Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1546 (2007)[1]

The code of good practice for political parties

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Recommendation 1438 (2000) and Resolution 1344 (2003) on the threat posed to democracy by extremist parties and movements in Europe; Resolution 1308 (2002) on restrictions on political parties in the Council of Europe member states; Recommendation 1516 (2001) on the financing of political parties, and Resolution 1264 (2001), Resolution 1320 (2003) and Recommendation 1595 (2003) on a code of good practice in electoral matters.

2. Furthermore, it refers to the following texts adopted by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission): the Guidelines on Legislation on Political Parties (2006), the Guidelines on the Financing of Political Parties (2000), the Guidelines on Prohibition and Dissolution of Political Parties and Analogous Measures (1999) and the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (2002).

3. The Assembly recalls the conclusions of the Council of Europe Forum for the Future of Democracy, held in Moscow in October 2006, which was devoted to the role of political parties in the building of democracy.

4. The Assembly acknowledges that political parties constitute a permanent feature of modern democracies, a key element of electoral competition, and a crucial linking mechanism between the individual and the state. Their role consists in integrating groups and individuals into the political process, serving as a tool for formulating and representing their interests, establishing public authorities at different levels, elaborating policies and alternative political programmes and holding the executive to account.

5. Consequently, being the key link between the individual and democratic governance, political parties bear a particular responsibility. Their legitimacy and credibility are of the utmost importance for the legitimacy of the democratic process as a whole. On the other hand, their dysfunction may affect the entire democratic system and institutions.

6. Regrettably, many political parties and politicians as a whole are increasingly criticised and distrusted. In many Council of Europe member states, some face a crisis of legitimacy, sometimes being regarded as corrupt, undemocratic in their internal procedures and serving more the interests of small groups or individuals than the whole of society.

7. This decline in confidence in political parties helps to create distrust in the democratic system as a whole, and, consequently, indifference towards political institutions and a lack of interest in the political process. This phenomenon is best illustrated by low levels of participation in political life and low turn-out in elections.

8. The Assembly is convinced that political parties should recognise their duty to enhance the reputation of the political system. They should take urgent steps to:

8.1. reconnect with individual citizens and focus on their aspirations and concerns;

8.2. improve their accountability to their electorate;

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1. Assembly debate on 17 April 2007 (13th Sitting) (see Doc. 11210, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Van den Brande; and Doc. 11242, opinion of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Mrs Bilgehan). Text adopted by the Assembly on 17 April 2007 (13th Sitting).

8.3. enhance the role of individual elected representatives;

8.4. develop their openness and that of the decision-making bodies on which they serve;

8.5. resist the temptation to make unrealistic promises to voters.

9. The Assembly considers that the elaboration of a code of good practice for political parties, which would set out the most important elements for their conduct, is both necessary and timely. The code should be based on the experience of political parties in Council of Europe member states and drawn from existing good practices. It should promote concepts and strategies which enhance and strengthen the role, status and relevance of political parties in a democratic system.

10. Such a code would reinforce parties' internal democracy and increase their credibility in the eyes of citizens, thus contributing to their greater participation in political life. The Assembly considers that good practices should also promote democratic principles such as equality, dialogue, co-operation, transparency and the fight against corruption.

11. The Assembly is concerned that wealthy individuals may receive favours from political parties in return for financial support and believes that every country should adopt methods of funding of political parties that command public support.

12. The Assembly also considers that such a code would assist parties in improving their impact on the democratic process and their ability to comply with the legislative framework within which they operate.

13. The Assembly considers that the code of good practice for political parties should embrace the following issues:

13.1. good practices for the election process:

13.1.1. promoting democratic principles, in particular transparency and equality of opportunities in the selection and nomination of candidates on electoral lists;

13.1.2. encouraging the participation and nomination of members from under-represented groups (for example young people, minorities, immigrants and people with disabilities)

13.1.3. establishing a long-term strategy, including special projects and training, aimed at increasing the assertiveness, knowledge and experience of under-represented groups within the party;

13.1.4. examining the experience of political parties that have introduced quotas for the selection and nomination of candidates for elections, and consideration of such a possibility in their own practice;

13.1.5. observing the principles of "fair play" and setting general standards for conduct during electoral campaigns;

13.1.6. developing internal rules which would ensure compliance with legislation on fair and transparent funding of electoral campaigns;

13.1.7. developing many more ways in which people may cast their vote, and places where they can cast it;

13.2. good practices for increasing the equality between men and women in political parties:

13.2.1. putting into place mechanisms which allow women to stand for election and carry out their functions, by drawing inspiration from the experience of other political parties which have introduced quotas and other forms of positive action for women not only for parliamentary elections but also for elections to decision-making posts, both inside the party (chairmanships, vice-chairmanships, steering committees, etc.) and outside the party (posts in government, on parliamentary committees, etc.);

13.2.2. organising training and other forms of encouragement for women and young people's active participation in political parties, and ensuring that the way the party functions allows both men and women to better combine professional life and family responsibilities with responsibilities in political parties;

13.2.3. invite political parties to supply annual indicators measuring the advances made in equality between women and men;

13.3. good practices for the financing of political parties and the funding of electoral campaigns:

13.3.1. developing internal rules which complete and strengthen national legislation on financing of political parties and funding of electoral campaigns, in particular, regarding transparency and accountability;

13.3.2. developing internal rules, complementary to national legislation, enabling monitoring of the financial status of elected representatives before, during and after their term of office;

13.3.3. ensuring transparency, high standards of conduct and sound management in parties' public performance in order to maintain the confidence of citizens;

13.3.4. reinforcing and supporting preventive and repressive measures aimed at combating corruption;

13.3.5. setting up independent disciplinary bodies to investigate and apply sanctions to corruption within parties;

13.3.6. strengthening evaluation, monitoring and disciplinary processes;

13.4. good practices for the political parties in the opposition:

13.4.1. recognising the role of the opposition as having a beneficial effect on the democratic process;

13.4.2. enhancing dialogue between governing and opposition parties and reinforcing the principle that the most important duty of the opposition is to hold the government to account;

13.4.3. fostering conditions that ensure that the role of opposition parties is not merely confined to criticising those in power;

13.4.4. encouraging the opposition to establish a "shadow"programme;

13.5. 13.5. good practices for external and institutional accountability:

13.5.1. ensuring public accountability by implementing transparency, high standards of conduct and sound management in their public performance;

13.5.2. reinforcing preventive measures as well as procedures for enforcement, namely evaluation, monitoring procedures and disciplinary measures;

13.5.3. monitoring and reporting systematically on results achieved by party representatives in public institutions;

13.5.4. keeping citizens informed of the fulfilment of electoral promises by, inter alia, providing the public with an assessment of the party programme and indicating to what extent it has been translated into public policies;

13.5.5. making the electoral programme available on the party's website during the length of its legislative mandate in order to enable public scrutiny;

13.5.6. disclosing details of pre-selection and key decision-making procedures upon official registration of the party;

13.5.7. providing for the disclosure of politicians' assets before, during and after having served in public administration;

13.6. 13.6. good practices for internal accountability and intra-party democracy:

13.6.1. ensuring that the internal rules of political parties are guided by legal certainty, clarity, transparency, accountability and independence;

13.6.2. ensuring that interaction between local political parties and society is based on dialogue, interdependence and co-operation;

13.6.3. promoting and enforcing equality in the administrative system of political parties at all levels;

13.6.4. reinforcing links between party leadership and local and regional levels of organisations;

13.6.5. reinforcing measures aimed at combating corruption within the party and improving internal accountability;

13.6.6. introducing open conditions for membership and the rights of members;

13.6.7. adopting internal procedures involving consultation of members on party policy or on important decisions for the party such as electoral coalitions or government agreements;

13.6.8. establishing mechanisms ensuring internal accountability of party members holding public offices;

13.7. good practices for the involvement of young people in the political process:

13.7.1. creating youth sections within parties;

13.7.2. supporting youth organisations of parties at local and regional levels;

13.7.3. providing training for youth participation;

13.7.4. promoting the active participation of young members in statutory bodies, and in particular, encouraging candidatures of young people at all levels and in all elections, in particular that of young women;

13.7.5. encouraging schools to pay increased regard to the need to teach schoolchildren about the mechanisms of government at all levels;

13.8. good practices for the participation of national minorities:

13.8.1. encouraging and enhancing the participation of minorities at all levels of the political process by defining the target part of the electorate and precise mechanisms;

13.8.2. ensuring that respect for dignity and the rights of national minorities are taken into account during the election process;

13.9. good practices for education for democratic citizenship:

13.9.1. facilitating citizens' access to information concerning local political affairs, informing them about all forms of participation in local public life and setting up offices to facilitate contacts between local authorities and citizens; this should not entail the use of public funds to promote political parties or certain ideologies;

13.9.2. organising activities in education for democratic citizenship, including open-ended conferences and discussion groups that focus on the topics related to the rights and responsibilities of a citizen in a democracy, the constitution, political parties, or the role of civil society;

13.10. good practices with regard to the media and information flow:

13.10.1. promoting new information and communication technologies;

13.10.2. exploring ways in which advances in information technology might be able to strengthen the democratic process, individual participation and decision making;

13.10.3. increasing the information flow that parties may offer citizens, as well as receiving input from the latter;

13.10.4. promoting free, competitive and active media which respect human dignity and gender equality;

13.11. good practices for relations and interaction with society at large:

13.11.1. ensuring that relations between political parties and civil society are based on independence, interdependence and dialogue as well as on the principle of transparency;

13.11.2. reinforcing connections between political parties and citizens aimed at achieving a more transparent and participatory system of government.

14. The principles set out above should also be applied to federations of parties at European level.

15. The Assembly invites the Venice Commission to draw up a code of good practice for political parties taking the above elements into account.

16. At the same time, the Assembly calls on political parties in Council of Europe member states to base their actions on the guidelines set out above.

17. The Assembly invites the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) of the Council of Europe to complement the code of good practice for political parties with a code of good practice for civic participation.