



Parliamentary Assembly  
Assemblée parlementaire

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

# **Members Handbook**

## Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

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# Foreword by the Secretary General of the Assembly

Dear members of the Assembly,

Whether you are a new or an existing member, you have an important role to play in ensuring that the Parliamentary Assembly fulfils its function as one of the two statutory organs of the Council of Europe, working to promote the principles of parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

Your active involvement in such varied activities as debating and voting on a contested issue in the plenary chamber and in committee, acting as a rapporteur for a committee, observing elections in a country or electing a judge to the European Court of Human Rights are crucial for the continued vibrant democratic influence exerted by the Assembly.

This handbook aims to provide an introduction to the working of this Assembly which can, at first glance, look complex. It does not aim to be exhaustive but rather to encourage you to take that first step, or the next step, to take advantage of all the opportunities that are offered to you to become involved.

While rules of procedure and administrative regulations are a necessary framework to channel energies and resources in a multi-lingual and multi-national parliamentary forum, the Assembly remains first and foremost a human network of committed parliamentarians and officials motivated to defend humanistic values.

I would like to assure you that all the members of the secretariat are committed to providing you, as every member of the Assembly, with the support that you need to fulfill that role.

On behalf of all my colleagues of the secretariat of the Assembly, I wish you every success with your mission.

Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis  
Secretary General of the Assembly

# Glossary

**ALDE** – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

**Alternate** – Replacement member in a committee

**AS/Cdh** – Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights

**AS/Cult** – Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

**AS/Ega** – Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

**AS/Jur** – Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights

**AS/Mig** – Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

**AS/Mon** – Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)

**AS/Pol** – Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

**AS/Pro** – Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs

**AS/Soc** – Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

**EC/DA** – European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance

**EPP/CD** – Group of the European People's Party

**Full member** – Full member in a committee entitled to vote and speak

**Chamber/Hemicycle** – Plenary Chamber of the Assembly

**NGOs** – Non-governmental organisations

**ODIHR** – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE

**OSCE** – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**PACE** – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

**Palais de l'Europe** – Main building of the Council of Europe, where Assembly plenary sittings and committee meetings take place

**Part-Sessions** – Four parts of the yearly Ordinary Session of the Assembly

**Representative** – Full member of the Assembly entitled to vote and speak during part-sessions

**SOC** – Socialists, Democrats and Greens

**Speakers List** – Electronic list on which members wishing to speak in a debate or ask a question to an invited personality must enter their name

**Substitute** – Replacement member of the Assembly entitled to vote and speak only if duly designated by the national delegation

**UEL** – Group of the Unified European Left

## **The Assembly at a glance**

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) is a pan-European political assembly comprising 612 nationally elected politicians (306 representatives and 306 substitutes) from 46 parliaments of the member States of the Council of Europe representing over 700 million Europeans.

### **The Assembly within the institutional structure of the Council of Europe**

According to the Statute of the Council of Europe, the Assembly is one of the two statutory organs of the Organisation. Although it is with the Committee of Ministers that the Assembly is most formally linked, it can also be seen as linking together the other institutions. The Committee of Ministers it holds to account, supplements and supports; the European Court of Human Rights it supports while respecting that Court's judicial independence; with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities it brings together the other levels of democratic representation and executive responsibilities to join in the common aim of the strengthening of democracy and upholding the rule of law. Finally, both the Committee of Ministers and the Commissioner for Human Rights report to the Assembly on a regular basis.

The Assembly's status within the Council of Europe is also underlined by the way in which it has a decisive role in the election of judges of the European Court of Human Rights, the European Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and other senior officials of the Organisation, as well as an advisory role in certain other appointments. Prior to the elections, the Assembly interviews the candidates and, for the judges and the Commissioner, makes a recommendation on the most suitable candidate.

### **What are the Assembly's mandate and goals?**

Building on the function of "deliberative organ" assigned to it by the Statute, the Assembly has over the years acquired a real parliamentary mandate. Its primary goal is to promote debates on emerging and topical European issues, identify trends and best practices and set benchmarks and standards.



In a nutshell, its powers are:

- to demand action from governments represented on the Committee of Ministers, which must reply;
- through its opinions, to influence the terms on which States join the Council of Europe;
- to “monitor” how far States fulfill their promises regarding democratic standards;
- to propose sanctions, by recommending the exclusion or suspension of a member State;
- to put questions to Heads of State and Heads of Government when they address the Assembly;
- to uncover new facts about human rights violations, promoting justice;
- to improve national law and practice by proposing multilateral treaties;
- to ask for legal opinions on the laws and constitutions of members States;
- to elect the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Assembly’s Secretary General, the judges of the European Court of Human Rights and the Commissioner for Human Rights.

### **How are topical issues picked up?**

The work of the Assembly and its committees is fuelled by the initiatives of members, who have the possibility of tabling a motion for a resolution or recommendation on any issue which they consider merits discussion by the Assembly. It is up to the Presidential Committee and the Bureau of the Assembly to determine whether the issue merits further discussion by a committee. If so, the relevant committee shall be responsible for examining the matter by appointing a rapporteur to prepare a report.

The draft report, including a draft resolution and/or draft recommendation, will be voted upon by the committee and then presented to the plenary Assembly or the Standing Committee for debate. At the end of the debate, amendments to the draft resolution or draft recommendation can be considered.

The agenda of Assembly sessions or Standing Committee meetings shall be drawn up by the Bureau on the basis of reports approved by the committees. The Bureau may also propose to the Assembly, on

the initiative of the political groups, delegations and committees, to hold a current affairs debate or a debate under urgent procedure.

The rapporteur and the relevant committee shall be responsible for following up the measures proposed in the resolution or recommendation during the twelve months following its adoption.

### **Who are our members?**

The Assembly consists of 306 representatives and 306 substitutes elected or appointed from among the members of, the national or federal parliaments of each member State. The number of members allocated to each national delegation is proposed by the Assembly when giving its opinion on the accession of the country to the Council Europe, with the main criteria being population size.

Several provisions in the Assembly's Rules of Procedure refer to gender balance. From the 2023 session onwards, each national delegation must include both women and men among its representatives, as well as a percentage of women at least equal to that of its parliament or, if this is more favourable to women's representation, a representation of the genders determined by the size of the delegation. Nominations for the posts of Vice-President of the Assembly, of members of some committees and rapporteurs of committees should take into account the principle of gender equality.

In 2022, the national delegations are composed as follows:

Member Dates	Number of representatives and substitutes	Accession to the Council of Europe
Albania	4 + 4	13.07.1995
Andorra	2 + 2	10.11.1994
Armenia	4 + 4	25.01.2001
Austria	6 + 6	16.04.1956
Azerbaijan	6 + 6	25.01.2001
Belgium	7 + 7	05.05.1949
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5 + 5	24.04.2002
Bulgaria	6 + 6	07.05.1992
Croatia	5 + 5	06.11.1996
Cyprus	3 + 3	24.05.1961
Czech Republic	7 + 7	30.06.1993
Denmark	5 + 5	05.05.1949
Estonia	3 + 3	14.05.1993
Finland	5 + 5	05.05.1989
France	18 + 18	05.05.1949
Georgia	5 + 5	27.04.1999
Germany	18 + 18	13.07.1950
Greece	7 + 7	09.08.1949
Hungary	7 + 7	06.11.1990

Iceland	3 + 3	07.03.1950
Ireland	4 + 4	05.05.1949
Italy	18 + 18	05.05.1949
Latvia	3 + 3	10.02.1995
Liechtenstein	2 + 2	23.11.1978
Lithuania	4 + 4	14.05.1993
Luxembourg	3 + 3	05.05.1949
Malta	3 + 3	29.04.1965
Republic of Moldova	5 + 5	13.07.1995
Monaco	2 + 2	05.10.2004
Montenegro	3 + 3	11.05.2007
Netherlands	7 + 7	05.05.1949
North Macedonia	3 + 3	09.11.1995
Norway	5 + 5	05.05.1949
Poland	12 + 12	26.11.1991
Portugal	7 + 7	22.09.1976
Romania	10 + 10	07.10.1993
San Marino	2 + 2	16.11.1988
Serbia	7 + 7	03.04.2003
Slovak Republic	5 + 5	30.06.1993
Slovenia	3 + 3	14.05.1993
Spain	12 + 12	24.11.1977
Sweden	6 + 6	05.05.1949
Switzerland	6 + 6	06.05.1963
Türkiye	18 + 18	09.08.1949
Ukraine	12 + 12	09.11.1995
United Kingdom	18 + 18	05.05.1949

In addition, the Assembly has also granted observer status to certain parliaments of non-member States of the Council of Europe which meet the conditions set out in paragraph 1 of Statutory Resolution (93) 26 of the Committee of Ministers. Those conditions are that the State accepts the principles of democracy, the rule of law and the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that it wishes to co-operate with the Council of Europe. The Parliaments of Israel (since 1957), Canada (since 1997) and Mexico (since 1999) currently enjoy observer status.

Furthermore, since 2010 the Assembly may grant partner for democracy status to national parliaments of non-member States of the Council of Europe in neighbouring regions, which meet a set of general conditions. The fundamental requirement for a parliament to receive the status is that it must embrace the values of the Council of Europe (including pluralist and gender parity-based democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, opposition to the death penalty, and commitment to free and fair elections and to gender equality). The parliament must also state its intention to make use of the Assembly's experience, as well as of the expertise of the Venice Commission, in its institutional and legislative work and commit to becoming party to relevant Council of Europe

conventions and partial agreements. The Parliaments of Jordan, Kyrgyzstan and of Morocco, as well as the Palestinian National Council, currently enjoy this status.

Finally, the Assembly of Kosovo<sup>1</sup> designates a delegation to follow the plenary sessions of the Assembly (with the right to speak but not to vote) and to participate in the work of some committees.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this text, all reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

# How to be an active member of the Assembly

Your active participation in the activities of the Assembly is important if you wish to contribute to the furthering of parliamentary democracy in Europe, to learn from the experiences of other national parliaments in Europe and to establish networks of like-minded politicians. You are therefore encouraged to volunteer to become a rapporteur for reports drawn up by committees, to take part in missions to observe elections and to represent the Assembly at international events.

As most Assembly documents are available only in the two official languages of the Council of Europe (English and French), your ability to speak one of these languages will be of great benefit to you and will facilitate your active involvement in the work of the Assembly. At the same time, the Assembly provides interpretation into the two official languages and the two other working languages of the Assembly (German and Italian) during part-sessions and committee meetings. For sub-committees, interpretation is provided for the two official languages.

## Your personal contribution

### *How to express your point of view*

There are various ways you can express your point of view in the Assembly. If you believe a topic merits further examination and debate in the Assembly, you should draft a **motion for a resolution or a recommendation** outlining the issue in not more than 300 words, obtain the signature of at least twenty Assembly members belonging to five national delegations or obtain the support of a committee, and table the motion with the Table Office, for publication. The President shall rule on the admissibility of such proposals. The Presidential Committee and the Bureau shall consider whether the question merits further consideration by a committee and, if so, shall propose to the Assembly that it be referred to the appropriate committee. The Bureau may either refer the matter to a committee (it may refer it to one or more other committees for an opinion), forward it for information or decide that no further action be taken. The Bureau's decision must be ratified by the Assembly. The committee to which the matter is referred shall appoint a rapporteur to prepare a report.

You can also table a **written declaration** not exceeding 200 words on a subject falling within the competences of the Council of Europe. You

need to obtain the signatures of twenty Assembly members belonging to four national delegations and two political groups. Written declarations do not bind on the Assembly, do not give rise to a committee report and are not debated in the Assembly.

They shall neither be referred to a committee nor debated in the Assembly (Rule 56).

Any representative or substitute may add his or her signature to a written declaration until the close of the next part-session, after which no further signatures may be added. The declaration shall be issued again with all the signatures collected.

If you wish to raise a matter with the **Committee of Ministers**, there are two ways of doing so:

- For part-sessions, you can address an oral or written question to the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers; oral questions may be answered orally by the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers during the same part-session, whereas written questions are published with the replies in an Assembly document;
- Outside part-sessions, you can send to the Table Office a written question addressed to the Committee of Ministers to which you will receive a written answer within six months at the most.

The President of the Assembly shall decide whether questions are in order.

Concerning oral contributions, you are encouraged to take the floor both in committee and in the plenary Assembly.

Finally, you are encouraged to vote in committee and in the plenary Assembly, in particular as those votes are recorded and, in the latter case, published on the Internet at the end of the relevant debate.

### *Contributing to the European debate at plenary sessions*

The Assembly meets four times a year in plenary session at the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg (France). The four part-sessions usually take place the last full week in January, April and June and the first or second week in October of each year.

Your attendance at the part-sessions gives you the opportunity to defend the position of your national parliament and the political group you represent as well as your own positions, and to compare your point of view with that of other parliamentarians from other national parliaments and political groups. You will be able to take part in the debates and influence, through amendments, the texts adopted during part-sessions, thus giving you the chance to make your voice heard at European level.

At the same, you are also expected to make use of the opportunities given to you by virtue of your national mandate to make the texts and standards of the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly known in your home country.

### *Participating in committee meetings*

All the committees meet during the part-sessions and virtually all meet at least once in-between. Many Assembly activities take place at the level of committees. You can be either a full member in maximum two committees (in addition, if applicable, the Monitoring, Rules and Election of Judges Committees, whose membership is determined by the political groups) or an alternate.

Most debates in the plenary Assembly and in the Standing Committee take place on the basis of committee reports. The committee reports are prepared (in English or French) and presented by a rapporteur, with the help of the Secretariat. Volunteering to be a committee rapporteur will be an opportunity for you to make a concrete contribution on a subject deemed important for the Assembly and to enhance your profile. Assembly reports sometimes have a high media impact, prompting direct government reactions and triggering political change.

Once an Assembly text is adopted, this is not the end of the story. The rapporteur and the relevant committee are mandated during the twelve months following the adoption of the text to check the implementation of measures proposed therein.

### *Taking part in observation of elections*

The Assembly systematically observes parliamentary and presidential elections in States subject to the monitoring or post-monitoring procedure, and also observes the elections in States whose

parliaments enjoy partner for democracy status. In principle, observing the elections is subject to an invitation received from the authorities of the country concerned. Your experience as a national elected representative is a distinct advantage for the successful handling of these missions, usually carried out as part of an International Election Observation Mission also involving ODIHR/OSCE, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and occasionally the European Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

You will usually be required to be on the spot for several days before election day and the day after. In addition, some three to four weeks before election day, a smaller delegation usually undertakes a pre-electoral mission. It is the political groups of the Assembly that propose names for the ad hoc committee of the Bureau carrying out the mission. Candidates to observe elections must sign a written declaration on any possible conflict of interest in relation to the country where they will observe elections.

#### *Representing the Assembly at events*

The Assembly holds a seat in a number of intergovernmental committees and treaty bodies for which the Bureau or a committee appoints their representatives.

The Assembly, its President or its committees are regularly invited to events (conferences, seminars, hearings) organised by other organisations, intergovernmental committees of the Council of Europe, NGOs, etc. The Assembly then has to decide whether it wishes to be represented and whether there are sufficient funds for this purpose. If such is the case, and if you would like to represent the Assembly on those occasions and make a presentation or simply observe and report back, you should make yourself known either to the secretariat or within the relevant body of the Assembly (Bureau, committee).

#### **Elections by the Parliamentary Assembly**

The Parliamentary Assembly elects the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Secretary General of the Assembly, the judges of the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. These elections take place during part-sessions in parallel to the sitting, usually on Tuesday morning (first round) and Wednesday morning



(second round), behind the presidential rostrum. For a more detailed explanation on the manner of voting, please see the chapter below on the practical arrangements for the session. When there is more than one candidate, the Assembly also elects its President.

## **Ethical behaviour**

The Assembly has developed an ethical framework, including a [code of conduct](#), to ensure that its members behave ethically. Your credentials must be accompanied by a signed written statement that you subscribe to the aims and basic principles of the Council of Europe. You must furthermore fill out a declaration of interests which will be published on the Assembly's website. For this purpose a [code of conduct for its members](#) has been put in place. Candidates for rapporteurships shall make an oral declaration of any professional, personal, financial or economic interest which might constitute a conflict of interest. Before speaking in plenary or in committee, members are encouraged to make a similar declaration if they have such an interest which might be considered relevant. Candidates to observe elections must sign a written declaration on any possible conflict of interest in relation to the country where they will observe the elections.

## **Substitution**

At the beginning of each part-session, all representatives are validated to speak and vote in the plenary Assembly.

If you are a substitute, you will be able to speak and to vote in plenary or during elections by the Assembly only if you are replacing a representative; the secretariat of your delegation will have previously notified the Table Office of your designation as a substitute to replace a representative.

You may attend the part-sessions and committee meetings, participate in the observation of elections and represent the Assembly at events even if you are a substitute and are not replacing a representative. You may also be a rapporteur and chairperson of a committee or a sub-committee.

# **Your role within the Assembly's committees and other structures**

## **Your mandate**

Assembly members must be representatives elected within the national parliament or appointed from among the members of the national parliament. Your term of office in the Assembly is in principle for the whole parliamentary year. At the beginning of the Ordinary Session in January, the whole Assembly is formally renewed. Some national delegations modify their composition on this occasion whereas others continue without any changes. The delegation also notify the appointments of their members in the committees.

## **Committees**

The reports debated in plenary session or at the Standing Committee are prepared by a committee. It is therefore important for you to be active within the committees if you wish to have an influence on the subjects being debated. The nine permanent committees of the Assembly are the following:

- Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy (AS/Pol)
- Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights (AS/Jur)
- Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development (AS/Soc)
- Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons (AS/Mig)
- Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media (AS/Cult)
- Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination (AS/Ega)
- Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) (AS/Mon)
- Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs (AS/Pro)
- Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights (AS/Cdh)

In addition, most of the committees have constituted sub-committees or have designated general rapporteurs on specific subjects, and may create ad hoc committees for specific activities.

All committees meet during the part-sessions in Strasbourg and most meet at least once in-between part-sessions, usually in Paris.

### **Standing Committee, Bureau and Presidential Committee**

The Standing Committee acts on behalf of the Assembly in between part-sessions, mainly by holding debates and adopting texts submitted by committees. Its members are the same as for the Bureau, plus the chairpersons of the national delegations.

The Bureau of the Assembly is responsible for the co-ordination of the activities of the Assembly and its committees. It assists the President and guides the external relations of the Assembly. It meets prior to each part-session and meeting of the Standing Committee and therefore has an important preparatory and organisational role. It consists of the President, the nineteen Assembly Vice-Presidents,<sup>2</sup> the chairpersons of the political groups and the chairpersons of the committees.

The Presidential Committee is a consultative body for the Bureau and the President. It prepares meetings of the Bureau. It consists of the President, the chairpersons of the political groups and the Secretary General of the Assembly.

### **Political groups**

The national delegations of the Assembly are composed so as to ensure a fair representation of the political parties or groups in their parliament. Members are therefore called upon to join one of the five organised political groups, depending on their political affiliation:

- the Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD);
- the Socialist, Democrats and Greens (SOC);
- the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance (EC/DA);

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<sup>2</sup> Elected by the Assembly according to a system of apportionment of Bureau seats into four groups of different-sized national delegations. Most often, the chairperson of the national delegation having the right to a seat in the Bureau is also Vice-President of the Assembly.

- the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE);
- the Group of the Unified European Left (UEL).

However, a number of members do not belong to a political group.

Joining a political group will provide you with political and administrative support. Membership of a political group conditions the possibilities for you to sit in the Monitoring, Rules and Election of Judges Committees or observe elections, in which candidates are put forward by the groups. The political groups also nominate the candidates for Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson of a committee. In addition, as political groups receive a grant allowance from the budget of the Assembly, they will provide you with administrative services as well as organising political seminars.

### **National delegations**

National delegations constitute an important link between the Assembly and the national parliament. The members can make known the position of their parliament in Assembly debates and can promote the implementation of texts adopted by the Assembly in their national parliament and government.

Each national delegation has its own secretariat, which serves as a liaison between the parliamentarians on the one hand, and between the parliamentarians and the secretariat of the Assembly on the other hand (e.g. notifying substitution or submitting requests to be placed on the list of speakers).

## Help with your mission

During your term of office, the secretariat of the Assembly will provide you with a number of tools and services to facilitate your active participation in Parliamentary Assembly activities. The only constraints on the secretariat are its statutory duty of impartiality and the availability of resources.

### Your status as a member

#### *Privileges and Immunities*

Under the Statute of the Council of Europe, Assembly members enjoy in the territories of the member States such privileges and immunities as are reasonably necessary for the fulfilment of their functions (“functional immunity”). Such immunities include immunity from arrest and all legal proceedings in respect of words spoken and votes cast. In addition, no restrictions can be imposed upon your free movement to and from the place of meeting, whether it is for a plenary session or a committee meeting.

#### *Council of Europe “laissez-passer”*

The Council of Europe can provide you with a “laissez-passer” attesting your official status as a member of the Assembly. This document can be obtained on request from the Protocol of the Council of Europe. For further information please contact the Protocol of the Council of Europe: [protocol.lp@coe.int](mailto:protocol.lp@coe.int) at least two weeks before a Part-Session.

#### *Badges*

At the beginning of your term of office, you will receive a badge during your first part-session, which will be valid throughout your term of office. Distribution of badges is ensured by the Council of Europe accreditation department at the main entrance of the Palais de l'Europe.

Your badge opens doors inside and outside the building and gives you access to all areas of the Palais de l'Europe (Chamber, meeting rooms, delegations' offices, Members' bar, restaurants). The badge must be worn at all times within the building. Your badge also serves as your voting card in the Chamber.

## **Help with the media**

There is a wide range of online and other tools available to help increase the media impact of your reports and other Assembly activities – as well as a team of press officers at your disposal to help spread your messages.

### *The website*

The PACE website is swiftly updated with news of your activities on behalf of the Assembly. There are videos, links to your reports, speeches, statements and votes – all of which can be reposted on your personal websites and blogs, Tweeted or uploaded to other social networks.

### *The “Media box”*

This service allows you to record short video clips of statements, reactions or interviews for your personal website or for use on any other social media – just sign up at the “box” in the lobby of the Chamber, do your piece to camera, and you are sent a link within the hour.

### *Access to networks of journalists*

Around 50 local journalists are permanently accredited to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, including correspondents from many of the major news agencies, while many more attend plenary sessions. The Assembly’s Communication Division also works closely with press officers in your home parliaments to maximise media interest in your work back home.

### *Other tools*

During Strasbourg plenary sessions, there is a dedicated press room where you can meet journalists and hold briefings, and a radio and television studio and audiovisual editing facilities for interviews and round-table debates.

## **Access to information**

### *Your reference texts*

You and the secretariat of your delegation should have the following texts available for reference, published and regularly updated on the

Assembly's website, and made available in bound form at the distribution desk during part-sessions (1st floor, opposite the Chamber):

– The Assembly List consists of all members, according to their affiliation, by political group, by committee and by national delegation. It also contains a list of members of Observers delegations, Partners for democracy, and the organisation chart of the Assembly's secretariat.

– The Rules of Procedure of the Assembly are published in a bilingual version and contain two parts: the Rules proper and the complementary texts, including the provisions on the organisation of plenary debates, the procedure for election by the Assembly, the ethical rules of conduct, the committees terms of reference, and the rules of access to and circulation in the Council of Europe premises.

– The Statute of the Council of Europe and Statutory Resolutions are also published on the Assembly's website.

#### *Electronic tools and applications*

All public documents of the Assembly and its committees are available to members on the Parliamentary Assembly website (<https://pace.coe.int/en>). It also contains thematic and topical files related to the Assembly's current affairs.

Members have personal and protected access to the online application "Pace-Apps" (<https://pace-apps.coe.int/>), which manages, in particular the registration for meetings and their annual declaration of interests. An account is created for each new member when they join the Assembly.

Finally, restricted committees' documents are available on the Assembly online application.

# **The Part-Sessions: practical arrangements**

## **Meetings of committees and political groups**

The list of meetings held by the committees and the other organs of the Assembly (Bureau, political groups, etc.) is published on the Assembly's website before each sitting. Unless a committee decides otherwise, committee meetings are not public. The documents of the meetings are made available to members on the online application, or sent by e-mail from the secretariat of the committee concerned.

Meetings of political groups take place on Monday, morning and late afternoon, as well as on Wednesday morning.

## **Languages**

The official languages of the Assembly are English and French. German and Italian are working languages. Speeches made in plenary session in any of these four languages are interpreted simultaneously into the other official and working languages. Members may, however, speak in languages other than English, French, German and Italian provided that their delegation arranges for interpretation into one of the official or working languages. During sittings this is generally the case for Greek and Spanish. Furthermore, interpretation for Spanish is available in Committee meetings in Strasbourg.

## **Assembly documents**

The following documents are available in French and English, on the website of the Parliamentary Assembly, as well as at the document counter (on the first floor, in front of the Chamber, near lift No. IV).

## ***Official documents***

The main official documents are:

Reports:                    The agenda of an Assembly part-session or Standing Committee meeting shall include consideration of reports approved by the committees.

Committee reports comprise one or more draft texts for adoption (recommendations, resolutions



or opinions) and an explanatory memorandum prepared under the responsibility of the rapporteur. Only draft texts can be amended and adopted by the Assembly.

The reports of the ad hoc committees on the observation of elections do not include a draft text. The same applies to the information reports of the committees.

One or more committees may be seized for an opinion on the report of the main committee. The opinion may be presented in writing or orally. An opinion submitted in writing must contain at the beginning a section entitled "Conclusions of the committee" and an explanatory memorandum by the rapporteur.

Amendments: Amendments to draft texts must be tabled in accordance with the relevant rules of procedure, particularly Rule 34 (see below). They must be signed by at least five representatives or substitutes, unless they are being submitted on behalf of a committee seized for report or opinion.

Agenda: The draft agenda prepared by the Bureau is made available to members of the Assembly at least two weeks before the opening of the part-session. The Assembly is required to adopt the draft agenda. A member may propose to amend it. The adoption of such a motion requires a majority of the votes cast. Once adopted, the agenda can be altered by the Assembly only by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast.

Report of debates: A **provisional report of debates** (English/French/German/Italian) is available on the Assembly's website after each sitting. Speakers may make corrections to the provisional report of debates by submitting their request to the Table Office within 24 hours.

Representatives and substitutes who were entered on the list of speakers and present in the Chamber but were unable to speak because of lack of time may hand in their typewritten texts for inclusion at the end of the report of debates. They should do so within four hours of the end of the debate concerned at the Table Office: [table.office@coe.int](mailto:table.office@coe.int) (Room 1081).

Adopted texts: The texts adopted by the Assembly are also published after each sitting, in English and French.

The texts adopted by the Assembly are:

- the recommendations (proposals addressed by the Assembly to the Committee of Ministers, for implementation by that Committee or the governments);
- the opinions (addressed to the Committee of Ministers); according to the Statute of the Council of Europe, or to other texts of a statutory character, the Committee of Ministers may ask the Assembly's opinion notably the accession of new member States, draft conventions or the Council of Europe's budget;
- the resolutions (embodying a decision by the Assembly on a question of substance which it is empowered to put into effect, a point of view for which it alone is responsible, or a question of form, transmission, execution or procedure).

The other official documents are:

- written questions addressed to the Committee of Ministers;
- written declarations;
- motions tabled by members;
- communications from the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, the Commissioner for Human Rights or the Secretary General of the Council of Europe;
- curricula vitae of candidates for elections by the Assembly (e.g. judges to the European Court of Human Rights);

- any other document, at the discretion of the President of the Assembly (requests for opinion, report or communication by the Committee of Ministers, activity report by an institution of the Council of Europe, etc).

## **Tabling amendments**

Members who wish to table amendments or sub-amendments to the draft texts before the Assembly should submit them in paper version to the Table Office (Room 1083) or via the online application "Pace-Apps" (<https://pace-apps.coe.int/>). Amendments and sub-amendments must be **signed by at least five representatives or substitutes**, unless they have been submitted on behalf of the committee submitting the report or an opinion.

Under the provisions on the organisation of debates (see p. 104 and following of the Rules of Procedure), the **deadlines for tabling amendments** are the following (where appropriate the Bureau may decide to change these deadlines, in particular for urgent debates or debates on general policy):

- for debates on the Monday afternoon: Monday at 12 noon;
- for debates on Tuesday: Monday at 4 p.m.;
- for all other debates (except specific indications on the agenda): 23 and a half hours before the opening of the sitting at which the debate is to begin.

Sub-amendments must be tabled at least one hour before the scheduled end of the sitting preceding that in which the debate begins.

The procedure for tabling, examining and voting on amendments and sub-amendments is set out in Rule 34 of the Rules of Procedure.

The committee seized for an opinion may submit amendments to the text presented by the committee seized for report.

The committee seized for report shall examine all the amendments tabled and take a position on each of them at a meeting prior to the debate in plenary. This position shall be announced by the Committee Chairperson in plenary when the Assembly votes on the amendments.

## **Motions for resolutions or recommendations**

Motions for recommendation or for resolution tabled during a part-session will be discussed by the Presidential Committee during the

part-session, if they have been tabled by **6.00 pm on the Tuesday of a part-session**; the motions tabled later will be examined at the first Presidential Committee meeting after the part-session.

### **Written declarations**

The written declarations tabled, and already published, are made available to members who wish to sign them. Declarations may be countersigned in the Table Office until the close of the next part-session. The declarations shall be issued again with all the signatures collected.

### **Changes in the membership of national delegations**

Members of the Assembly are appointed for the duration of an Ordinary Session (one year from January to January). However, following elections, the national parliament concerned shall make new appointments to the Assembly within six months of the elections. If the national parliament cannot make all such appointments in time for the opening of a new Ordinary Session, it may decide, for a period of not more than six months after the election, to be represented in the Assembly by members of the existing delegation.

A national parliament may also fill, during a session, one of the seats of its national delegation which has become vacant as a result of death or resignation.

Members' credentials shall be submitted by the president of the national parliament concerned to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, who will submit them to the Assembly or the Standing Committee for ratification at the first sitting or meeting following their receipt.

### **Changes in the composition of the committees**

The Parliamentary Assembly shall reconstitute its nine committees at the opening of its ordinary session. The national delegations shall appoint their members to the six Assembly committees concerned in time for the opening of the ordinary session (the composition of three committees is a matter for the political groups). Thereafter, the chairperson of a national delegation informs the President of the Assembly of any proposed change(s) in committee membership concerning that delegation's members. The President of the Assembly submits the proposed change(s) to the Assembly, the Standing Committee or, failing that, the Bureau for ratification.

## **Notification of substitutes in plenary session**

In principle, all representatives at the opening of the first sitting (on Monday, at 11.30 a.m.) have their voting cards validated, but not substitutes unless the Secretariat of the Assembly is duly informed about substitutions. Therefore secretaries of national delegations have the duty to inform the Secretariat of the Assembly about the substitutions via the online application “Pace-Apps” (<https://pace-apps.coe.int/>). If this is not done, substitutes attending the sitting do not have speaking and voting rights.

The online system for substitution registration is open three weeks before each part-session and delegations secretaries can register and unregister any substitute member of their delegation during the whole period when the system is open. The online system closes 24 hours before the beginning of the sitting concerned.

Please note that substitutions are never automatically carried over to the following sitting: substitute members must be registered for each consecutive sitting in which they should have speaking and voting rights.

When the correct notification has been given, substitutes will have their voting cards validated. At the same time, cards of representatives who are to be replaced by substitutes will become invalid, preventing them from speaking in the debate and voting, including in elections.

## **Register of attendance**

Members must sign the register of attendance before entering the Chamber for a sitting. An interactive station for electronic signature where you can register with your badge is placed next to each entry door of the hemicycle for this purpose. A duly designated substitute will find his or her name in the register next to the name of the representative for whom he or she is substituting. If, in the register of attendance, no name is found for the representative’s name, it means that no substitution was notified for the representative for that particular sitting and therefore only the representative is authorised to speak in the debate and vote.

All members of the Assembly – representatives and substitutes as well as members of Observers delegations and Partners for Democracy – have access to the Chamber at any time of the sitting. They are therefore invited to sign the attendance register with their badge, if

they attend the sitting, whether or not they are allowed to speak and vote.

### **Speakers' register**

Members who wish to speak in a debate must register their names on a list of speakers. They should do this through the secretaries of the national delegations or the secretaries of the political groups via an on-line system of registration on « Pace-Apps » (<https://pace-apps.coe.int/>). The lists are opened before the part-session upon publication of the draft agenda; they are closed for each debate one hour before the scheduled end of the previous sitting, except in the case of the first sitting of a part-session, when the deadline is one and a half hours before the start of the sitting. These deadlines are indicated on the draft agenda.

During a part-session, members may enter their names on the list for a maximum of **five debates** but may take the floor **not more than three times** (this limit does not apply to members appointed as political group spokespersons or as rapporteurs, and does not take into account registration for questions addressed to invited personalities).

Only authorised members - i.e. representatives or their duly appointed substitutes - may take the floor in debates or put questions for oral answer to the presidency of the Committee of Ministers or to invited personalities. A substitute whose name has not been notified before a sitting cannot participate in the debate.

The order of speakers on the list for each debate is determined according to criteria set by the Bureau and can be found in the Rules of Procedure.

**Speaking time** is limited to a total of 10 minutes for rapporteurs to present the report (7 minutes) and to reply (3 minutes). The co-rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee shall each have 5 minutes for the presentation (and 5 minutes to be divided at their convenience for the reply). Rapporteurs for opinion, to present the opinion or to reply to the debate, shall have the same speaking time to present their opinions as the speakers registered for the debate concerned, i.e. 3 minutes. Other speakers on the list normally have 3 minutes. The chairperson of the committee seized for report shall have 3 minutes at the end of the debate.

Members have 30 seconds to present a question for an oral reply to the presidency of the Committee of Ministers or to guest speakers, or to present an amendment.

At the start of each sitting the President announces the speaking arrangements.

### **Requests for debates under urgent procedure or current affairs debates**

At the request of the Committee of Ministers, of a committee, of a political group, or of twenty or more representatives or substitutes, a debate may be held on an item which has not been placed on the Assembly's draft agenda under urgent procedure. The request must be addressed to the President of the Assembly in time for the meeting of the Bureau before the opening of the part-session. The President submits them to the Bureau, which makes a proposal to the Assembly. The adoption of urgent procedure requires a two-thirds majority of the votes cast.

An urgent debate is based on a report prepared by the committee to which the matter has been referred and gives rise to a vote of a resolution and/or recommendation.

At least twenty members, one political group, a committee or a national delegation may request a current affairs debate on a subject which is not on the Assembly's draft agenda. The request must be made in writing to the President of the Assembly in time for the last meeting of the Bureau before the opening of the part-session. The possible choice between several requests is made by the Bureau, a decision which needs to be endorsed by the Assembly. There may only be one or two current affairs debates per part-session. A current affairs debate may not normally exceed one and a half hours. The debate shall be opened by one of the members who requested it and chosen by the Bureau. The first speaker has 7 minutes speaking time, other speakers 3 minutes.

A current affairs debate is not based on a report, therefore does not give rise to a vote. The Bureau of the Assembly may, however, propose that the subject be referred for report to the appropriate committee.

The Standing Committee may also be asked to hold a current affairs debate.

## **Questions to invited guest speakers**

For most invited guest speakers, as well as for the presidency of the Committee of Ministers, the draft agenda indicates whether there is the possibility for members to ask questions. Where there is that possibility, members are encouraged to register via the online speaker registration system on “Pace-Apps” (<https://pace-apps.coe.int/>). For most guest speakers, members are invited to indicate the subject of their oral question.

The deadline for registration is indicated in the draft agenda. At each part-session, at the end of its communication, the presidency of the Committee of Ministers shall reply orally to spontaneous questions from members.

Members may also send written questions to the presidency of the Committee of Ministers. They should register online and submit the text of the question at least one week before the opening of the part-session. This deadline is indicated in the draft agenda. The question and the reply of the presidency of the Committee of Ministers are published in an Assembly Document.

However, no member may put more than one oral or written question to the presidency of the Committee of Ministers at any one part-session and members shall therefore register on one of the two lists (either “written question” or “oral question”).

The intervention of guest speakers being limited to one hour, speeches and questions included, the number of questions which will receive an answer is necessarily limited. Members are therefore invited to register quickly on the online register.

## **Free debate**

With a view to making part-sessions more lively, the Assembly introduced one “free debate” as from January 2012. Assembly members are able to speak freely on a topic of their choice, not appearing on the agenda of the part-session. This debate, limited to one hour, usually takes place during each part-session. Members must register on the online register. Speeches must comply with the regulations governing the proper conduct of debates concerning acceptable speech. No vote is taken in this free debate and no action is taken by the Assembly.



## **Electronic voting**

All votes in the Assembly, except elections (for example for the judges of the European Court of Human Rights), take place by electronic voting in the Chamber.

The badges issued to members of the Assembly are used for access to the Chamber, identification and voting.

Members are invited to insert their voting cards in the voting terminals when they take their seat in the Chamber and to remove them when they leave the Chamber at the end of the sitting.

The voting cards of duly notified substitutes must be validated by the secretariat to enable them to vote.

A validated card is signalled by the name of the member and his number being displayed on a small screen in the voting terminal. Any malfunctioning or error message displayed on the voting terminal screen should be immediately reported to the Secretariat present in the Chamber.

The opening of a vote is confirmed orally by the President.

After the opening of a vote, members should vote by putting their hands into the small booth of the voting terminal and by pressing one of the three voting buttons (stickers which are on the top of voting terminals are put there only for information in order to indicate the positions of the “for”, “against” and “abstention” buttons). The chosen vote is confirmed on the small blue display screen.

Once the President has declared the vote closed, a member cannot modify his or her vote.

For each vote, the names of Assembly members taking part in it, as well as how they voted in each case, are published on the Assembly’s website. It is not possible to correct published information. If the members have made a mistake in their vote, they may ask the President for permission to speak, so that the explanation is recorded in the minutes of the sitting.

## **Quorum**

All votes of the Assembly shall be valid whatever the number of members voting, unless, before the voting has begun, the President

has been requested to ascertain whether there is a quorum. At least one sixth of the representatives authorised to vote, belonging to at least five national delegations, must vote in favour of the request.

The quorum is one third of the number of representatives of the Assembly authorised to vote.

### **Majorities required**

In general, the Assembly takes decisions by a majority of the votes cast. This is the case for the adoption of a resolution or the decision to hold a current affairs debate. A majority of two thirds of the votes cast is however required for the adoption of a recommendation or an opinion to the Committee of Ministers, for the adoption of urgent procedure, for an alteration to the order of business, for the setting up of a committee and the decision to remove the holder of an elective office. Specific majorities apply for elections/nominations. A tie vote is equivalent to a negative vote.

### **Mobile phones and laptop computers**

Members of the Assembly shall make reasonable use of mobile phones and other electronic means of communication and shall refrain from any behaviour that may interfere with the smooth running of debates in the Chamber and during committee meetings.

Laptop computers may be used discreetly in the Chamber and each desk has an electronic socket for charging.

## Finances

According to the Statute of the Council of Europe, the basic rule is that the parliaments of member States must bear the expenses of their representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly.

When they leave on an official mission for the Assembly (e.g. fact-finding visits by rapporteurs, representing the Assembly at official events, pre-electoral visits), its members are entitled to claim the reimbursement of their travel and subsistence expenses in accordance with an aide-mémoire dated February 1995 (updated in January 2009) concerning the reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses of members of the Parliamentary Assembly travelling at the charge of the Council of Europe budgets.

**Reimbursement of expenses during missions on behalf of the Assembly** (fact-finding missions, representation of the Assembly at events, etc.)

Parliamentary Assembly members travelling on Assembly business and at the Assembly's expense should arrange their journeys in the most economical manner.

### *Travel and subsistence expenses*

Members' travel and daily subsistence expenses are paid in accordance with the provisions of the "Aide-mémoire", which is sent to members when they are invited. The main provisions are given below.

### *Travel expenses*

Parliamentary Assembly members are entitled, under the conditions set out in the "Aide-mémoire", to the reimbursement of travel expenses incurred in travelling between their place of residence and the place of the meeting.

All claims for reimbursement of travel expenses for all means of transport must be accompanied by the relevant ticket or a copy and evidence of the expenditure actually incurred (for example, an invoice, credit card slip or bank statement). In no case shall the amount reimbursed exceed the actual expenditure incurred. If an invoice is

provided, this must be the original document issued by the travel agency or airline that issued the ticket.

The reimbursement of first class rail fare is authorised. In the case of air travel, reimbursement shall be based on the “economy class” fare on the normal route, irrespective of the class and route actually used.

Transit fares in connection with changing from one means of transport to another and fares paid for travel between home or the meeting place and railway station or airport will be reimbursed on the basis of the amount of the fare of the existing public means of transport.

The subsistence allowance paid will be based on the duration of the journey by the means of transport chosen as the basis for reimbursement.

Members of the Parliamentary Assembly travelling by private car to attend an activity that takes place less than 400 km from their usual place of residence shall be entitled to a mileage allowance determined annually by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and calculated on the basis of the shortest route they can be reasonably expected to take, excluding any supplements and without taking into account any other expenditure occasioned by the use of a car.

If two or more members of the Parliamentary Assembly entitled to claim expenses use the same car, a refund shall be made only to the person in charge of the vehicle, with an increase of 10% for the first passenger and 8% for each additional passenger.

Members of the Parliamentary Assembly travelling by car do so at their own risk. The Council of Europe disclaims all liability in respect of any accident that may occur during the journey.

### *Subsistence expenses*

During the mission, members of the Parliamentary Assembly shall be entitled to receive an allowance at a daily rate determined annually by the Committee of Ministers (***the rate in force as from 1 January 2020 is 269 euros***). This rate is the same wherever the meeting takes place. This allowance shall be deemed to cover all expenditure incurred by members of the Parliamentary Assembly in attending meetings, except for the travel expenses provided for above.

The duration of the period conferring entitlement to the allowance shall be determined as follows:

- a. the subsistence allowance is payable for each 24-hour period within the duration of a mission. Part-days totalling 12 hours give entitlement to the full allowance and parts totalling between 6 and 12 hours to half the allowance; parts totalling less than 6 hours give no entitlement;
- b. the duration of a mission is calculated according to the day and hour of departure from and return to the usual place of residence.

The expenses referred to above will be refunded upon submission of a claim certified true and correct by the member of the Parliamentary Assembly, according to the reimbursement form to which vouchers (or copies) must be appended.

Members shall declare any meals or overnight accommodation provided to them free of charge. Where overnight accommodation or meals to Members are provided free of charge the daily allowance shall be reduced.

#### *Reimbursement files*

The reimbursement files must include:

- The duly completed and signed reimbursement claim form and the relevant documents (legible copies of airline and train tickets, copy of seat reservations, train supplements and sleeper reservation vouchers, showing the dates and times of departure and return, stop-over and arrival). If an invoice is provided, this must be the original document issued by the travel agency or airline that issued the ticket.

It is important that you indicate in the “Comments” box of the reimbursement claim form the day and time of your departure/return from / to your home address and also the day and time of your departure from Strasbourg.

If you are travelling in your own car or in an official car, it is strongly recommended that you indicate the date/time of your departure from home and the date/time at which you expect to arrive home.

- The original invoice corresponding to the ticket, or original receipt of the amount paid (credit card slip, etc.).

For electronic tickets ordered by Internet or telephone:

The “passenger receipt” or the “itinerary receipt” alone will not be accepted without (for example, screen-print, e-mail, receipt of payment, invoice or bank statement) showing the amount paid, the name of the traveller and the method of payment.

## Facilities at the Palais de l'Europe

The Council of Europe has several buildings all devoted to its activities. The building where the Assembly and its committee meetings take place is known as the "Palais de l'Europe", which was inaugurated in 1977.

### Parliamentary Chamber and offices

The Chamber where the plenary sittings take place, sometimes referred to as the "Hemicycle", is situated on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the building. The offices of your parliamentary delegation and of all political groups are situated on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the building. A detailed map of the location of offices on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor can be found in this Handbook.

### Restaurants and bars

There are two restaurants in the Palais, all situated on the ground floor: a formal sit-down restaurant where you will be served *à la carte* (the "Blue Restaurant") and a self-service canteen. Once you get to the restaurant area, there will be signposts for these various restaurants.

There are two bars in the building. The one used by most parliamentarians, and which is the most convenient, is situated on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor opposite the plenary Chamber (the "Parliamentarians' Bar"). There is another bar below the plenary Chamber on the ground floor (the "twelve stars" bar).

### Bank, post office and kiosk

One of the French banks, *la Société Générale*, has a branch in the building, on the ground floor and a cash point is located near the Twelve Stars bar on the ground floor as well as a post office. A kiosk and a philatelic office are also at your disposal. The opening times are communicated to delegations before each part-session.

## **Medical centre**

A medical centre open to you and all persons present in the building is open from 8.30 a.m. until the end of the plenary sitting in the evening.

## **Shuttle bus**

The city of Strasbourg is represented in the entrance hall of the building. You will notably find information on the free shuttle bus between the centre of Strasbourg, the train station and the Palais de l'Europe. You will need to present your badge when entering the bus.



## Your contacts at the Assembly

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