
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CONSIDERING VIRTUAL MEETINGS, PLENARY DUE TO VIRUS

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The European Parliament is considering whether to hold its meetings and plenary sessions by teleconference instead of in person due to growing concerns about the fast-spreading coronavirus that originated in China, a spokesman said on Thursday (27 February).

Its being seriously considered. Well know more in the next few days, the spokesman said.

No country should make the fatal mistake of assuming it will be spared the coronavirus, the World Health Organization said, as governments from Iran to Australia raced to contain the epidemics rapid global spread.

All continents affected except Antarctica

Countries on three continents reported their first cases of the coronavirus on Friday as the world prepared for a pandemic of the disease and investors dumped equities in expectation of a global recession.

Share prices were on track for the worst week since the global financial crisis in 2008 as virus-related disruptions to international travel and supply chains fueled fears of recession in the United States and the eurozone.

Mainland China □ where the virus originated late last year □ reported 327 new cases, the lowest since 23 January, taking its tally to more than 78,800 cases with almost 2,800 deaths.

Four more countries reported first cases taking the number of countries outside China with infections to 55, where about 3,700 cases have killed about 70 people. Countries other than China are accounting for about three-quarters of new infections.

An Italian man who arrived in Nigeria this week was confirmed as the first coronavirus case in Africas most populous country. And a person who returned on a flight from Iran became the first in faraway New Zealand.

While in eastern Europe, Belarus and Lithuania both reported their first cases.

World Health Organization (WHO) Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said all nations

should prepare.

This virus has pandemic potential, Tedros said in Geneva on Thursday. This is not a time for fear. This is a time for taking action to prevent infection and save lives now.

Ratings agency Moodys said a pandemic – usually taken to mean a disease spreading quickly in different places – would trigger global and US recessions in the first half of the year.

Decisive

In addition to stockpiling medical supplies, governments ordered schools shut and canceled big gatherings to try to halt the flu-like disease known as COVID-19.

US President Donald Trumps administration was considering invoking special powers to expand production of protective gear, two officials told Reuters.

In Europe, Frances number of reported cases doubled, Germany warned of an impending epidemic and Greece, a gateway for refugees from the Middle East, announced tighter border controls.

The death toll in Italy, Europes worst-hit country, rose to 17 and the number of people who tested positive for the illness increased by more than 200 to 655.

Germany has about 45 cases, France about 38 and Spain 23, according to a Reuters count.

Tedros told reporters in Geneva that Iran, Italy and South Korea were at a decisive point in their efforts to prevent a wider outbreak.

South Korea has the most cases outside China, and reported 256 new infections on Friday, bringing its total infections to 2,022.

The head of the WHOs emergency program, Dr Mike Ryan, said Irans outbreak may be worse than realized. It has suffered the most deaths outside China – 26 from 245 reported cases.

US intelligence agencies are monitoring the spread of coronavirus in Iran as well as India, where only a handful of cases of have been reported, sources said.

Tokyo Olympics future

Japan is scheduled to host the 2020 Olympics in July but Ryan said discussions were being held with organizers about whether to go ahead.

As of Friday, confirmed cases in Japan topped 200, with four deaths, excluding more than 700 cases and four more deaths from a quarantined cruise liner, Diamond Princess.

Japan has told schools to close and said big gatherings should be scrapped or curtailed, while pledging the Games will go ahead.

Tokyo Disneyland will be closed from Saturday to 15 March, its operator said, leaving all of Walt Disney Cos theme parks in Asia temporarily shut.

The coronavirus has played havoc with global aviation and tourism as airlines cancel flights, countries ban visitors from hot spots and nervous passengers put off travel.

California-based Facebook Inc said it would cancel its annual developer conference and Microsoft Corp withdrew from a gaming conference.

Scientists warn that much remains unknown about the virus, which can lead to pneumonia, and say a vaccine could take up to 18 months to develop.

Hong Kong quarantined a pet dog of a coronavirus patient after it showed weak positive results for the virus, even though it did not have symptoms. Further tests would be conducted.

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) director Robert Redfield said the agency was evaluating how long coronavirus could be infectious on surfaces.

On copper and steel its pretty typical, its pretty much about two hours, Redfield told a House of Representatives hearing. But I will say on other surfaces - cardboard or plastic - its longer.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/health-consumers/news/european-parliament-considering-virtual-meetings-plenary-due-to-virus/>

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