the Sejm and its bodies. Possibilities for the Sejm to work remotely with the aid of distance communication means has also other applications. That is why this modality has been quite readily used not only to perform traditional parliamentary tasks (including lawmaking) but also to take actions in new areas. Parliamentary diplomacy is a case in point as it took a considerable speed because of the pandemic and newly established telework solutions. Secondly, during the pandemic parliaments undertook intensive legislative works to adopt special anti-COVID regulations. This lawmaking
-

process was intended to protect people and the economy against the effects of announced lockdowns and constituted an essential area of the parliamentary work. The adoption of support measures packages, including various forms of safeguards for employees and employers, as well as the establishment of the legal framework for the reorganization of the healthcare system most often required the relevant legislative basis, which entailed a high level of activity of representative assemblies, fostered by previously established remote work modalities. Finally and thirdly, parliaments' works in connection with the pandemics and its effects revolve around measures devised to implement aid mechanism in order to allow for post-pandemic economic recovery. The implementation of national recovery and resilience plans, the mobilization of domestic and European funding and the control of spending against the criteria of purposefulness, sound management and diligence, are those areas where parliaments are becoming more and more active.

3. Comprehensive measures are required to prepare the healthcare system for the post-COVID-19 recovery. The healthcare system should be built with due consideration of crisis management requirements as a complement element to the system able to resist various threats. Because of a relatively small number of patients who needed hospitalization during the so-called first wave of COVID-19, Poland could manage the outbreak in standard healthcare institutions adapted for this purpose (i.e. centers with the infection disease departments or specialty centers, so-called "single-name hospitals"). Due to a substantial increase in infection rates during the second and the third epidemic wave a significantly higher number of healthcare institutions and healthcare professionals had to be involved in the treatment of COVID-19 patients: 1) temporary hospitals were set up as a back-up in case of a sudden flow of COVID patients; 2) primary care practitioners were involved in diagnosing and treatment of suspected and confirmed cases of infection with SARS-CoV-2 virus; 3) the network of mobile collection points (drive-through points) was extended; 4) in the first days of 2021 the national COVID-19 vaccination plan was launched (as of 18 May 2021 nearly 12 million of Poles have already had at least one jab, while nearly five millions had both of them).
-

4. The highly evolving epidemiological situation was a determinant factor in the approach adopted to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. The assumptions for actions pursued under the health policy have been included in “The Anti-COVID-19 Strategy”. These steps were possible thanks to the posting of healthcare staff to healthcare institutions directly involved in the treatment of COVID-19 patients by virtue of the decision of voivodship governors. The involvement of other ministries and the use of administrative measures turned out to be important as well in the prevention and fight against COVID-19. Now, steps have been taken to restore, to the maximum extent, access to medical care for all patients. Furthermore, analyses are under way on how to prepare the healthcare system for post-pandemic challenges, and namely how to provide a rehabilitation program for post-COVID patients, and how to work out public health solutions to limit the risk of the pandemic spread in the future.
 5. Poland puts a strong emphasis on healthcare computerization measures and the development of remote medical care, including telemedicine. The most recent experiences related to COVID-19 proved that these initiatives are effective. Furthermore, as it was showcased by the pandemic, it is important to ensure a swift collection of patient data, in line with privacy protection rules, and the ability to exchange and compare them in an efficient manner. This applies to data on infection rates and data used in contact tracing systems which, in order to be effective, need to allow for the cross-border exchange of information.
 6. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the loss of health and life to millions of people all over the world. The negative impact of the pandemic means also mental disorders, including depression, violence and addictions. Vulnerable groups are the most exposed, in particular children who during the pandemic often had but limited contacts with their peers and on many occasions distance learning turned out to be rather inefficient. As a result of the pandemic, social inequalities have become more acute. Moreover, the pandemic has contributed to major changes on the labor market and in education. These developments and their effects require further detailed examination with a view of working out the best solutions.
-