

*Within the framework of the New Democratic Pact for Europe*

# ***Towards Trusted and Inclusive Electoral Processes: The Role of Observers***

28 (afternoon) - 29 (full day) April 2026

 Paris, OECD, 2 Rue André Pascal, 75016 Paris (16e arrondissement), Room CC12

Event moderator: **David Eades**, Broadcaster and Conference Host, former BBC Europe Correspondent and Anchor

**Format:** *This joint debate is designed as an interactive exchange among practitioners and experts. Rather than formal speeches, each session will feature a short introduction by a lead speaker, followed by two discussants, before opening the floor to interventions. To facilitate moderation and ensure contributions from the broadest possible range of viewpoints and stakeholders, participants wishing to speak may want to inform the organisers beforehand at [congress.elections@coe.int](mailto:congress.elections@coe.int).*

## **Tuesday 28 April 2026**

**13:30 - 14:15 | Registration and welcome coffee**

**14:30 - 15:00 | Opening statements**

- **Petra Bayr**, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
- **Gunn Marit Helgesen**, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
- **Marta Cartabia**, President of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe

**15:00 - 16:30 | Session I: *Legal Frameworks for Domestic and International Election Observation – Guarantees, Gaps and Good practices***

*What minimum legal guarantees should national frameworks provide to ensure meaningful and credible election observation by both domestic and international observers?*



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**New Democratic Pact for Europe**

**Key themes:**

- Legal guarantees for access, accreditation and protection of domestic and international observers
- Differences and complementarities between domestic and international observation under national legal frameworks
- Balancing transparency with electoral security
- Legal status and protection of domestic observers under national laws and recent amendments

**Chair: Stewart Dickson**, Vice-Chair of the Council for Democratic Elections, member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (United Kingdom)

**Lead speaker: Oliver Kask**, substitute member of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe in respect of Estonia, Rapporteur of the 2024 Venice Commission report on "Election Observers as Human Rights Defenders"

**Discussants:**

- **Zofia Lutkiewicz**, President of the Political Accountability Foundation (Poland), Board member of the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) and the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM)
- **Rian Vogels**, Rapporteur on "The need to protect election observers", member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Netherlands)

Q&A / Discussion

16:30

Family photo

17:00 - 18:30

Reception

## Wednesday 29 April 2026

**08:30 – 09:15 | Welcome coffee**

**09:30 – 11:00 | Session II: *Security and Operational Challenges in Election Observation***

*How can election observers effectively operate in increasingly challenging environments while ensuring their safety, access and the integrity of the observation process?*

**Key themes:**

- Safety and security of observers in times of conflict, crisis and political polarisation
- Access to remote or politically sensitive and restricted areas
- Observing out-of-country and diaspora voting
- Foreign interference, digital threats and data protection challenges affecting election observation

**Chair: Srdjan Darmanović**, Vice-Chair of the Council for Democratic Elections, member of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe in respect of Montenegro

**Lead speaker: Meaghan Fitzgerald**, Head of the Election Department, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)



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**Discussants:**

- **Nicolae Panfil**, Director of the Monitoring Democratic Processes Programme at Promo-LEX (Republic of Moldova)
- **Holly Ruthrauff**, independent election expert (United Kingdom)

Q&A / Discussion

**11:00 – 11:30 | Coffee break**

**11:30 - 13:00 | Session III: *Fostering Co-Operation for Enhanced Electoral Integrity and Public Trust***

*How can election observation actors coordinate more effectively to strengthen credibility, public trust and the impact of their findings?*

**Key themes:**

- Ensuring complementarity and avoiding duplication between international observation missions
- Cooperation between IEOM partners
- Communication strategies: joint statements, public messaging and media engagement
- Building trust and co-operation with domestic observers and political stakeholders
- Preventing misuse of election observation, including fake observers

**Chair: Lord David Blencathra**, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (United Kingdom)

**Lead speaker: Stefanie Schiffer**, Director of European Exchange, Chair of the Board of the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE)

**Discussants:**

- **Zlatko Vujović**, Executive Director of the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO)
- **Riccardo Chelleri**, Senior Election Advisor, European External Action Service (EEAS)

Q&A / Discussion

**13:00 - 14:30 | Lunch break**

**14:30 - 16:00 | Session IV: *The Way Forward: Priorities for Action***

*Which concrete measures can governments, EMBs and observation actors take to better protect observers' legal and operational rights and strengthen trust in electoral processes? What role for the Council of Europe?*



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## Key themes

- Strengthening legal guarantees for election observation by encouraging member States to introduce or update legislation that clearly protects the rights of domestic and international observers, including access, accreditation and freedom of movement
- Establishing mechanisms to prevent and respond to intimidation, harassment or administrative restrictions affecting election observers
- Strengthening dialogue and interaction between EMBs, domestic observer organisations and international missions throughout the electoral cycle
- Developing standards, codes of conduct and training programmes to support professional and credible election observation
- Ensuring effective follow-up to election observation recommendations and promoting electoral reforms based on observation findings

**Chair: Niklas Wilhelmsson**, Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM), Head of Democracy and Elections Unit, Department for Democracy and Public Law of the Ministry of Justice of Finland

**Lead speaker: George Papandreou**, General Rapporteur on Democracy, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Greece)

## Discussants:

- **Konstantinos Koukas**, Congress Bureau Rapporteur for the New Democratic Pact for Europe, President of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress (Greece)
- **Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz**, senior international election expert (United Kingdom)

Q&A / Discussion

**16:00 - 16:30 | Coffee Break**

## 16:30 – 17:15 | Closing Session: *The Paris Call to Action on Election Observation*

Presentation of the draft conclusions of the debate and “Call to Action” by **Rastó Kužel**, General Rapporteur of the debate, Executive Director of Memo98

## Concluding remarks

- **Pablo Hispán**, Chair of the Council for Democratic Elections, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Spain)
- **Stewart Dickson**, Vice-Chair of the Council for Democratic Elections and member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (United Kingdom)
- **Srdjan Darmanović**, Vice-Chair of the Council for Democratic Elections, member of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe in respect of Montenegro

## 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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