



Bureau of the Assembly

Ad hoc Committee on the New Democratic Pact

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

21 November 2025

Declassified¹

Proceedings

of the meeting held on 4 November 2025

Introduction

The *ad hoc* Committee on the New Democratic Pact was established in April 2025 as part of the Council of Europe's broader initiative to respond to democratic challenges across the continent,² and in particular to reinforce the Parliamentary Assembly's impact and parliamentary dimension in the implementation of the New Democratic Pact for Europe. After a first meeting of the *ad hoc* Committee held on 2 October 2025, the 4 November meeting was convened in Strasbourg within the solemn framework of the 75th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights. Its purpose was to lay the groundwork for measures to strengthen democratic security and resilience across Europe, as well as to assess the impact of the European Court of Human Rights' case law, particularly in relation to those freedoms most fundamental to parliamentary democracy: the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. The meeting convened leading experts and PACE members to discuss the relationship between Convention's rights and contemporary challenges, marking a significant contribution towards the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Proceedings

President's opening remarks

The President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Mr Theodoros Rousopoulos welcomed the *ad hoc* Committee members and highlighted its pivotal role in translating the Pact's principles into concrete parliamentary initiatives. In his opening remarks, the President outlined the day's agenda focusing on freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, as well as on parliamentary responsibilities within the Convention's institutional history. Members were informed of a new Assembly web page dedicated to the Convention's history and the Assembly's ongoing support for the Court and its judgments.

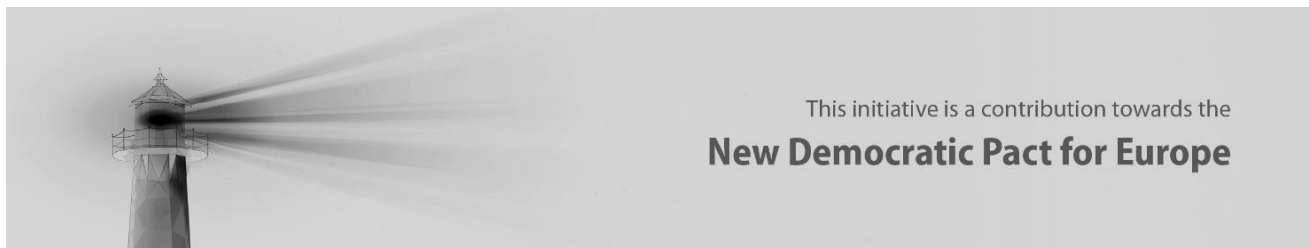
Ms Anna Austin, Jurisconsult, European Court of Human Rights

Ms Austin addressed the essential interconnection between democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, underscoring how these values are mutually reinforcing and vulnerable to restriction or abuse. She stressed that freedom of expression is vital to the democratic process, with limited scope for restricting political speech, except in cases of hate speech or disinformation, which can destabilise democracy. The case law of the European Court of Human Rights affirms robust protections for those upholding democratic processes, such as journalists, NGOs, and particularly members of parliament, who, in turn, must accept higher levels of critique.

Ms Austin explained the rigorous scrutiny applied to restrictions on political parties' rights to associate, reflecting their decisive role in pluralism and democracy. The Court distinguishes between parties adopting

¹ These proceedings were declassified by the Ad Hoc Committee on 20 November 2025.

² www.coe.int/en/web/new-democratic-pact-for-europe/home.



This initiative is a contribution towards the
New Democratic Pact for Europe

legal, democratic means – even when controversial or seeking systemic reform – and parties utilising anti-democratic methods, as exemplified in several landmark judgments. She also underlined the increasing relevance of Convention’s Articles 17 and 18 regarding the abuse of rights and restrictions applied in bad faith.

Ms Austin responded to questions about the delays in the Court’s decisions and their impact on timely democratic reforms. She highlighted that while processing times are inevitably long due to caseloads, the actual implementation rate of judgments remains high, though some political issues fall outside judicial remedy. The evolving challenges posed by technological advances and social media, especially targeted manipulation and electoral interference, were addressed through principles adapted to contemporary contexts, with the *Bradshaw and others v. UK* case cited as illustrative.³

Mr Staffan Lindberg, Director, Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem)

Mr Lindberg presented comparative insights on the global and European state of democracy, drawing on V-Dem’s extensive data.⁴ He emphasised the ongoing wave of autocratisation over the past 25 years, with declining levels of democracy and freedoms – particularly freedom of expression – now being statistically worse across numerous countries. According to V-Dem, freedom of expression has exhibited the most significant negative changes, often driven by media censorship and bias.

In the European context, he noted that socio-economic inequality creates fertile ground for democratic deterioration, echoing the situation in the continent in the 1930s. While instances of democratic renewal are evident in countries like Brazil and Poland, most cases of democratic backsliding are driven by far-right, nationalist, and anti-pluralist forces. Mr Lindberg remarked that successful defence of democracy often involves broad coalitions and a proactive judiciary, underscoring the need for vigilant institutional and political responses.

Mr Lindberg also responded to queries on how liberal democracy is defined by V-Dem (combining electoral competition, freedom of expression, freedom of association, rule of law, and accountability), stressing that the elements of this definition for data measurement purposes have remained consistent over time. He noted the strong correlation between disinformation, polarisation, and democratic erosion, pointing to the need for greater public awareness and institutional resilience.

Panel II: Political Parties and Democratic Backsliding

Ms Claire Bazy Malaurie, President, Venice Commission

Ms Bazy Malaurie introduced the Guidelines on Political Party Regulation⁵ issued by the Venice Commission jointly with the OSCE/ODIHR regarding the constitutional and legislative foundations for supporting political parties as defenders of democracy. She indicated that, while the guidelines remain relevant, the evolving political landscape poses new challenges to the parties’ capacity to fulfil this role. She outlined models of party regulation, stressing principles of pluralism, freedom of association and expression, and equal treatment, as well as the risks posed by restrictions on party activity and “winner-takes-all” dynamics.

Ms Bazy Malaurie particularly emphasised the need for State neutrality and prompt resolution of regulatory disputes, noting that delays or poor implementation of judicial decisions can undermine parties’ function as bulwarks against democratic backsliding. She also stressed that defending democracy requires that citizens support its rules and understand the related intricacies: all those who take part in democratic life should be educated and trained, and this is why political parties remain very important.

³ Case of *Bradshaw and Others v. the United Kingdom* (*Application no. 15653/22*), judgment, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=001-244218>.

⁴ www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports.

⁵ Approved by the Council of Democratic Elections at its 69th online meeting (7 October 2020) and adopted by the Venice Commission at its 125th online Plenary Session (11-12 December 2020), [www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2020\)032-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2020)032-e).



This initiative is a contribution towards the
New Democratic Pact for Europe

Ms Didi Kuo, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

Ms Kuo reflected on the current crisis of political parties, highlighting historical trends of declining membership, vote shares and public trust in parties, as well as the different causes of economic, social and political nature. She stressed that historically, the role of political parties has been to serve as linkage between citizens and society; to peacefully manage social divisions; and to uphold the norms of tolerance, peaceful transition of power, deliberation and legitimacy and fairness of democratic processes. Parties today, in contrast, are perceived as not connected to society, too elitist, and not adaptable in the face of great social and economic change. She identified short-term electoral strategies (such as the use of *cordons sanitaires* to create large pro-democracy coalitions and isolate extremist, anti-democratic factions) and, in the longer term, the necessity for parties to rebuild sustained ties with electorates, for example offering tangible membership benefits, thus giving members a greater influence, and showing that they have a role which goes beyond winning elections. Ms Kuo underscored the role of political parties as essential transmission belts between society and government, arguing that rebuilding trust and active participation are crucial for defending democracy against anti-democratic forces.

Interventions by Members

Committee members raised critical questions and comments addressing:

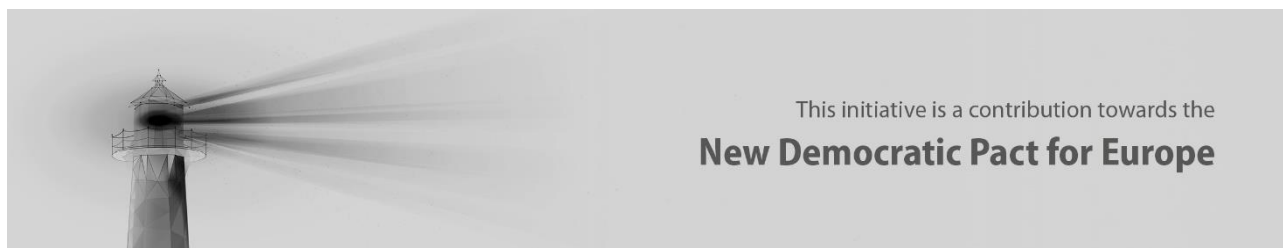
- the legal and practical means to hold social media platforms accountable for disinformation and hate speech;
- the role of socio-economic inequality in driving autocratisation and polarisation;
- challenges in the independence of media, including economic dependence on state and local funding;
- delays in decisions of the European Court of Human Rights and their impact on reform and public trust;
- strategies for public awareness, citizen engagement, and enhancing responsiveness of political parties;
- the importance of neutrality and proportional regulation in safeguarding party pluralism;
- the role of collective intelligence through citizens' assemblies and participatory mechanisms.

Speakers responded with references to both institutional frameworks and personal experience, emphasising ongoing efforts to adapt case law and policy approaches to new democratic challenges.

Conclusion

The meeting synthesised recent developments regarding freedom of expression, assembly, and association, as well as the crucial functions of political parties in preventing democratic backsliding. Key outcomes included:

- affirmation of the centrality of the European Court of Human Rights case law and Parliamentary Assembly oversight in upholding democracy;
- recognition of rising threats such as disinformation, judicial delays, polarised press, and socio-economic inequality;
- consensus on the need for robust and timely implementation of court judgments, enhanced institutional communication, and renewed democratic coalitions to counter autocratisation;
- calls for innovative policy responses, enhanced civic participation, neutral regulatory environments, and resilient party structures;
- continued commitment of the *ad hoc* committee and the Assembly to contribute to the work towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe through active debate, coalition-building, and public engagement.



This initiative is a contribution towards the
New Democratic Pact for Europe

Appendix – Programme

Chair: Mr Theodoros Rousopoulos, President of the Parliamentary Assembly

15:15-16:15 – Panel I – Impact of the Court’s judgments on freedom of expression, assembly and association

Background elements: [Case-Law Guide on article 10](#); [Case-Law Guide on article 11](#); Court’s [factsheet on political parties and associations](#)

The Court’s case-law on article 10 and article 11 – Freedom of expression, assembly and association

Ms Anna Austin, Jurisconsult of the European Court of Human Rights

Insights about freedom of expression, assembly and association in Europe from V-Dem

Mr Staffan Lindberg, Director of the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) ([bio](#))

Debate

16:15-17:15 – Panel II – Can political parties be the first line of defence against democratic backsliding?

Background elements: [Resolution 2625 \(2025\) “Political parties and democracy”](#); [CDL-AD\(2020\)032-e Joint Guidelines of the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR on Political Party Regulation](#)

The Joint Guidelines of the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR on Political Party Regulation

Ms Claire Bazy-Malaurie, President of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) ([bio](#))

Political Parties as the first line of defence against democratic backsliding

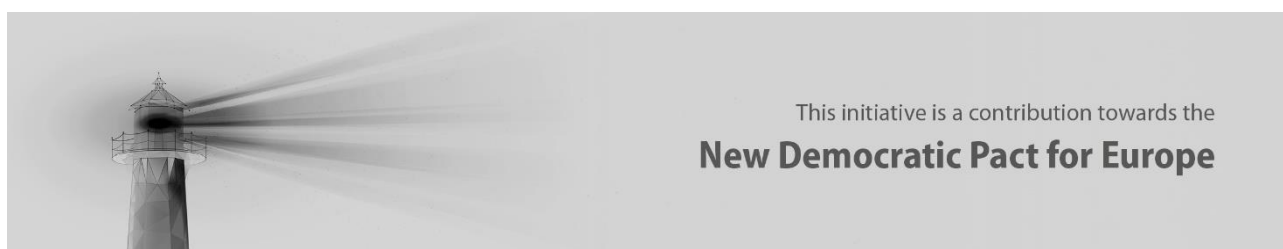
Ms Didi Kuo, Center Fellow, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies (online) ([bio](#))

Debate

17:15-17:30 – Final remarks

By **Mr George Papandreou** (Greece, SOC), General rapporteur on democracy ([bio](#))

and **Ms Valentina Grippo** (Italy, ALDE), General rapporteur on media freedom and safety of journalists ([bio](#))



This initiative is a contribution towards the
New Democratic Pact for Europe