DECISION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 15 December 2021

on extraordinary measures enabling the European Parliament to carry out its duties

and exercise its prerogatives under the Treaties

THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

Having regard to Rules 237a, 237c and 237d of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament,

Having regard to the approval of the Conference of Presidents at its meeting of 15 December 2021,

Whereas:

(1) The overall epidemiological situation within the Union continues to be characterised by a high and rapidly increasing case notification rate. Based on the latest data provided by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control a further increase of the case notification rates, death rates and hospital admissions is expected. Moreover, the Omicron variant has been detected in the majority of Member States and research is ongoing to assess the impact of this new variant, including its level of transmission rate and the risk of evasion of protection conferred by vaccination or recovery from a COVID-19 infection.

(2) Member States have stepped up vaccination efforts to reduce the number of people who remain unvaccinated and deployed booster doses to enhance existing protection against COVID-19. In parallel, Member States are reinforcing their measures to limit the increased spread of COVID-19. Those measures include the reintroduction of restrictions on access to certain facilities open to the general public, restrictions on entry by employees to their workplace and limitations on the freedom of movement. In many instances, those restrictions do not apply when a person is able to present an EU Digital COVID Certificate or an equivalent proof of vaccination, recovery or a negative PCR test.

(3) Parliament has reinforced its risk-mitigation and safety measures in order to protect the health of Members, staff and other persons working in the European Parliament, while at the same time safeguarding Parliament’s operational capacity, particularly its legislative and budgetary activity. Following the Decision of the Bureau of the European Parliament of 27 October 2021 on exceptional health and safety rules
governing access to the European Parliament's buildings, access to Parliament's buildings in the three places of work is granted only upon presentation of a valid EU Digital COVID Certificate or equivalent certificate. In addition, by Decision of the President of 25 November 2021, the security measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 were prolonged and adapted.

(4) The threats and challenges deriving from the coronavirus continue to constitute exceptional circumstances and, in light of an overall epidemiological situation of high or very high concern where the case notification rates and other indicators are forecast to further increase, unforeseeable circumstances beyond Parliament's control.

(5) On the basis of reliable evidence from, inter alia, the European Centre of Disease Prevention and Control and confirmed by Parliament's Medical Preparedness and Crisis Management Unit, for reasons of safety, it is dangerous for Parliament to convene in accordance with its usual procedures as set out in the Rules of Procedure and its adopted calendar. It is therefore necessary to adopt appropriate extraordinary measures to enable Parliament to continue to carry out its duties and to exercise its prerogatives.

(6) Following the advice of Parliament's Medical Preparedness and Crisis Management Unit, during part-sessions, meetings of committees, interparliamentary delegations and other bodies, physical distancing of 1,5 metre should be ensured in order to further minimise health risks for persons present at those meetings.

(7) The part-session starting on 17 January 2022 is essentially dedicated to the election of the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors of Parliament, with only a limited number of votes and debates expected. Physical presence is necessary both because of the solemn nature of the election and of the swift interactions possibly needed between the ballots. Therefore, the sittings of the part-session starting on 17 January 2022 should be held in physical presence with additional safeguards.

(8) It would not always be possible to guarantee physical distancing of 1,5 metre between all Members present during the sittings of the part-session if only the hemicycle was used. Therefore, the sittings of the part-session in Strasbourg starting on 17 January 2022 should be held in the hemicycle and, where necessary, simultaneously in rooms S1.4 and N1.4 of the WEISS building, thereby guaranteeing that Members can appropriately exercise their mandate while respecting the requirement of physical distancing of 1,5 metre. In accordance with Rule 237d, first indent, where the hemicycle and rooms S1.4 and N1.4 of the WEISS building are simultaneously used, those meeting rooms collectively constitute the Chamber within the meaning of the Rules of Procedure.

(9) Due to the current epidemiological situation, the remote participation regime should continue to apply for meetings of committees, of interparliamentary delegations and of other bodies of Parliament, thereby ensuring that Members can exercise certain of their parliamentary rights by electronic means. Some rights and practices cannot be exercised appropriately in those meetings without the Members’ physical presence and therefore
should be adapted for the duration of this Decision in accordance with the provisions laid down in Chapter 2 of the Decision of the Bureau of 8 February 2021 on rules governing voting under the remote participation regime and the Guidelines on the remote voting procedure in committees as adopted by the Conference of Committee Chairs.

(10) Missions of committees and inter-parliamentary delegations, election observation missions, democratic support activities and inter-parliamentary meetings should be able to be authorised based on an individual risk assessment, and in line with the applicable national, Union and international rules. It should also be possible for such activities to be organised remotely.

(11) Rule 237a is applied by this Decision as a last resort. The extraordinary measures provided for in this Decision are strictly necessary and no less restrictive measures are available or equally suitable to enable Parliament to continue to carry out its duties and exercise its prerogatives under the Treaties while ensuring safety.

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Chapter I - Parliament’s part-session and sittings

Article 1

The sittings of the part-session starting on 17 January 2022 shall be held in the hemicycle as well as, where necessary, simultaneously in rooms S1.4 and N1.4 of the WEISS building in accordance with Rule 237d.

Article 2

1. In the hemicycle and, where necessary, in rooms S1.4 and N1.4 of the WEISS building, Members shall speak from the front rostrums.

2. In the hemicycle and, where necessary, in rooms S1.4 and N1.4 of the WEISS building, the President shall ensure that physical distancing of 1,5 metre between attendees is observed.
Chapter II - Committees and interparliamentary delegations

Article 3

1. Committees and interparliamentary delegations shall organise their meetings, including hearings and workshops, under the remote participation regime laid down in Rule 237c.

2. In committees and interparliamentary delegations, Members shall exercise their voting rights in accordance with the provisions laid down in Chapter 2 of the Decision of the Bureau of 8 February 2021 on rules governing voting under the remote participation regime.

3. The rights and practices which cannot be exercised appropriately without the physical presence of Members shall be adapted as laid down in the Guidelines on the remote voting procedure in committees as adopted by the Conference of Committee Chairs.

4. In meeting rooms, the Chair shall ensure that physical distancing of 1,5 metre between attendees is observed.

Article 4

Without prejudice to the general rules on authorisation, missions of committees and interparliamentary delegations, election observation missions, democratic support activities and inter-parliamentary meetings may be authorised on a case-by-case basis, based on an individual risk assessment, and in line with the applicable national, Union and international rules.

Chapter III - Other bodies

Article 5

1. Meetings of other bodies may be organised under the remote participation regime laid down in Rule 237c.

2. In meeting rooms, the Chair shall ensure that physical distancing of 1,5 metre between attendees is observed.
Chapter IV - Final provisions

Article 6

This Decision shall be without prejudice to any additional preventive and safety measures for risk mitigation by the President, the Bureau of the European Parliament or other competent authorities of Parliament.

Article 7

1. This Decision shall enter into force on 20 December 2021 with its publication on Parliament’s website.

2. The Decision of 19 November 2021 on extraordinary measures enabling the European Parliament to carry out its duties and exercise its prerogatives under the Treaties is revoked.

3. This Decision shall lapse on 23 January 2022 unless renewed, amended or revoked before this date.

Strasbourg, 15 December 2021

David Maria SASSOLI