

Members' Handbook Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe



March 2025



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Contents

FOREWORD	5
THE ASSEMBLY AT A GLANCE	7
What are the Assembly's mandate and goals?	7
How are topical issues picked up?	8
Who are the Assembly's members?	8
Your dual mandate	10
Ethical behaviour	10
HOW TO BE AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE ASSEMBLY	11
Exercising your right of initiative	11
Contributing to the European debate at plenary sessions	12
Participating in committee meetings	13
Taking part in observation of elections	13
Representing the Assembly at official events	14
THE ASSEMBLY'S COMMITTEES AND OTHER STRUCTURES	15
Committees	15
Standing Committee, Bureau and Presidential Committee	16
Political groups	16
Parliamentary Networks	17
HELP WITH YOUR MISSION	19
Your status as a member	19
Help with the media	20
Finances	21
Access to information	21
THE PART-SESSIONS: PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS	23
Meetings of committees and political groups	23
Languages	23
The official documents of the Assembly	24
Credentials and changes in the membership of national delegations	25
Changes in the membership of committees	26
Notification of substitutes in plenary session	26
Register of attendance	26
List of speakers	27
Speaking time	27
Request for a debate under urgent procedure	28
Request for a current affairs debate	28
Questions to guest speakers	29

Tabling amendments	29
Free debate	29
Electronic voting	30
Elections	31
Quorum	31
Majorities required	32
FACILITIES AT THE PALAIS DE L'EUROPE	33
The Chamber and offices of the national delegations	33
Restaurants and bars	33
Bank, post office and kiosk	34
Medical service	34
Shuttle bus	34
YOUR CONTACTS AT THE ASSEMBLY	35
APPENDIX	37



Foreword

Dear members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Whether you have been a member for many years or are new to the Assembly, your active involvement in such varied activities as debating and voting in the plenary chamber or 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 is crucial for the continued vibrant democratic influence exerted by the Parliamentary Assembly, one of the two statutory organs of the Council of Europe. This handbook aims precisely to encourage you to take advantage of all the opportunities that are offered to you to become fully involved.

While rules of procedure and administrative regulations, including ethical standards, are a necessary framework to channel energies and resources in a multilingual and multinational parliamentary forum, the Assembly remains first and foremost a network of committed parliamentarians and officials defending the principles and values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

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 fulfil that role and, also on their behalf, I wish you every success with your mission.

Despina Chatzivassiliou
Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly



The Assembly at a glance

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) is a pan-European political assembly representing over 700 million Europeans and bringing together 612 national legislators from the 46 member States of the Council of Europe. As one of its two statutory organs, the Assembly ensures the democratic character of the Organisation's work.

What are the Assembly's mandate and goals?

Building on its statutory role, the Assembly has over the years acquired a full-fledged parliamentary mandate.

In a nutshell, its **powers** are to:

- ▶ hold debates on emerging and topical European issues, identify trends and good practices and set benchmarks and standards;
- ▶ demand action from governments represented in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which must reply;
- ▶ give the green light for states to join the Council of Europe and influence the conditions of their accession through its opinions;
- ▶ propose multilateral treaties to improve national law and strengthen the pan-European legal space;
- ▶ ask for legal opinions on the laws and constitutions of member states;
- ▶ uncover new facts about human rights violations, in order to promote justice;
- ▶ "monitor" how far member states fulfil their undertakings regarding democratic standards;
- ▶ in case of grave violations, propose action, ultimately by recommending the exclusion or suspension of a member State;
- ▶ put questions to the heads of State and government when they address the Assembly;
- ▶ elect the judges of the European Court of Human Rights, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and the Assembly's Secretary General.



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 for a recommendation on an issue which merits discussion by the Assembly. If the Assembly decides that the issue indeed merits a debate, the relevant committee will be responsible for examining the matter and appointing a rapporteur to prepare a report to be presented to the Assembly.

Moreover, on the initiative of the political groups, national delegations, committees or members, the Assembly may hold **current affairs debates** or **debates under urgent procedure**.

Who are the Assembly's members?

The 612 members of the Assembly are elected or appointed from among the members of the national or federal parliaments. Within each national delegation, there is an equal number of representatives (who are entitled to vote and speak during the plenary debates) and substitutes (who can vote and speak during the plenary debates only if they are replacing a representative and have been duly designated by their national delegation). In total, there are 306 representatives and 306 substitutes.

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 of Europe, with the main criteria being population size (see Appendix).



Gender equality

Several provisions in the Assembly's Rules of Procedure refer to **gender equality**. 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 fixed percentage determined by the size of the delegation. Nominations for the posts of Vice-President of the Assembly, of members of committees and rapporteurs of committees should also take into account the principle of gender equality.

Observer and partner for democracy status

The Assembly has granted observer status to parliaments of some non-member states of the Council of Europe which accept the principles of democracy, the rule of law and the enjoyment by all persons within their jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and wish 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, provided that the parliaments meet a set of general conditions. The Parliaments of Jordan, Kyrgyzstan and Morocco, as well as the Palestinian National Council, currently enjoy partner for democracy status with the Assembly.

Observer and partner for democracy delegations, as well as the delegation appointed by the Assembly of Kosovo* enjoying a special status, may take part in Assembly debates, with the right to speak but without the right to vote, and may participate in committee meetings under certain conditions.

Your dual mandate

Whether you belong to the ruling majority or the opposition, you are 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 Assembly known in your home country and promote their implementation. You can also make known the position of your parliament or your political party in Assembly debates.

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 principles of the Council of Europe and that you shall abide by the code of conduct's provisions. You must furthermore fill out a **declaration of interests** which will be published on the Assembly's website.

In addition, rapporteurs must abide by the [code of conduct for rapporteurs](#). Candidates for rapporteurships must 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, you are encouraged to make a similar declaration if you 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.

* 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

Exercising your right of initiative

If you believe a topic merits examination and debate in the Assembly, you should draft a **motion for a resolution or for a recommendation** outlining the issue in not more than 300 words, obtain the signature of at least 20 Assembly members belonging to five national delegations, or the support of a committee, and table the motion with the Table Office via the online application “Pace-Apps” (<https://pace-apps.coe.int/>). Once tabled, a motion cannot be withdrawn by its authors and no signature may be withdrawn or added to it.

Following a proposal by the Presidential Committee, the Bureau of the Assembly will decide whether the question merits consideration by a committee and, if so, propose to the Assembly that it be referred to the appropriate committee for report (it may also propose to refer it to one or more other committees for opinion) or to be taken into account in the preparation of an ongoing report. If not, the Bureau will propose to transmit it to a committee for information or decide that no further action be taken. The committee to which the matter is referred (following ratification by the Assembly) will appoint a rapporteur to prepare a report.

You can also draft a **written declaration** not exceeding 200 words on a subject falling within the competences of the Council of Europe. You need to obtain the signature of at least 20 Assembly members belonging to 4 national delegations and two political groups, and table the declaration with the Table Office via the online application “Pace-Apps”. Written declarations are published on the Assembly website but they commit only those who have signed them, do not give rise to a committee report and are not debated in the Assembly. No signature may be withdrawn.

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 (the latter must be tabled at least one week before the opening of the part-session); both oral and written questions may be answered orally by the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers during the same part-session; no member may put more than one **oral or written question to the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers** at any one part-session;
- ▶ outside part-sessions, you can address a **written question to the Committee of Ministers** to which you will receive a written answer within six months. A written question may also be addressed by several members of the Assembly. Both the question and the reply are published on the Assembly website as an Assembly document.

Contributing to the European debate at plenary sessions

To express your point of view, you are encouraged to register on the list of speakers and vote in the plenary debates.

The Assembly holds one “ordinary” plenary session each year, which is divided into four part-sessions, taking place in January, April, June and October at the Palais de l’Europe in Strasbourg (France).

At the beginning of each part-session, all representatives are authorised to speak and vote in the plenary Assembly. If you are a substitute, you will be able to speak and vote in plenary or during elections by the Assembly only if you are replacing a representative.

The Assembly’s sittings are broadcast live; your speeches in plenary are published in the verbatim records and are available on the Assembly website via the video on demand (VOD) tool. Votes are published on the website at the end of the relevant debate.

Participating in committee meetings

Many Assembly activities take place at the level of committees and therefore active participation within the committees is essential if you wish to have an influence on the subjects being debated. You can be a full member in maximum two committees (and also, if applicable, in the Monitoring, Rules and Election of Judges Committees, whose membership is determined by the political groups) or an alternate.

Most debates in the Assembly and in the Standing Committee take place on the basis of committee reports. The committee reports are prepared and presented by a rapporteur, with the help of the Assembly 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, and can prompt direct government reactions and trigger political change.

Once an Assembly text is adopted, the rapporteur and the relevant committee follow-up the implementation during the following twelve months.

Taking part in observation of elections

The Assembly systematically observes parliamentary and presidential elections in states subject to its monitoring or post-monitoring procedure. It also observes the elections in states whose parliament enjoys partner for democracy status. Observing the elections is subject to an invitation received from the authorities of the country concerned. For each election observation, the Bureau of the Assembly constitutes an ad hoc committee to carry out the mission based on the candidates proposed by the political groups. Your experience as a national elected representative is a distinct advantage for the successful handling of these missions, normally carried out as part of an International Election Observation Mission also involving the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and occasionally the European Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

In principle, you will 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.

Representing the Assembly at official events

The Assembly holds a seat in a number of intergovernmental committees and treaty bodies of the Council of Europe. It is the Bureau that appoints the representatives of the Assembly to these bodies.

Moreover, the Assembly is regularly invited to be represented at events (conferences, seminars, hearings) organised by other organisations, intergovernmental committees of the Council of Europe, NGOs, etc. If you would like to represent the Assembly on those occasions, participate or make a presentation, you should make your availability known to the Secretariat before the Bureau or committees designate a representative; you will be invited to report on the event and your contribution thereto.



The Assembly's committees and other structures

Committees

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)

Most of the committees constitute sub-committees or designate 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 (see below), plus the chairpersons of the national delegations. It is convened twice a year in the member States which hold the rotating Presidency of the Council of Europe.

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 Vice-Presidents of the Assembly,¹ the chairpersons of the political groups, the chairpersons of the committees, and four *ex officio* members.²

The **Presidential Committee** is a consultative body for the Bureau and the President. It prepares the 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

1. A Vice-President shall be elected by the Assembly in respect of each national delegation entitled to a seat according to a system of apportionment of seats divided into four groups based on the size of the national delegations.
2. Chairpersons of the national delegations of the member States holding the current, the previous and the next two chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers shall be *ex officio* members of the Bureau.

are therefore called upon to join one of the **five political groups**, depending on their political affiliation:

- ▶ the Socialist, Democrats and Greens Group (SOC);
- ▶ the Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD);
- ▶ the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates (ECPA);
- ▶ the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE);
- ▶ the Group of the Unified European Left (UEL).

Members who choose not to belong to a political group are referred to as non-registered members (NR).

Membership of a political group conditions the possibility to sit in the Monitoring, Rules and Election of Judges committees or the *ad hoc* committees of the Bureau to observe elections, for which candidates are put forward by the groups. The political groups also nominate the candidates for the election of the nine committee bureaux (one chairperson and three vice-chairpersons for each committee). Tellers responsible for supervising the procedure for electing judges of the European Court of Human Rights and Council of Europe high officials are appointed by political groups. In addition, as political groups receive a grant allowance from the budget of the Assembly, they provide members with administrative and political support.

Parliamentary Networks

The Assembly has created a number of thematic networks that bring together its members so that they are made aware of particular issues of paramount importance to European citizens and can press for change in these specific areas:

- ▶ the parliamentary Network women free from violence;
- ▶ the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance;
- ▶ the parliamentary Network for a healthy environment;
- ▶ the parliamentary Platform for the rights of LGBTI people in Europe;
- ▶ the parliamentary Network on the situation of the children of Ukraine;
- ▶ the parliamentary Network of election observers;
- ▶ the Parliamentary Alliance for Good Governance and Integrity in Sport.

These networks are generally run under the auspices of a relevant Assembly committee.

The Women@PACE group is a non-political, cross-party, informal platform open to all women members of the Assembly; it allows them to address, from a woman's perspective, any issue affecting society, share experiences, channel their initiatives, co-ordinate and build synergies to bring about change.

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 participation in Assembly activities. The only constraints on the Secretariat are its duty of impartiality and the availability of resources.

Your status as a member

Privileges and Immunities

Members of the Assembly are covered by special rules on immunity at European level, laid down by the Statute of the Council of Europe, the General Agreement on Privileges and Immunities of the Council of Europe of 1949 and its additional Protocol of 1952. These rules establish the twofold principle of parliamentary non-liability and inviolability and provide in addition for the free movement of Assembly members within the territory of the member States.

For more information, see “[Parliamentary Assembly and parliamentary immunity](#)”.

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 at least two weeks before a part-session.

Badges

At the beginning of your term of office, you will receive a badge, which will be valid throughout your term of office. Distribution of badges is ensured by the Council of Europe accreditation office at the main entrance hall of the Palais de l'Europe. The badge has two important functionalities:

- ▶ It gives you access to all areas of the Palais de l'Europe (Chamber, meeting rooms, national delegations' offices, Parliamentarians' Bar and restaurants). The badge must be worn at all times within the building.
- ▶ It allows you to take the floor and serves as your voting card in the Chamber. Therefore, you are invited to insert it in the voting terminal when you take your seat in the Chamber and to remove it when you leave 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 for any advice.

The website

The Assembly's 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 social networks, personal websites and blogs.

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 as soon as possible.

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. Important hearings or other public events are also livestreamed via the Assembly's YouTube channel.

A "self-service" online VOD tool enables to download your speeches and allows video clips from plenary sessions to be edited, downloaded and posted on social media or the web, showcasing your work at the Assembly.

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 Assembly.

However, when they leave on an official journey for the Assembly (for example fact-finding visits by rapporteurs, or representing the Assembly at official events), members are entitled to claim the reimbursement of their travel and subsistence expenses in accordance with an aide-mémoire updated in March 2024 concerning the reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses of members of the Parliamentary Assembly travelling at the charge of the Council of Europe budgets.

Access to information

Reference texts

The following reference texts are published on the Assembly's website and updated regularly:

- ▶ the **Assembly List** consisting of all members, according to their affiliation by political group, by committee and by national delegation. It also contains a list of members of observer delegations, Partners for democracy, and the list and contact numbers of the members of the Assembly Secretariat;
- ▶ the **Rules of Procedure** of the Assembly which 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**.

Electronic tools and applications

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

In addition, members have personal and protected access to the **online application "Pace-Apps"** (<https://pace-apps.coe.int/>), where they can table texts, register for meetings and access all committee documents. Members must also fill in their annual declaration of interests on "Pace-Apps". An account is created for each new member when they join the Assembly, access to which is personal and confidential.



The part-sessions: practical arrangements

Meetings of committees and political groups

The list of meetings to be held by the committees and the other bodies of the Assembly (Bureau, political groups, etc.) is published on the Assembly's website (under the banner "Diary"). Unless a committee decides otherwise, committee meetings are not public. The documents of the meetings are made available to members on Pace-Apps or sent by e-mail by the secretariat of the committee concerned.

Meetings of political groups usually 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.

The official documents of the Assembly

The official documents of the Assembly are available in French and English, on the website of the Assembly.

In addition to **motions for a resolution** or for a **recommendation, written declarations**, written **questions addressed to the Committee of Ministers**, and the **curricula vitae of candidates for elections** by the Assembly (for example judges of the European Court of Human Rights), the official documents are:

■ Reports

Committee reports comprise one or more draft texts for adoption (resolution and/or recommendation or opinion) and an explanatory memorandum prepared under the responsibility of the rapporteur. After adoption of the draft text in a committee, it is edited and officially published two weeks before the opening of a part-session so that members can read it in preparation for the debates in plenary or in the Standing Committee. Only draft texts for adoption can be amended by the Assembly.

The reports of the ad hoc committees on the observation of elections do not include a draft text for adoption.

A committee may be seized for an opinion on the report of the main committee. An opinion submitted in writing contains a section entitled “Conclusions of the committee”, proposed amendments and an explanatory memorandum by the rapporteur.

■ Adopted texts

The texts adopted by the Assembly are published after each sitting. They are:

- ▶ resolutions (embodying a decision by the Assembly on a question of substance which it is empowered to put into effect, proposals addressed to member States, other international organisations, civil society, etc.);
- ▶ recommendations (proposals addressed to the Committee of Ministers, for implementation by that Committee or the governments);

- ▶ 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 on the accession of new member States or exclusion of a member State, draft conventions or the Council of Europe's budget.

■ Agenda

The draft agenda prepared by the Bureau on the basis of a list of reports approved by the committees is made available to members of the Assembly at least two weeks before the opening of the part-session. It is adopted by the Assembly at the first sitting of the part-session; any motion to amend it 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.

■ Amendments

Amendments to draft texts must be tabled by members or a committee in accordance with the relevant rules of procedure, particularly [Rule 34](#). A compendium of amendments to a draft text is then published on the website.

■ Verbatim records

Verbatim records (English/French/German/Italian) of the speeches made in the Chamber are available on the Assembly's website after each sitting. These records are produced by artificial intelligence (speech-to-text). In case of inaccuracy, members may ask for corrections to be made to these records by submitting their request to the Table Office within 24 hours. Members who were entered on the list of speakers and present in the Chamber but were unable to speak because of lack of time may – no later than four hours after the list of speakers is interrupted – submit the text of their undelivered speeches (limited to 400 words) to the Table Office electronically (table.office@coe.int).

Credentials and 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, during the year, national parliaments may appoint new members to the Assembly to fill seats that have become vacant through death or resignation, or following parliamentary elections. National parliaments shall make such appointments within six months of the election.

Members' credentials shall be sent by the president of the national parliament concerned to the President of the Assembly, who shall submit them to the Assembly or the Standing Committee for ratification. Credentials may be challenged at the opening of a part-session or a meeting of the Standing Committee on procedural grounds (based on criteria of political representation or gender representation) or on substantive grounds (serious violation of the basic principles and values of the Council of Europe, persistent failure to honour obligations and commitments).

Changes in the membership of committees

The 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. The President of the Assembly submits the proposed change(s) to the Assembly or the Standing Committee.

Notification of substitutes in plenary session

As soon as their credentials are ratified, all representatives have the right to speak and vote in the plenary sitting using their badges. This is not the case for substitutes, who may have the right to speak and vote only if they are replacing an absent representative of their delegation. 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/>).

The online system for substitution registration is open before the part-session shortly after the draft agenda has been made public. Delegation secretaries can register and unregister any substitute member of their delegation for the entire session week or for a particular sitting or debate. Registration closes 24 hours before the debate concerned.

Register of attendance

All members of the Assembly have access to the Chamber at any time of a sitting. The seating in the Chamber is organised by political groups; all the

members of the Assembly, whether representatives or substitutes, who have registered online on “Pace-Apps” and confirmed their participation in a part-session will have a reserved seat.

Before entering the Chamber, members must electronically sign the register of attendance with their badge. An interactive station is placed next to each entry door of the Chamber for this purpose.

With a view to facilitating orientation in the Chamber, upon badging, the station notably indicates members which entry door they are using, their allocated seat number and its location in the Chamber.

List of speakers

Members who wish to speak in a debate must ask the secretaries of the national delegations or the secretaries of the political groups to register their names on a list of speakers by using the on-line system of registration on “Pace-Apps” (<https://pace-apps.coe.int/>). The lists are opened before the part-session shortly after the publication of the draft agenda. The deadlines for registering on the list of speakers are indicated on the draft agenda.

During a part-session, members may have their names entered on the list for a maximum of five debates but may not take the floor for 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 guest speakers). Only authorised members – that is 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 guest speakers.

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 (see Complementary texts, Appendix I, Additional provisions relating to Assembly debates).

Speaking time

- ▶ During the debates on a report, rapporteurs have ten minutes (seven minutes to present the report and three minutes to reply).
- ▶ The chairperson of the committee seized for report (at the end of the debate) and all other speakers have three minutes.

- ▶ Co-rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee have five minutes each to present the report (and five minutes to be divided at their convenience to reply). Five minutes are also given to rapporteurs of the Bureau ad hoc committees on the observation of elections.
- ▶ Members have 30 seconds to put a question for an oral reply to the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers or to guest speakers, or to present an amendment or a procedural motion.

Request for a debate under urgent procedure

At the request of the Committee of Ministers, of a committee, of one or more political groups, or of 20 or more members, a debate under urgent procedure may be held on an item which has not been placed on the Assembly's draft agenda. The request must be addressed to the President of the Assembly in time for the last Bureau meeting before the opening of the part-session. The President submits it to the Bureau, which makes a proposal to the Assembly. The adoption of urgent procedure requires a two-thirds majority of the votes cast in the Assembly.

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. It does not contain an explanatory memorandum.

Request for a current affairs debate

At least 20 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 cannot be more than two current affairs debates per part-session. A current affairs debate may normally not exceed one and a half hours. The debate is opened by a member chosen by the Bureau who has ten minutes speaking time in total (indicatively seven to introduce the debate and three to reply to it).

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

The Standing Committee may also hold a current affairs debate.

Questions to guest speakers

For guest speakers, the draft agenda indicates whether there is the possibility for members to ask questions and the deadline for registration. The Presidency of the Committee of Ministers presents a communication at each part-session. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe intervenes at all part-sessions to answer members' oral questions and presents an annual report at the January part-session. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights presents an annual activity report once a year, at the April part-session.

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 or via the online application "Pace-Apps" (<https://pace-apps.coe.int/>). The procedure for tabling, examining and voting on amendments and sub-amendments is set out in [Rule 34 of the Rules of Procedure](#).

Amendments and sub-amendments must be signed by at least five members, unless they have been submitted on behalf of the committee seized for report or opinion.

The deadlines for tabling amendments are indicated in the draft agenda of the part-session. Sub-amendments must be tabled at least one hour before the scheduled end of the sitting preceding that in which the debate begins.

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.

Free debate

With a view to making part-sessions livelier, the Assembly introduced the possibility of holding a "free debate" as from January 2012. During the free debate, limited to one hour, Assembly members may speak freely on a topic of their choice not appearing on the agenda of the part-session. Members must be registered on the list of speakers and speeches must comply with the regulations governing the proper conduct of debates concerning acceptable speech. No vote is taken in the free debate and no action is taken by the Assembly.



Electronic voting

All votes in the Assembly, except for elections, take place by electronic voting in the Chamber.

Badges issued to members serve as voting cards. Thus, to vote, members must insert their badge in the voting terminal. A badge is valid if the name of the member, as well as his/her country and his/her political group, are displayed on the small screen in the voting terminal. At the bottom of the screen, the sentence “you have the right to vote” or “you do not have the right to vote” will appear.

Any malfunctioning or error message displayed on the voting terminal screen should immediately be reported to the Secretariat present in the Chamber.

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

After the opening of a vote, members may 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 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 modify this 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 verbatim records of the sitting.



Elections

Elections of judges of the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and the Secretary General of the Assembly are held by secret ballot on the day and times specified in the agenda of the part-session, usually on Tuesday (first round in the morning and second round in the afternoon), using paper ballots, polling booths and ballot boxes. They take place in the rotunda behind the presidential rostrum. Members must present their badge to identify themselves and sign the attendance sheet electronically. After having cast their vote, their participation is recorded electronically by validating their badge again.

Note: If you are a substitute, you will be able to vote during elections by the Assembly only if you are duly replacing a representative.

Quorum

The votes of the Assembly are 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 this 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 agenda, for the setting up of a committee and the decision to dismiss the holder of an elective office. Specific majorities apply for elections. A tie vote is equivalent to a negative vote.



Facilities at the Palais de l'Europe

The Council of Europe has several buildings devoted to its activities. The building where the plenary sittings of the Assembly and its committee meetings take place is known as the “Palais de l’Europe”.

The Chamber and offices of the national delegations

The Chamber where the plenary sittings take place, also referred to as the “Hemicycle”, is situated on the 1st floor of the Palais. The offices of parliamentary delegations and political groups are situated on the 5th floor.

Restaurants and bars

The two restaurants in the Palais – a formal sit-down restaurant (the “Blue Restaurant”) and a self-service canteen – are situated on the ground floor. There are also two bars. The one used by most parliamentarians is situated on the 1st floor opposite the Chamber (the “Parliamentarians’ Bar”) and the other one (“Café du Palais”), on the ground floor, right before the restaurants. Information on the services and opening hours of the various catering areas are communicated to delegations before each part-session.

Bank, post office and kiosk

A bank, a cash point, a post office, and a kiosk are at your disposal at the main entrance hall of the Palais. The opening times are communicated to delegations before each part-session.

Medical service

A medical service is provided during the part-sessions starting from 8.30 am. The medical centre is located on the ground floor, on the right-hand side of the bank in the main entrance hall of the Palais.

The medical service call number is 24 42. For emergencies, dial 33 00 from an internal phone or 00 33 3 88 41 33 00 from a mobile phone.

Shuttle bus

A free shuttle bus between the centre of Strasbourg, the train station and the Palais de l'Europe is provided by the city of Strasbourg during part-sessions. You will need to present your badge when entering the bus.

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Appendix

Composition of national delegations of Council of Europe member States:

Member States	Number of representatives and substitutes	Date of 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
Czechia	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	13.04.1950
Ukraine	12 + 12	09.11.1995
United Kingdom	18 + 18	05.05.1949



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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. The Parliamentary Assembly, consisting of representatives from the 46 national parliaments, provides a forum for debate and proposals on Europe's social and political issues. Many Council of Europe conventions originate from the Assembly, including the European Convention on Human Rights.



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE