

Within the framework of the New Democratic Pact for Europe

TOWARDS TRUSTED AND INCLUSIVE ELECTORAL PROCESSES: THE ROLE OF OBSERVERS

 **Room CC12, OECD Conference Centre, 2 rue André Pascal, Paris, France**
28 (afternoon) -29 (full day) April 2026

PACE-Congress-Venice Commission joint debate on election observation in Member States

Impartial election observation is a cornerstone of safeguarding electoral integrity and strengthening public trust in democratic institutions. As electoral environments grow increasingly complex, election observation becomes an essential component in responding to democratic backsliding. In this changing context, it is fundamental to reinforce the legitimacy of democratic processes by guaranteeing that election observation is not only allowed in every country but also effectively facilitated. Credible assessments, in line with international standards, both by domestic and international observers, should become standard practice across Council of Europe member States.

The issues:

In many Council of Europe member States, international and domestic election observation faces a range of persistent and emerging challenges, both legal and practical. Where **legal frameworks** are inadequate or lacking, election observers are left without sufficient guarantees regarding their status, rights and protection, hindering their ability to fulfil their role effectively.

Recent election observation reports have noted other obstacles such as limited access to remote or politically sensitive areas, restrictions on accreditations and rights, new voting procedures (notably out-of-country voting) and the use of digital tools, which have introduced significant **operational and logistical challenges** for observers and their methodology.

At the same time, the shrinking of civic space, limitations on fundamental freedoms, increased polarisation, foreign interference and disinformation as well as the conduct of elections in conflict and post-conflict situations, further complicate the **operational environment** and threaten the safety and independence of observers.

Addressing these issues requires clearer legal guarantees, the removal of obstacles, improved coordination among institutions and observer organisations and measures that reinforce trust, transparency, and the credibility of observation missions. In addition, a more ambitious political agenda, which could lead to a coherent and fully shared international legal framework, could also be explored.



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Setting the stage:

At the invitation of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, a joint event will be held with national policy makers in charge of elections, representatives of member states' electoral management bodies, civil society and election-related institutions at all levels.

Following the Fourth Summit of the Council of Europe heads of States and Governments and within the framework of the New Democratic Pact for Europe, the event will reflect on potential follow-up actions at Council of Europe level. This includes evaluating whether existing soft law instruments can/should be consolidated, strengthened, or developed further—potentially through a binding Council of Europe instrument on electoral matters—while respecting the diversity of electoral systems and national constitutional traditions.

Key objectives of the event:

- Assess persistent and emerging challenges faced by observers in member States at all levels.
- Review existing Council of Europe standards, opinions, and recommendations relating to election observation and observers' rights.
- Explore the effectiveness and limits of current soft-law instruments in ensuring consistent protection of observer rights.
- Discuss possible avenues for follow-up, including enhanced cooperation, guidance, or normative development at Council of Europe level.
- Contribute to an informed dialogue on the potential added value, scope, and feasibility of a binding Council of Europe instrument on electoral matters.

Conveners and participants:

Besides the three conveners, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, participants will include national policy makers in charge of elections, electoral management bodies and relevant election-related institutions from all 46 member States, as well as representatives from OSCE/ODIHR, the European Parliament, the EEAS, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and NGOs involved in election observation.



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Possible follow-up actions:

- **Assistance in reviewing legal frameworks:** providing assistance to member States in strengthening their legal frameworks for election observation, drawing on Venice Commission opinions and international best practice.
- **Comprehensive mapping** of the status of domestic and international observers across all 46 member States.
- **Training programmes for observers** on new legal provisions and principles to ensure credible and impartial election observation.
- **Targeted support for domestic observation initiatives** to strengthen their effectiveness and sustainability.
- **Enhanced cooperation** between domestic and international observers: improving interaction and collaboration to ensure consistent methodologies and mutual support.
- **Regular monitoring** of the situation of domestic and international observers during each presidential, parliamentary, and local/regional election observation mission.
- **Possible development of a shared international legal framework on elections**



Why a New Democratic Pact for Europe?

Democratic backsliding, disinformation, impunity, and authoritarianism are undermining democracy in Europe. People are increasingly afraid and frustrated. It comes at a time when democratic security – the resilience of our democratic institutions, freedoms, and values – is our first line of defence against the threats we face. A collective response is needed. There is no quick fix and no single solution. With the New Democratic Pact, the Council of Europe unites with its partners to boost solutions that work and create new responses. To identify them, consultations are needed. The Pact will serve as a collective and inclusive process – not to reinvent democracy, but to reinforce its foundations, amplify its benefits, and innovate its form to make it tangible for everyone, especially younger generations. The directions set during the consultation phase running through 2026 will shape the work that follows.



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