



Bureau of the Assembly

Ad hoc Committee on the New Democratic Pact

AS/Bur/AH-NDP (2025) Proceedings 02

9 December 2025

Declassified¹

Proceedings

of the meeting held on 20 November 2025

Introduction – President's opening remarks

The third meeting of the *ad hoc* Committee of the Bureau of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly on the New Democratic Pact took place on 20 November 2025 in Chişinău, Republic of Moldova.² The meeting focused on a critical dimension of democratic resilience: safeguarding democracy against foreign interference in electoral processes. Building on the earlier meeting of the *ad hoc* Committee, which addressed the impact of the European Court of Human Rights' judgments on freedom of expression, assembly and association, and examined how political parties could serve as the first line of defence against democratic backsliding, the *ad hoc* Committee pursued its work under the New Democratic Pact for Europe by addressing another essential dimension of democratic backsliding: foreign interference in electoral processes.

Welcoming the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Alain Berset, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Theodoros Rousopoulos, underlined the importance of the Secretary General's initiative to renew democracy. Recalling the words of the Secretary General at the opening of the World Forum for Democracy on 5 November – that member States may have stronger armies but weaker democracies – the Chair stressed the Assembly's *ad hoc* Committee's commitment to promoting the Pact across member States, particularly through its parliamentary dimension and its 70 members, who reflect the entire spectrum of the Assembly's work, encompassing all political perspectives and geographical regions of Europe. President Rousopoulos concluded his opening remarks by stressing the necessity of translating the Pact into tangible outcomes and concrete proposals, including through the series of thematic meetings the *ad hoc* Committee would convene, thus supporting the Pact in achieving its overarching goal: the renewal of democracy.

The New Democratic Pact for Europe³ – Exchange of views with Alain Berset, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Intervention of the Secretary General

Secretary General Alain Berset highlighted the pressing challenges facing European democracies, noting that despite decades of optimism following historical milestones such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and post-war recovery in the Western Balkans, the current landscape is marked by successive crises: financial instability, social inequality, climate change, and notably, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine since 2014. Regarding Ukraine, he recalled that among the outcomes of the Reykjavik Summit was the creation of the Register of Damage, which is the first step towards a mechanism that will ensure justice and compensation for Ukraine and its people.⁴

¹ These proceedings were declassified by the Ad Hoc Committee on 11 December 2025.

² Agenda: <https://rm.coe.int/as-bur-ah-ndp-2025-oj03rev-revised-agenda-chisinau-20-november-2025/48802968b5>.
Concept note: <https://rm.coe.int/ahcndpe-20-november-2025-meeting-concept-note/48802968b8>. PACE and the New Democratic Pact for Europe: <https://pace.coe.int/en/pages/ad-hoc-committee-on-the-new-democratic-pact>.

³ Text of the Pact: www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/report-2025.

⁴ Reykjavik Summit, www.coe.int/en/web/portal/fourth-council-of-europe-summit. Register of Damages, www.rd4u.coe.int/en.



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The Secretary General underscored the compounded pressures on democratic institutions, with emerging threats from digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, which facilitates misinformation and deepfake content that could soon erode the public's ability to discern truth.

Mr Berset detailed the Council of Europe's comprehensive involvement across its various bodies, including the Venice Commission, which contributes to strengthening democracy. He further underlined the Council of Europe's conventional framework, including recent conventions open to signature, such as the Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer.⁵

He introduced the initiative for a prospective new convention targeting disinformation and foreign interference, which emerged from high-level discussions at the European Political Community summit in Tirana. He noted that this initiative represents a proactive step towards coordinated responses to hybrid threats, emphasising legal frameworks and co-operation amongst member States.

The Secretary General stressed the indispensable role of national parliaments, represented by the Assembly's 46 delegations and 306 parliamentarians, as the "first line of defence" in advancing democratic security domestically. He concluded by reaffirming his commitment to strengthen co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly to translate these strategies into tangible outcomes.

Debate

During their exchange with the Secretary General, committee members raised the following issues:

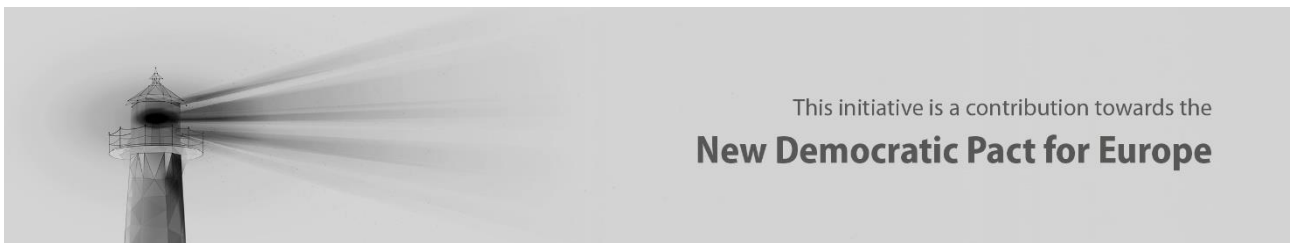
- the importance of avoiding undue restrictions on freedom of expression under the pretext of combating disinformation;
- the risk of qualifying any political statement as interference, thereby deterring freedom of expression and speech, and the consequent necessity to define clearly what constitutes interference, including foreign interference;
- the necessity to address the political pressure faced by the judiciary in Europe, including the protection of courts' and judges' independence, the separation of powers, and judicial impartiality against political interference;
- the complexity of engaging young people in democracy, given widespread scepticism about political leadership among youth, and the critical role that local governance and youth participation play in fostering democratic inclusion;
- the challenges posed by extremist narratives glorifying the past and the alienation of young people from democracy, emphasising the importance of youth inclusion in democratic renewal and addressing the root causes of such disillusionment;
- the importance of engaging in debates on political platforms' content during electoral campaigns, including discussions about the social rights citizens seek on a daily basis – such as housing and a minimum wage – and promoting bottom-up decision-making.

In his responses, the Secretary General emphasised, *inter alia*, the importance of addressing the root causes of youth disillusionment. For democratic renewal and institutional stability, he underlined the significance of having a strong Rule of Law system. Mr Berset recalled the importance of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and local government bodies in addressing the issues facing young people and where positive consequences can be observed.

Regarding the independence of the judiciary, the Secretary General recalled the pressures exerted on the European Court of Human Rights and on national courts, and stressed the necessity to protect the independence and impartiality of courts overall, including through the support of Council of Europe institutions such as the Venice Commission.

Regarding the very foundations of Europe's democratic societies, the Secretary General acknowledged existing threats, revealing deeper structural vulnerabilities in European societies marked by inequality, poverty, social exclusion and democratic fatigue, all of which facilitate manipulation from both inside and outside

⁵ www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/council-of-europe-adopts-international-convention-on-protecting-lawyers.



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member States. Resilient democracies, he emphasised, require strengthening not only institutions but also the social foundations on which they stand. Access to quality public services, equal opportunities, and strong labour and social rights are not secondary issues but preconditions for democratic security, he added.

Regarding fundamental freedoms and media pluralism, the Secretary General recalled the importance of protecting journalists regardless of their origin and stressed the pressures exerted on such freedoms and pluralism – in particular freedom of expression – by some governments and autocratic regimes through censorship and political influence. Whilst ill-intentioned actors use misinformation and disinformation as a pretext to impose unacceptable limitations on freedom of speech, digital platforms manipulate content through algorithms. Mr Berset insisted on the necessity of addressing both problems with equal determination. He added that whilst restrictions to fundamental freedoms are possible, such restrictions must be grounded in law and compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights and the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

Regarding political pluralism, the Secretary General recalled that protecting democracy also means protecting the opposition and diverging positions.⁶ The Secretary General concluded by stressing that a meaningful New Democratic Pact must integrate social justice, equality and inclusive participation. He underlined that democracy is indivisible: political and social rights either stand together or erode together.

Hearing and exchange of views on “Safeguarding Democracy: Elections and Foreign Interference”

Mr Martin Kuijer, Vice-President of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, member in respect of the Netherlands

Mr Kuijer underlined that electoral processes had become a particular vulnerability of democracy, as autocratic tendencies can infiltrate systems through regular elections and then use a claimed democratic mandate to weaken constitutional checks and balances. He recalled that the Venice Commission’s country-specific work demonstrates how a winner-takes-all approach and a narrow understanding of majoritarian democracy place democratic institutions at risk. In this context, and on the occasion of its 35th anniversary, Mr Kuijer informed the Committee that the Venice Commission was updating its Rule of Law Checklist to respond to these evolving challenges.⁷

He noted that since the adoption of the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters in 2002,⁸ electoral processes and their vulnerabilities had changed profoundly, particularly due to foreign interference through digital means such as information disorders, cyberattacks, illicit financing and manipulation of the information space. The Venice Commission’s work on digital technologies had identified foreign intervention in elections as a serious threat to public confidence and had called for international regulations and institutional capacities to be adapted to the new technological context. Mr Kuijer added that an interpretative declaration to the Code focuses on safeguarding free and equal suffrage in the digital environment, stressing that voters’ freedom to form an opinion is undermined by online misinformation, and that equal suffrage would require fair media access and transparent political financing.

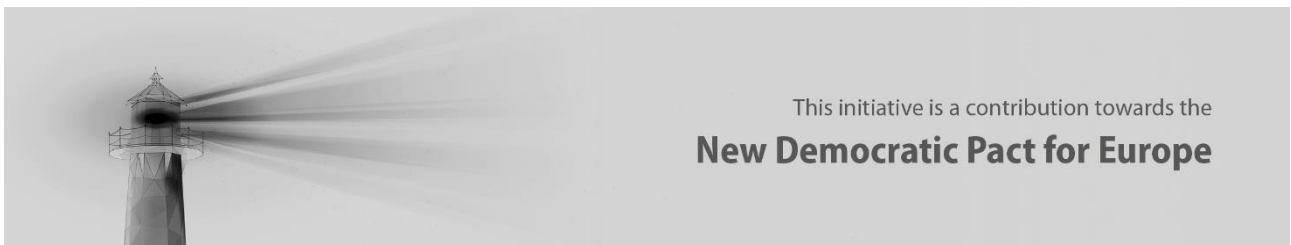
Mr Kuijer emphasised that media failures to provide impartial information and opaque digital political advertising were frequent weaknesses, and that foreign money and influence in campaign financing demanded effective regulation, including transparency of online activities, possible spending limits and even bans on certain forms of paid political advertising on social media. He added that safeguarding electoral integrity therefore required three key measures: robust legal frameworks, strong and independent institutions (notably

⁶ See in this respect *Report on the role of the opposition in a democratic Parliament*, adopted by the Venice Commission, at its 84th Plenary Session (Venice 15-16 October 2010), www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/cdl-ad-2010-025-e.

⁷ Adopted by the Venice Commission at its 106th Plenary Session (Venice, 11-12 March 2016), endorsed by the Ministers’ Deputies at the 1263rd Meeting (6-7 September 2016), endorsed by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe at its 31st Session (19-21 October 2016), endorsed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on at its 4th part Session (11 October 2017),

www.venice.coe.int/images/SITE%20IMAGES/Publications/Rule_of_Law_Check_List.pdf. Adoption of the *Rule of Law Checklist: Update* (ref. 1210/2024) foreseen at the 12-13 December 2025 Plenary Session of the Venice Commission.

⁸ www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/opinion-190.



election management bodies) and enhanced cross-border co-operation amongst national authorities, international organisations and election observers.

Mr Kuijer further highlighted an urgent report on the cancellation of election results by constitutional courts,⁹ in which the Venice Commission stressed that effective judicial safeguards and clear, proportionate rules are essential to address digital disinformation and foreign interference in electoral disputes. He underlined that procedural guarantees – including the right to present evidence, to a fair and public hearing and to appeal – were of particular importance where irregularities stem from information disorders and foreign interference. He warned that democratic backsliding could arise both from foreign manipulation and from disproportionate measures ostensibly adopted to protect electoral integrity, and that protecting elections could not come at the expense of democracy, human rights and the Rule of Law. Finally, he informed the *ad hoc* Committee of ongoing work by the Venice Commission to map legislation on foreign influence and interference and to develop further activities on foreign interference and elections within the framework of the New Democratic Pact for Europe.¹⁰

Ms Angelica Caraman, President of the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova¹¹

Ms Caraman shared practical insights from the Republic of Moldova's electoral experience, particularly the parliamentary elections held on 28 September 2025, which took place under intense pressure from hybrid threats, notably Russian interference manifested through economic coercion, political capture, disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks targeting electoral infrastructure.

She described Moldova's institutional readiness, built over years, including strengthened legal frameworks, party finance controls, improved cybersecurity and strategic real-time communication measures. Civil society, domestic observers, investigative journalists and an active diaspora functioned as crucial oversight elements, mitigating manipulation efforts and reinforcing electoral confidence.

Ms Caraman underlined the essential role of election monitoring bodies in addressing new challenges such as extremist content amplification through social media algorithms. She stressed the need for empowered electoral commissions with adequate resources and legal authority to respond effectively during sensitive campaign periods. Ms Caraman finally emphasised the importance of educating citizens about social media content.

Mr Chris Said (Malta, EPP/CD), Chairperson of the ad hoc committee for the observation of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova (28 September 2025) and member of the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections¹²

Mr Said introduced the exchange of views by recalling the presentations of Mr Kuijer and Ms Caraman, which highlighted respectively the applicable legal standards and the practical challenges of organising elections under pressure. He underlined that the Republic of Moldova was not simply holding elections, but resisting a sustained hybrid campaign of external interference.

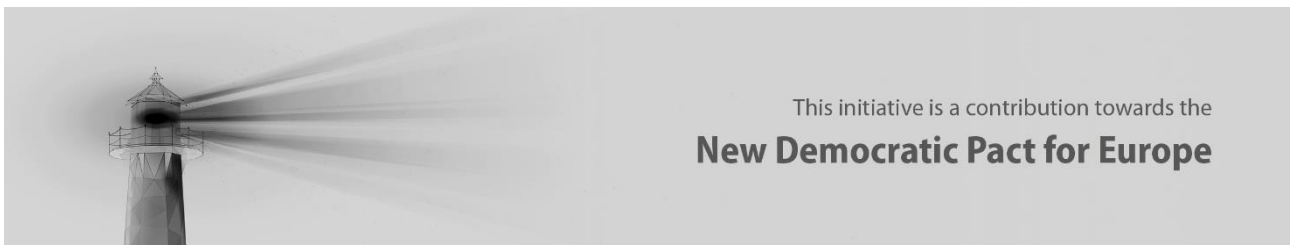
He reported that, according to the election observation, Russia's interference operated along three main vectors: economic and energy pressure to weaken the government and fuel discontent; political capture through illicit funding, proxy parties and oligarchic networks; and information and cyber operations, including coordinated disinformation on social media and numerous cyber incidents targeting state infrastructure and the Central Electoral Commission. This strategy sought not only to influence the result but also to undermine public confidence in the fairness of elections in the Republic of Moldova.

⁹ Issued on 27 January 2025 pursuant to Article 14a of the Venice Commission's Revised Rules of Procedure Endorsed by the Venice Commission at its 142nd Plenary Session (Venice, 14-15 March 2025), www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/opinion-1218.

¹⁰ Venice Commission's ongoing *Study on foreign interference* no. 1239/2025, www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/ongoing-opinion-requests.

¹¹ <https://pv.cec.md/>.

¹² See in this respect Doc. 16296, 20/11/2025, Observation of the parliamentary elections in Republic of Moldova (28 September 2025), report, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/35722>.



Mr Said stressed three pillars of Moldovan resilience. First, institutional readiness: since 2021, and particularly following the 2024 presidential election and referendum, the Republic of Moldova has strengthened its legal and operational framework, including tighter party finance rules, improved coordination between the Central Electoral Commission, security services and law enforcement, enhanced cyber defences and strategic communications to counter disinformation in real time. This enabled institutions, with international support, to move from vulnerability to active defence and to safeguard electoral integrity and political stability, with implications for the wider region and Moldova's European trajectory.

Secondly, he highlighted whole-of-society oversight, noting the role of domestic observers, investigative journalists and civil society in exposing malpractice, as well as the mobilising effect of the diaspora, particularly in EU countries, which acted as a democratic safeguard. Thirdly, he stressed electoral dynamics, indicating that an externally imposed "Europe versus Russia" framing had transformed the elections into a strategic choice in which many voters opted for a European path over a return to an oligarchic, externally dependent system.

At the same time, he acknowledged that resilience entailed dilemmas, pointing to late decisions to disqualify certain parties and to restrict some voting opportunities, which, whilst motivated by security concerns, raised issues of legal certainty, proportionality and equal suffrage. He concluded by inviting members to reflect on appropriate limits to restrictive measures, safeguards against misuse of emergency tools, better integration of the diaspora, media and civil society into national resilience strategies, and the future role of the Assembly in setting standards and monitoring foreign interference.

Interventions by Members

Committee members raised the following issues:

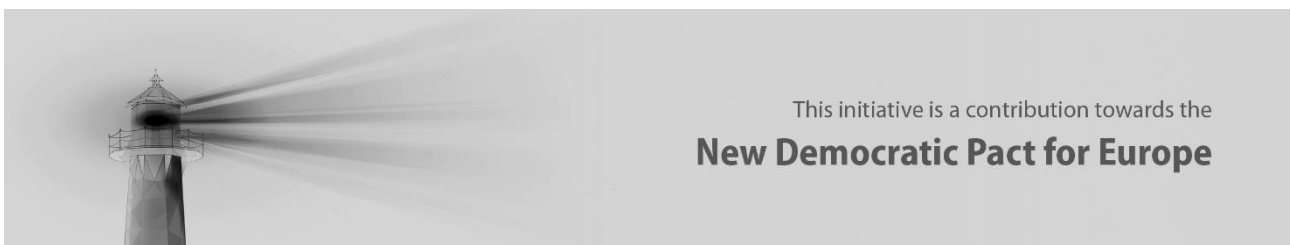
- the resilience demonstrated by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova in addressing foreign interference, and the crucial role of the Central Electoral Commission amongst Moldovan authorities in tackling such unprecedented interference;
- the importance of international and Council of Europe norms and standards in securing electoral processes, in particular the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters and Rule of Law Checklist;
- the importance of ensuring the security and integrity of electoral processes in member States, including electoral campaigns themselves, and the need for international funding support to sustain critical media in difficult environments;
- the impact of money in the media landscape on electoral fairness;
- concerns regarding changes to the algorithms of various social media platforms, which distort the information and its sources as presented to users.

Conclusion

Main outcomes

The meeting reinforced the recognition that safeguarding democracy requires a multifaceted approach, combining legal frameworks, institutional resilience and comprehensive parliamentary engagement. The *ad hoc* Committee underscored the intensifying challenge posed by foreign interference in electoral processes, amplified by digital technologies and sophisticated hybrid tactics. The *ad hoc* Committee agreed on the necessity of addressing these threats within human rights frameworks, ensuring that measures respect fundamental freedoms such as freedoms of expression and association.

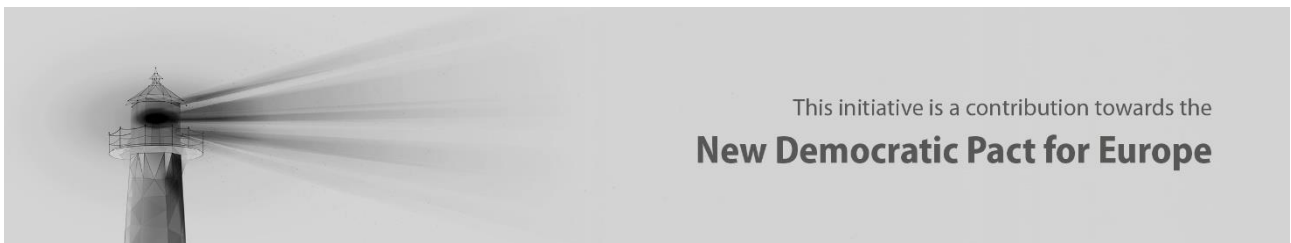
The speakers stressed the importance of robust, adequately resourced election management bodies, judicial safeguards and cross-sector co-operation, including with private technology actors. The experiences shared from the Republic of Moldova provided tangible evidence of effective resilience through preparedness and whole-of-society involvement. The dialogue highlighted the need for clear definitions and principles to avoid double standards and ensure consistent responses to interference regardless of origin.



Perspectives and next steps

The participants converged on advancing a Council of Europe-led framework integrating existing conventions and potentially a new binding convention to tackle disinformation and foreign interference. Strategic priorities include:

- finalising and disseminating updated Rule of Law standards adapting to technological and political realities;
- strengthening independent oversight bodies in electoral systems with ample powers and resources;
- promoting early warning mechanisms to detect democratic backsliding and threats on electoral processes;
- enhancing cross-border and multi-stakeholder co-operation, especially with social media platforms, on algorithm transparency and the limitation of extremist content;
- ensuring broad parliamentary advocacy and public awareness across member States to fortify democratic participation and resilience;
- continuing monitoring and reporting to inform policy development, with the *ad hoc* Committee's future meetings and reports laying the groundwork for ongoing concerted action.



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Attendance list / Liste de présence

(The names of members who took part in the meeting are in bold /
Les noms des membres ayant pris part à la réunion sont en caractères gras)

President of the Parliamentary Assembly / Président de l'Assemblée parlementaire

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS Greece / Grèce

Chairpersons of Political Groups / Président·es de Groupes politiques

Mr Frank SCHWABE

SOCIALISTS, DEMOCRATS AND GREENS GROUP / *GROUPE DES SOCIALISTES, DEMOCRATES ET VERTS*

Mr Pablo HISPÁN

GROUP OF THE EUROPEAN PEOPLE'S PARTY / *GROUPE DU PARTI POPULAIRE EUROPEEN*

Ms Elisabetta GARDINI

EUROPEAN CONSERVATIVES, PATRIOTS & AFFILIATES / *CONSERVATEURS EUROPEENS, PATRIOTES & AFFILIES*

Mr Iulian BULAI

ALLIANCE OF LIBERALS AND DEMOCRATS FOR EUROPE / *ALLIANCE DES DEMOCRATES ET DES LIBERAUX POUR L'EUROPE*

Mr George LOUCAIDES

GROUP OF THE UNIFIED EUROPEAN LEFT / *GROUPE POUR LA GAUCHE UNITAIRE EUROPEENNE*

General Rapporteur on Democracy / Rapporteur Général sur la démocratie

Mr George PAPANDEOU

Chairpersons of Committees / Président·es de commissions

Mr Bertrand BOUYX

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy / *Commission des questions politiques et de la démocratie*

Lord Richard KEEN

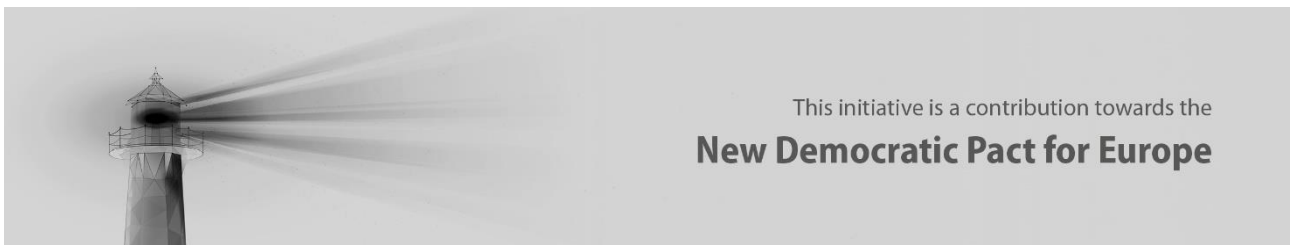
Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights / *Commission des questions juridiques et des droits de l'homme*

Ms Saskia KLUIT

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development / *Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable*

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons / *Commission des migrations, des réfugiés et des personnes déplacées*



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Mr Mehmet AKALIN, 1st VP
Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media / *Commission de la culture, de la science, de l'éducation et des médias*

Ms Catia POLIDORI
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination / *Commission sur l'égalité et la non-discrimination*

Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA
Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by member states of the Council of Europe / *Commission pour le respect des obligations et engagements des Etats membres du Conseil de l'Europe*

Mr Constantinos EFSTATHIOU

Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities / *Commission du Règlement, de l'éthique et des immunités*

Ms Petra BAYR

Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights / *Commission sur l'élection des juges à la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme*

Youth Rapporteurs / Rapporteur·es pour la jeunesse

Mr Max LUCKS

Ms Saara-Sofia SIRÉN

Ms Aurora FLORIDIA

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN

Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK

Ms Aysu BANKOĞLU

Ms Naomi CACHIA

Ms Sona GHAZARYAN

General Rapporteurs / Rapporteurs généraux et rapporteures générales

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO

Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI) people / Droits des personnes lesbiennes, gays, bissexuelles, transgenres et intersexes (LGBTI)

Mr Francesco VERDUCCI

Combating racism and intolerance / Contre le racisme et l'intolérance

Mr Georgios STAMATIS

Roma and Travellers / Roms et Gens du Voyage

Ms Mia KARAMEHIĆ – ABAZOVIĆ

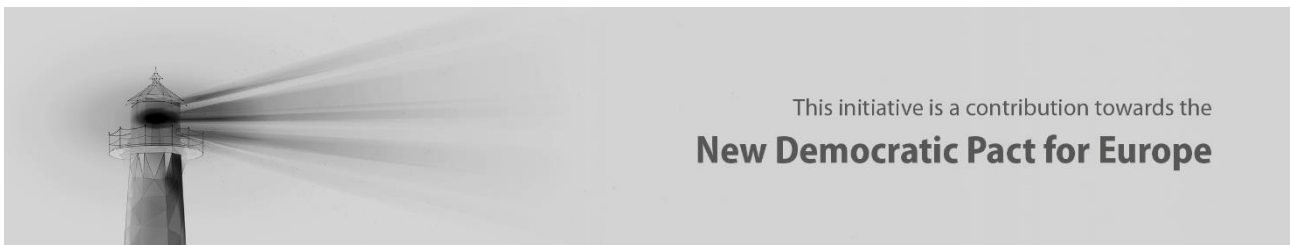
Science and technology impact assessment / Evaluation de l'impact de la science et de la technologie

Ms Valentina GRIPPO

Media freedom and safety of journalists / Liberté des médias et la sécurité des journalistes

Mr Mogens JENSEN

Governance and Ethics in Sport /Gouvernance et l'éthique dans le sport



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Ms Gala VELDHOEN
Abolition of the death penalty / Abolition de la peine de mort

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS
Situation of human rights defenders and whistleblowers / Situation des défenseurs des droits de l'homme et des lanceurs d'alerte

Ms Azadeh ROJHAN
Political prisoners / Prisonniers politiques

Mr Christophe BRICO
Budget and intergovernmental programs / Budget et le programme intergouvernemental

Mr Sergiy VLASENKO
Anti-Corruption and Ethical Standards / Normes éthiques et lutte contre la corruption

Ms Yuliia OVCHYNNYKOVA
Local and regional authorities / Pouvoirs locaux et régionaux

Ms Elena BONETTI
Participation of children / Participation des enfants

Mr George PAPANDREOU
Democracy / Démocratie

Mr Ryszard PETRU
For a Democratic Belarus / Pour un Bélarus démocratique

Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS
Russian Democratic Forces / Forces démocratiques russes

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy / Commission des questions politiques et de la démocratie

Ms Sena Nur ÇELİK KANAT

Mr Marko PAVIĆ

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Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO

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Ms Danuta JAZŁOWIECKA

Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD



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Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES

Mr Paul GALLES
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Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO
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Ms Andrea EDER-GITSCHTHALER
Ms Wanda NOWICKA
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Mr Didier MARIE
Ms Sabina ĆUDIĆ
Ms Zita GURMAI
Ms Albana VOKSHI

Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities / Commission du Règlement, de l'éthique et des immunités

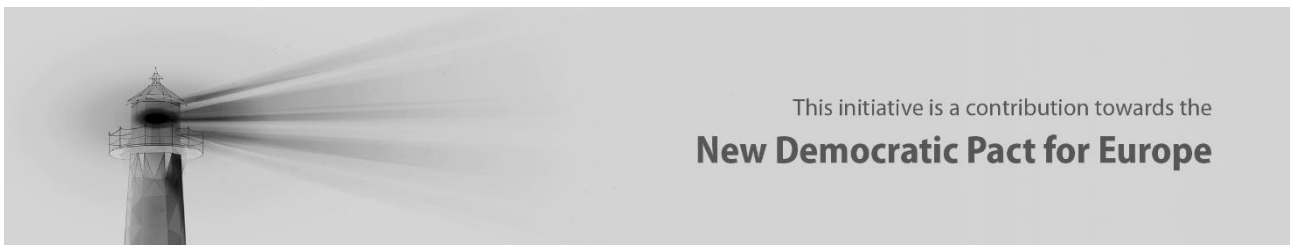
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Ms/Mme Panagiota MICHA
Ms/Mme Audur ÖRLYGSDÓTTIR, Delegation Secretary, Iceland / Secrétaire de délégation, Islande
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Ms/Mme Angelica Caraman, President of the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova / Présidente de la commission électorale centrale de la République de Moldova

Mr/M. Chris Said, Chairperson of the ad hoc committee for the observation of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova (28 September 2025) and member of the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections / Président de la commission ad hoc pour l'observation des élections parlementaires en République de Moldova (28 septembre 2025) et membre de l'Alliance parlementaire pour des élections libres et équitables

Mr/M. Martin Kuijer, Vice-President of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, member in respect of the Netherlands / Vice-Président de la Commission de Venise du Conseil de l'Europe, membre au titre des Pays-Bas

Ms/Mme Delphine Freymann, Deputy Secretary of the Commission, Venice Commission / Secrétaire adjointe de la Commission, Commission de Venise

Mr/M. Sigurður Helgi Pálmason, Representative of the Parliament of Iceland / Représentant du Parlement d'Islande

Council of Europe / Conseil de l'Europe

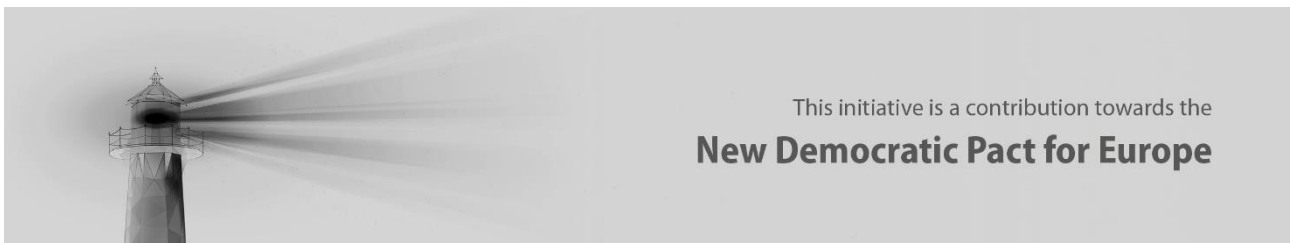
Ms/Mme Despina CHATZIVASSILIOU, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétaire Générale de l'Assemblée Parlementaire

Ms/Mme Isild HEURTIN, Head of Secretariat, Bureau of the Assembly / Cheffe de Secrétariat, Bureau de l'Assemblée

Ms/Mme Francesca ARBOGAST, Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l'Assemblée Parlementaire

Mr/M. Gaël MARTIN-MICALLEF, Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l'Assemblée Parlementaire

Ms/Mme Denise O'HARA, Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l'Assemblée Parlementaire



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