



## **Renewing the rules-based international order: the role of parliaments in addressing and responding to contemporary crises**

### **Background document**

*"Parliamentary diplomacy supports traditional diplomatic channels, serving as a bridge between peoples and lawmakers for promoting mutual understanding."*  
Antonio Tajani, Italian Foreign Minister (2024)

*"Only through dialogue, solidarity, determination, compassion and humility can we overcome the challenges of today and tomorrow, and build a world with peace, justice and human rights for all."*  
Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2024)

*"By supporting the rules-based order, parliaments ensure that global cooperation is anchored in respect for agreed international norms."*  
Martin Chungong, Former Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2023)

### **1. The rules-based international order under strain**

1. Emerging from the devastation of global war in 1945 and determined "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war",<sup>1</sup> the founding members of the United Nations set out to construct an ambitious architecture for peace. In the aftermath of the war, more intergovernmental organisations spread across every continent and policy area, creating an increasingly complex system of global governance, reflecting the conviction that interdependence required multilateral co-operation. The second half of the twentieth century became **the golden age of multilateralism**.

2. Nearly eight decades later, the international landscape has changed dramatically. The assumptions that underpinned the post-war order are increasingly being challenged. The world is undergoing a turbulent **transition towards multipolarity**, characterised by a redistribution of power and a growing divergence of political visions, governance models, and conceptions of the international order itself. These divergences are colliding with increasing frequency.

3. This **geopolitical fragmentation** has been accompanied by the resurgence of authoritarianism, populism, aggressive nationalism, isolationism and unilateralism, as well as an increasingly unapologetic return to raw power politics. Strategic competition has returned to the centre of international affairs with remarkable speed, often at the expense of international norms.

4. We are witnessing an unprecedented number of **conflicts**, exemplified by the Russian Federation's protracted war of aggression against Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated dramatically in 2022; the ongoing war in the Middle East, which has provoked a **humanitarian catastrophe** in Gaza; conflict-provoked **hunger and famine-like conditions** in several regions of the planet. At the same time, the world is confronted with new, complex, and interconnected **challenges**, including the climate catastrophe, environmental decline, large-scale unregulated migration, widening inequalities, global health crises, food and energy insecurity, and technological disruption.

5. Renewing multilateralism is essential to ensure a stable and predictable international system. International law provides the framework for resolving disputes peacefully, safeguarding the rights and sovereignty of all nations, and establishing clear expectations of conduct. Only through genuine multilateral co-operation can the transnational challenges affecting humanity be tackled effectively and in compliance with human rights.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Preamble to the United Nations Charter](#).

6. Renewing multilateralism requires a renewed commitment to legal norms and agreed principles. In the current increasingly fractured international landscape, **parliaments should champion this renewal and demonstrate their commitment and capacity to uphold international law.**

## 2. National parliaments and foreign policy

7. At domestic level, national parliaments can achieve this objective through their **oversight** of the executive branch, including its conduct of foreign policy. By demanding transparency, scrutinising international engagements and ensuring adherence to constitutional and legal norms, parliaments can prevent the executive from acting unilaterally. In situations where governments fail to comply with international obligations, parliamentarians and parliamentary assemblies can play an important watchdog role by maintaining political scrutiny and mobilising international attention.

8. Furthermore, parliaments play a crucial role in **ratifying treaties**, thereby formalising a state's commitment to international agreements. This process provides democratic legitimacy and ensures that the government's obligations are subject to public scrutiny, reinforcing the rules-based order. This is an essential function in areas such as human rights, environmental protection, and fighting against transnational crime, where international co-operation is vital. Parliamentary committees can also track compliance with human rights standards, the rule of law, and Council of Europe and other international commitments and obligations.

9. In times of emergency or when facing transnational challenges such as pandemics, the climate catastrophe or security threats, parliaments play a key role in providing **immediate legislative responses** that uphold the rule of law and protect democratic principles. They allocate resources, pass emergency measures and engage in cross-border co-operation.

10. In addition, national parliaments maintain **their own channels of foreign relations**. Inter-parliamentary dialogue, official visits and friendship or bilateral groups can enhance mutual understanding and trust independently of executive-to-executive ties.

## 3. The added value of parliamentary diplomacy

11. **Parliamentary diplomacy** is the ongoing dialogue and engagement between parliamentarians from different countries. Unlike traditional diplomacy, parliamentary diplomacy has a distinctive political flexibility. Operating simultaneously through formal institutions and informal channels, it often enables dialogue to continue precisely when official relations become strained or politically constrained.

12. Parliamentary diplomacy can serve a deeper democratic function. At a time when international governance is often criticised as technocratic, distant or insufficiently accountable, parliamentary engagement **reconnects multilateralism with democratic legitimacy**. It introduces political plurality, public scrutiny and representative debate into international affairs – features that are indispensable for the long-term credibility of global governance.

13. Parliamentarians are often **early detectors** of democratic decline, polarisation, foreign interference and institutional attacks, using close ties to citizens, civil society and local authorities to provide early warning.

## 4. The parliamentary dimension of multilateralism

14. The parliamentary dimension of multilateralism dates back to the late nineteenth century, notably with the creation of the **Inter-Parliamentary Union** in 1889 as the first organised forum for dialogue among national legislatures. This trend accelerated after World War II, as many new regional and international organisations included parliamentary branches to represent citizens and strengthen the democratic legitimacy and accountability of global governance.

15. One of the most influential examples is the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)**, founded in 1949, which plays a central role in oversight and deliberation within the Organisation. Similarly, the **European Parliament**, initially a consultative assembly, has evolved into a powerful legislative and budgetary authority and is today the world's only directly elected international parliamentary institution.

16. **Europe** is also home to a variety of other international parliamentary structures, either self-standing or part of intergovernmental organisations. These include the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM), the Baltic Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC), the Nordic Council and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), to name a few.

17. Importantly, the growing recognition of the parliamentary dimension of multilateralism is by no means limited to Europe. Across virtually **every continent**, there has been a clear and expanding trend towards the creation of international or regional parliamentary assemblies aimed at strengthening interparliamentary dialogue and institutional oversight within multilateral frameworks.

18. This trend is not confined to organisations bringing together liberal democracies, promoting human rights principles or based on values and commitments. Parliamentary structures have also emerged within multilateral frameworks of a more transactional, geopolitical or economic nature. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), for example, includes an Interparliamentary Assembly, while the BRICS grouping of major emerging economies holds annual parliamentary forums aimed at strengthening interparliamentary co-operation. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is also exploring a parliamentary dimension. A debate on developing a parliamentary branch of the United Nations has been going on for some time.

## 5. Some examples of parliamentary engagement in support of the rules-based order

### 5.1. International election observation missions

19. Parliamentarians play an important role in international election observation missions. Unlike purely technical observers, parliamentarians bring direct experience of electoral competition, legislative oversight, and democratic accountability. As elected representatives, they are well placed to evaluate whether elections are conducted in a genuinely pluralistic environment and whether fundamental political freedoms – including freedom of expression, assembly, and association – are respected throughout the electoral process. Their role is essential to guarantee the right to free and fair elections and ensure the respect of international standards in the electoral field.

20. International parliamentary observation missions are frequently organised by PACE, the OSCE PA, the European Parliament, the African Union, and the Organization of American States, with parliamentarians participating in the monitoring of campaigning, voting, counting, and post-election procedures.

21. An important added value of parliamentary observers lies in their ability to promote political dialogue and confidence-building among stakeholders. Their findings and recommendations can encourage electoral reforms, strengthen democratic institutions, and support public trust in electoral outcomes. Furthermore, parliamentary diplomacy can help maintain sustained engagement with partner countries beyond election day itself. Parliamentarians should also work together to further strengthen election observation tools and methodologies, making them more effective at identifying hybrid threats to the integrity of electoral processes.

### 5.2. Parliamentary networks

22. International parliamentary networks play an important role in helping translate international standards into national policies and legislation. By bringing together parliamentarians from different countries, they facilitate the exchange of good practices, peer learning and parliamentary scrutiny of governments' international commitments, thereby strengthening democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

23. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has established several thematic networks that support the implementation of European standards. These include, amongst others, networks on violence against women, environmental protection, democratic elections and, more recently, the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. Through dialogue, awareness-raising and the sharing of expertise, these networks encourage legislative reforms, strengthen oversight mechanisms and help bridge the gap between international obligations and domestic implementation.

24. The contribution of parliamentary networks extends beyond Europe. Informal international networks such as the OECD Global Parliamentary Network,<sup>2</sup> the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption,<sup>3</sup> GLOBE International,<sup>4</sup> and Parliamentarians for Global Action<sup>5</sup> which provide platforms for co-operation on issues including governance, human rights, gender equality, disarmament, anti-corruption, the climate catastrophe, biodiversity and sustainable development. By promoting practical co-operation rather than formal decision-making, these networks help parliamentarians support the effective implementation of international standards and reinforce the rule of law.

### **5.3. National parliaments and the Pact for the Future**

25. Over the past two decades, the UN has increasingly recognised that the effectiveness of multilateral commitments depends heavily on national parliamentary support. The recently adopted United Nations Pact for the Future strongly reflects this evolution.<sup>6</sup> Adopted at the 2024 Summit of the Future, the Pact seeks to ‘reinvigorate multilateralism’ and strengthen more inclusive forms of global governance. Importantly, the Pact explicitly recognises the role of national parliaments in sustaining support for multilateral co-operation.

26. Action 55 of the Pact, in particular, acknowledges the importance of ‘United Nations engagement with national parliaments in United Nations intergovernmental bodies and processes’, building upon co-operation between the UN and the IPU. This constitutes a significant political recognition that multilateralism cannot rely exclusively on executive diplomacy but requires broader democratic legitimacy through parliamentary involvement.

### **5.4. National parliaments and the New Democratic Pact for Europe**

27. National parliaments play a central and multifaceted role in the New Democratic Pact for Europe,<sup>7</sup> serving as both architects and guarantors of democratic resilience across the continent. The Pact, launched as a strategic and political initiative, underscores the importance of parliaments as pillars of independent, effective democratic institutions. They are pivotal in upholding the separation of powers, fostering accountability, and ensuring that laws and practices adhere to the highest standards of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. As the direct representatives of the people, parliaments have a unique legitimacy and responsibility to anchor the Pact’s vision within their national contexts by legislating for institutional integrity, championing judicial independence, and scrutinising executive action to prevent backsliding and safeguard democratic security.

28. Beyond their legislative and oversight functions, national parliaments are engines for inclusive participation. The Pact calls for a renewal of democratic governance that engages all sectors of society – civic actors, minorities, youth, marginalised and vulnerable groups. Parliaments can lead by example, adopting transparent and participatory procedures that allow for meaningful debate, deliberation, and the integration of diverse perspectives. By empowering parliamentary committees on human rights, equality, sustainability, and digital transformation, and by working closely with civil society, parliaments can help ensure the relevance of the Pact’s pillars – namely, learning and practising democracy, protecting democratic systems, and innovating for democratic resilience – within rapidly evolving social and technological landscapes.

29. National parliaments also serve as critical arenas for addressing emerging challenges such as disinformation, digital threats, and foreign interference. The Pact highlights the importance of informed public debate and the integrity of civic space; parliaments can support this by adopting robust measures for media pluralism, countering hate speech, and protecting civic and political actors from intimidation or violence. Moreover, by piloting self-assessment exercises parliaments can assess vulnerabilities, share best practices, and foster mutual learning, thereby enhancing their ability to anticipate and respond to crises.

30. Finally, parliaments are instrumental in operationalising the outcomes of the Pact’s broad consultations. By embedding the Pact’s orientations into legislative priorities and budgetary decisions, and by maintaining ongoing dialogue with regional and local authorities, parliaments can drive lasting institutional transformation. Their sustained commitment will be vital in translating the vision of a secure, inclusive, and future-proof democracy into tangible policies and everyday realities for all people across Europe.

---

<sup>2</sup> [Parliamentarians | OECD](#).

<sup>3</sup> [GOPAC – Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption](#).

<sup>4</sup> [GLOBE](#).

<sup>5</sup> [Parliamentarians for Global Action: Who We Are - About Us](#).

<sup>6</sup> [United Nations Pact for the Future](#).

<sup>7</sup> [Alain Berset, 2026 report, “The New Democratic Pact for Europe in times of rupture”](#).

## 6. Conclusions

31. Europe cannot afford to be a mere spectator of the erosion of shared norms and multilateral institutions. It must not position itself as a nostalgic custodian of a fading order, but rather as a driving force for its renewal. Parliaments are indispensable actors in this endeavour. Through oversight, treaty ratification, emergency response, and parliamentary diplomacy, they ensure government accountability and bridge the gap between national interests and global responsibilities. Thanks to their representativeness, they bring democratic legitimacy and greater inclusivity to the conduct of foreign relations.

32. International parliamentary assemblies can also function as rapid political response mechanisms during crises. Through urgent debates, fact-finding missions, election observation, hearings with stakeholders and political dialogue with national authorities, they can contribute to situational awareness, international coordination and confidence-building efforts. Such activities complement governmental and intergovernmental action while providing democratic legitimacy and political visibility.

33. However, vigilance remains essential. In an era where anything can be instrumentalised to stir divisions in democratic societies and lead to their destabilisation, parliamentary diplomacy and international parliamentary platforms can be exploited to undermine the international rules-based order.

34. If the twentieth century taught the world that peace requires multilateral institutions, the twenty-first is demonstrating with equal clarity that multilateral institutions require political trust, democratic legitimacy and constant renewal. Parliaments can help provide all three.

### Questions for discussion:

- How is it possible to maximise synergies between traditional and parliamentary diplomacy?
- How is it possible to ensure that parliamentary diplomacy contributes to the support of rules-based multilateralism instead of becoming an instrument of foreign interference?
- How can parliamentary diplomacy be leveraged more effectively to address international crises? And to contribute to early warning?
- How can parliamentary exchanges contribute to peace-building and reconciliation in conflict-afflicted regions?
- What role can parliaments play in ensuring accountability for violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law?
- What reforms are necessary to ensure that multilateral institutions are more effective, representative concerning gender, age, (dis)abilities, marginalisation, and capable of responding to contemporary crises? How can parliaments contribute to these reforms?
- How can parliamentarians create a better two-way connection between multilateral organisations and the citizens they represent?
- What good practices can be identified to promote the follow-up by national parliaments of the activities of international parliamentary assemblies?
- How can co-operation between international parliamentary assemblies be further strengthened?

## Appendix: key reference documents and webpages

Assembly [Resolution 2641 \(2026\)](#) "Threats against the international order: the case of Greenland"

Assembly [Resolution 2637 \(2026\)](#) "Supporting the commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine and the security of the European continent"

Assembly [Resolution 2581 \(2025\)](#) "The need for a renewed rules-based international order"

Assembly [Resolution 2259 \(2023\)](#) "The role of the Council of Europe in preventing conflicts, restoring credibility of international institutions and promoting global peace"

Assembly [Resolution 2388 \(2021\)](#) "Recent challenges to security in Europe: what role for the Council of Europe?"

[PACE parliamentary networks, alliances and platforms](#)

[Alain Berset, Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 2026, The New Democratic Pact for Europe in times of rupture](#)

Meeting of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, "[How do national parliaments take forward the work of parliamentarians who attend international parliamentary assemblies?](#)", 7 October 2013, Geneva

[Istanbul Declaration, Nurturing hope, securing peace and ensuring justice for future generations, endorsed by the 152nd IPU Assembly \(Istanbul, 19 April 2026\)](#)