



## Resolution 980 (1992)<sup>1</sup>

# Citizens' participation in politics

### Parliamentary Assembly

1. During a conference held in the Budapest Parliament building from 15 to 17 May 1991, the Parliamentary Assembly convened elected representatives, NGOs<sup>2</sup> and media representatives from Western, Central and Eastern Europe to analyse the situation of long-standing and recently established pluralistic democracies.
2. The Assembly recalls the keen concern expressed in its [Resolution 800 \(1983\)](#) -“Democracy atrophies without frequent participation by citizens who should, wherever possible, be consulted on matters closely concerning them, through appropriate mechanisms” -and notes that the present situation, as revealed by the work of the conference, is far from satisfactory.
3. Democracies consolidated by decades of existence are suffering from the growing indifference of citizens to political life and the decline in the rate of citizens' participation in elections.
4. Among the reasons cited for this state of affairs, particular emphasis was laid on :
  - 4.1. the insufficient attention paid to NGOs by elected representatives, parties and government authorities. Greater heeding of NGOs, which comprise the active members of society, would facilitate the conduct of the political process ;
  - 4.2. the insufficient means granted to parliamentarians to meet their needs for information and consultation vis-à-vis citizens and NGOs ;
  - 4.3. the failings of the media, and particularly the audiovisual media, which concentrate on “sensational stories”, confine themselves to a superficial and “slanted” presentation of news items and neglect their role as a means of expression and participation at the service of citizens and their associations.
5. The countries of Eastern and Central Europe have to contend with the considerable problems generated by reforms that are required to change not only structures but also attitudes. The instilling of a sense of responsibility in citizens in the face of the implications of the democratisation of society, on the one hand, and recognition of the emancipation of citizens and their needs by the public authorities, on the other, are at their early stages.
6. The Assembly notes, however, that :
  - 6.1. denunciation of the shortcomings of parliamentary democracies does not call into question attachment to the representative system considered to be “the best and the only one acceptable” ;
  - 6.2. the conference revealed a number of gaps in relations between elected representatives and NGOs which, if they were filled, would pave the way for the advent of a civil society in Western Europe and for the regeneration of citizens' movements which have led to representative democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

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1. Assembly debate on 7 February 1992 (26th Sitting) (see [Doc. 6537](#), report of the Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations, Rapporteur : Mrs Haglund). Text adopted by the Assembly on 7 February 1992 (26th Sitting).

2. Non-Governmental Organisations : associations, foundations, movements or groups independent of government, constituted on a non-profit-making basis to defend specific interests.



7. It firmly stresses the fact that relations between parliamentarians and NGOs should not lead to a confusion of roles and that only parliamentarians in their legislative capacity represent general interest.
8. In order to strengthen parliamentary democracy the Assembly considers it necessary to foster and support the development of voluntary, unpaid activities by NGOs, which may, through their role as a means of information on social problems and of citizens' participation in politics, help elected representatives to be more in touch with the budding aspirations of citizens.
9. It appeals to political parties and to the media to review their relations with NGOs so that they can be more effectively informed of their needs and aspirations and more fully take them into account.
10. Moreover, the Assembly asks member parliaments to prepare legislative measures :
  - 10.1. allowing NGOs to be granted resources that will enable them to discharge specific tasks of public interest in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, in other words, tasks which may be competently performed at their level to the satisfaction of citizens ;
  - 10.2. laying down the conditions for NGOs to have access to these resources : type of status, modes of election, methods of democratic management, etc. ;
  - 10.3. guaranteeing impartiality in the application of measures concerning the assistance provided for NGOs and their independence once they have obtained it ;
  - 10.4. granting parliamentarians adequate means to meet their needs for information and consultation vis-à-vis citizens and NGOs ;
  - 10.5. encouraging regular access to the media by elected representatives and NGOs ;
  - 10.6. creating the conditions whereby voluntary organisations' non-commercial radio stations can exercise their activities ;
  - 10.7. ensuring that school curricula include civics courses which would develop a sense of social solidarity, an understanding of how the representative democratic system operates and an analytical and critical approach to the information system and to the content of such information.