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Assessing the functioning of the partnership for democracy

Report[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
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Summary

The report takes stock of the functioning of the partner for democracy status introduced in 2010 and presents an overview of the Parliamentary Assembly's relations with its four partners: the Parliaments of Morocco, Kyrgyzstan and Jordan, as well as the Palestinian National Council.

The report concludes that, overall, the partnership has reached its statutory goal of establishing a structured co-operation with parliaments of neighbouring countries willing to perform a *rapprochement* with the Assembly on the basis of shared values. It has offered to partner parliamentarians an opportunity to participate, on an institutionalised basis, in the European political debate.

However, the rapporteur points out that the partners have shown a varying degree of commitment to the goals of partnership, both in terms of implementing reforms in their countries and of using the opportunities to work in the Assembly and its committees. There is a demand, on the part of some partners, to have more possibilities to contribute to this work.

Accordingly, the draft resolution suggests, on the one hand, providing more participation rights to all partner delegations, and on the other hand, to grant additional rights to those delegations which have shown outstanding results in achieving the goals of partnership and participate fully in the work of the Assembly and its committees.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 14942, Reference No. 4468 of 30 September 2019.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. In June 2009, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted Resolution 1680 (2009) "Establishment of a 'partner for democracy' status with the Parliamentary Assembly", in which it reaffirmed its strong commitment to developing co-operation with neighbouring regions as a means of consolidating democratic transformations and promoting stability, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. The new status was introduced in the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly by Resolution 1698 (2009) in November 2009 as a new Rule 60 (now Rule 64) and entered into force from January 2010.

2. The Assembly recalls that granting of partner for democracy status is conditional on a political commitment, on the part of the candidate parliament, to embrace the values of the Council of Europe, which are pluralist and gender parity-based democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It constitutes a recognition by the Assembly of democratic aspirations of parliaments requesting or enjoying it. The partnership is a dynamic tool aimed at promoting parliamentary democracy, facilitating democratic transformations in partner countries and assisting partner parliaments in strengthening democratic institutions, good governance and the rule of law.

3. The Assembly further recalls Resolution 1818 (2011) "Request for partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Morocco" whereby it stated that progress in taking forward reforms is the prime aim of the partnership for democracy and should constitute the benchmark for assessing its efficiency.

4. The Parliaments of Morocco, Kyrgyzstan and Jordan, as well as the Palestinian National Council, have obtained partner for democracy status. The Assembly has considered specific reports on the evaluation of the partnership for democracy in respect of these parliaments and has reviewed progress made in achieving the aims of the partnership.

5. The Assembly believes that, overall, the partnership has reached its statutory goal of establishing a structured and values-based co-operation with parliaments of neighbouring countries willing to perform a *rapprochement* with the Assembly on the basis of shared values. It has contributed, though to varying degrees, to the strengthening of the role of parliaments in consolidating democratic transformations and promoting stability, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. It has offered to partner parliamentarians an opportunity to participate, on an institutionalised basis, in the European political debate.

6. Based on this experience, the Assembly deems it appropriate to consider ways for improving the functioning of the partnership with a view to making it more meaningful and effective for both the Assembly and the partners.

7. The Assembly resolves that the following rights shall be granted to partner for democracy delegations in addition to those foreseen by Rule 64:

7.1. the chairpersons of partner for democracy delegations shall have the right to participate in the meetings of the Standing Committee;

7.2. members of partner for democracy delegations shall have the right to put spontaneous oral questions to guest speakers in plenary sittings of the Assembly and in the Standing Committee;

7.3. partner for democracy delegations shall have the right to designate their members to work in Assembly committees and sub-committees (including *ad hoc* sub-committees) open to them. The names of such designated members would appear on the lists of committees and sub-committees under reference "partners for democracy" and would be in addition to the number of committee members designated by the delegations of member States in accordance with Rule 44.1;

7.4. members of partner for democracy delegations shall have the right to be appointed as full members in various networks set up in the Assembly.

8. The Assembly further resolves that some additional rights may be granted to partner for democracy delegations which have shown outstanding results in achieving the goals of partnership and participate fully in the work of the Assembly and its committees. Such additional rights may include:

8.1. the right to table motions for recommendation and resolution, subject to co-signature of a member of the Assembly, with both names appearing as authors of the motion;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 24 January 2023.

8.2. the right to table amendments, subject to co-signature of a member of the Assembly, with both names appearing as movers of the amendment;

8.3. the right to request current affairs debates and to be chosen to open such debates. If such a request is made by an individual member of a partner for democracy delegation, this right should be subject to co-signature of a member of the Assembly, with both names appearing as authors of the request and collecting support from 19 more members. In case of a request made by a partner for democracy delegation, it should be supported by a political group, a national delegation or a committee as provided by Rule 53.2;

8.4. the right to table written declarations, subject to co-signature of a member of the Assembly, with both names appearing as authors of the written declaration;

8.5. the right to be appointed as rapporteurs for information reports which do not contain a draft resolution and/or recommendation.

9. The additional rights referred to in paragraph 8 above may be granted by decision of the Bureau, ratified by the Assembly, at the beginning of a new session (in January). The decision shall be based on a proposal from the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. Extended rights shall be granted for the duration of the session (one year) with possibility to extend or not to extend them in view of the results.

10. The Assembly encourages its committees open to the participation of partners for democracy to:

10.1. consider organising more meetings and other activities in co-operation with the partner delegations, including in their countries. Members of partner delegations should be associated more closely to the preparation of various events and be given prominent roles in the programmes of such events;

10.2. increase the visibility of the input of partners to the work of the committees, for example by indicating on their agendas whenever an item is put on it following a proposal from a partner delegation;

10.3. show more creativity and flexibility in order to facilitate and highlight the positive contribution of partners to their activities.

11. The Assembly encourages the partner delegations to make their participation in the work of the Assembly better known in their parliaments, for example by presenting regular reports on the activities, priorities and key decisions of the Assembly.

12. The Assembly encourages its presidents to consider holding regular meetings with the Speakers of partner parliaments in order to overview the functioning of the partnership, make it more visible and provide political impetus to it.

13. The Assembly will continue to offer various training activities for members and the staff of partner parliaments on issues defined by common agreement.

14. The Assembly recalls that, in accordance with Resolution 1680 (2009), the national parliaments of all southern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries participating in the Union for the Mediterranean-Barcelona Process, and of central Asian countries participating in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, should be eligible to request partner for democracy status. Furthermore, requests from parliaments of other States may also be considered if the Bureau of the Assembly so decides.

15. The Assembly asks its relevant committee to prepare amendments to its Rules of Procedure in accordance with the present resolution.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Ria Oomen-Ruijten, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. In June 2009, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted Resolution 1680 (2009) "Establishment of a "partner for democracy" status with the Parliamentary Assembly", in which it reaffirmed its strong commitment to developing co-operation with neighbouring regions as a means of consolidating democratic transformations and promoting stability, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. The new status was introduced in the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly by Resolution 1698 (2009) in November 2009 as a new Rule 60 (now Rule 64) and entered into force from January 2010.

2. The Parliaments of Morocco, Kyrgyzstan and Jordan, as well as the Palestinian National Council, have obtained partner for democracy status. Parliamentarians from these delegations regularly take part in the work of the Assembly and its committees, thus availing themselves of the opportunity to benefit from the Assembly's experience in democracy building and to contribute to the political debate on common challenges which transcend European boundaries.

3. In June 2019, ten years after the introduction of the partner for democracy status, the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy tabled a motion for a resolution "Assessing the functioning of the partnership for democracy"[3]. The motion calls for considering ways of improving the functioning of the partnership with a view to making it more meaningful and effective both for the Assembly and the partners.

4. The tabling of the motion followed an exchange of views in the committee on the item "Partner for Democracy Status 2009-2019: Stock-taking and the way forward" (June 2019) to which the delegations of Morocco, Jordan and Palestine made written contributions.

5. On 14 November 2019, the committee appointed me as rapporteur. Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in the beginning of 2020, my work was considerably complicated by the absence of direct contacts with our partners. Nevertheless, the committee organised in December 2020 a remote hearing on the Council of Europe Neighbourhood Policy with the participation of late Ambassador Rémi Mortier, Permanent Representative of Monaco, Chairperson of the Rapporteur Group on External Relations of the Committee of Ministers, and representatives of partner for democracy delegations of Morocco and Palestine.

6. On 25 October 2022, I carried out a fact-finding visit to Rabat, and had a chance to discuss the experience and expectations of Moroccan counterparts with regard to the partnership. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Moroccan delegation for organising my visit at very short notice.

7. The Assembly has considered specific reports on the evaluation of the partnership for democracy in respect of the parliaments enjoying this status and has reviewed progress made in achieving the statutory goals of the partnership. The purpose of this report is not to perform another country-by-country evaluation, but to review and assess the functioning of the partnership as such, including to what extent the purposes of the partnership have been attained, and put forward proposals for its improvement.

2. Partnership for democracy: aims and conditions

8. As mentioned above, partner for democracy status was introduced by Assembly Resolution 1680 (2009) with a view to establishing institutional co-operation with parliaments of non-member States in neighbouring regions wishing to benefit from the Assembly's experience in democracy building and to participate in the political debate on common challenges which transcend European boundaries.

9. The Assembly thus reaffirmed its strong commitment to developing co-operation with neighbouring regions as a means of consolidating democratic transformations and promoting stability, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law, as expressed, *inter alia*, in its Recommendation 1724 (2005) "The Council of Europe and the European Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union", Resolution 1506 (2006) "External relations of the Council of Europe", Resolution 1598 (2008) "Strengthening co-operation with the Maghreb countries", and Resolution 1599 (2008) "The situation in the republics of central Asia".

3. Doc. 14942, 4 July 2019.

10. The status entered into force in January 2010. Rule 64 of the Rules of the Procedure sets out the conditions and the procedure for granting the status, as well as the rights of members of delegations enjoying the status to participate in the work of the Assembly and its committees (see more detail in paragraph 50 below).

11. The partner for democracy status has two particular features that differentiate it from other forms of co-operation with parliaments of non-member States.

12. First, its granting is conditional on a political commitment, on the part of the candidate parliament, "to embrace the values of the Council of Europe, which are pluralist and gender parity-based democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms".[4] The political commitments, which parliaments applying for the status must subscribe to, are contained in Rule 64.2. In addition, when deciding on the granting of the status, the Assembly may lay down specific conditions.[5]

13. Second, the status introduces a degree of accountability: the Assembly stated that "…progress in taking forward reforms is the prime aim of the partnership for democracy and should constitute the benchmark for assessing its efficiency."[6]

14. In particular, when requesting the status, the parliament applying for it shall commit "to inform the Assembly on the state of progress in implementing Council of Europe principles".[7] It has to be recalled that in Resolution 1680 (2009), the Assembly resolved to "periodically review the progress made by the parliaments concerned in the framework of partner for democracy status" (paragraph 12.4).

15. Accordingly, the status is not an honorary title. It has to be viewed as a recognition by the Assembly of democratic aspirations of parliaments requesting or enjoying it and a dynamic tool aimed at promoting parliamentary democracy, facilitating democratic transformations in partner countries and assisting partner parliaments in strengthening democratic institutions, good governance and the rule of law.

3. Partnership for democracy: Overview (2010-2022) and current state of play

3.1. Morocco

16. As early as in February 2010, the Parliament of Morocco was the first parliament to apply for the new status. It was also the first one to obtain it in June 2011, when the Assembly adopted Resolution 1818 (2011) "Request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Morocco".

17. In Resolution 1818 (2011), the Assembly resolved "…to review, no later than two years from the adoption of this resolution, the state of progress achieved in implementing the political commitments taken by the Parliament of Morocco…" (paragraph 14). The Resolution also contained a list of specific issues which the Assembly considered to be of key importance for strengthening democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Morocco (paragraph 8).

18. In June 2013, the Assembly adopted Resolution 1942 (2013) "Evaluation of the partnership for democracy in respect of the Parliament of Morocco". The report took stock of political reforms in the country and of the implementation of political commitments undertaken by the Parliament of Morocco in June 2011, and welcomed the adoption of the new Constitution, the holding of early parliamentary elections and the formation of a government based on the results of these elections. In addition, the report concluded that the partnership had created new dynamics in the co-operation between the Council of Europe and Morocco, both at parliamentary and government levels, and thus contributed to achieving its primary aim.

19. When preparing the first evaluation report, the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy held a meeting in Rabat (13-14 March 2013) which offered an opportunity for an in-depth exchange of views with key Moroccan stakeholders on the implementation of reforms in the country and co-operation programmes with the Council of Europe.

4. Rule 64.2, 1st indent.
5. Rule 64.1.
6. Resolution 1818 (2011), paragraph 13.
7. Rule 64.2, 7th indent.

20. The Assembly further evaluated its partnership with the Parliament of Morocco in June 2015 and in May 2019 (Resolution 2061 (2015) and Resolution 2282 (2019)). Both reports assessed positively the results achieved in the framework of the partnership. The 2019 report highlighted the high level of participation of the Moroccan partner delegation in the activities of the Assembly and its committees, in particular the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons and the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination.

21. The 2019 report further suggested that the Assembly would need to re-think the partner for democracy status in such a way as to take into account that it brings together countries in disparate stages of reform and whose parliamentary delegations are involved to varying degrees in the Assembly's activities.

22. While the 2013 resolution provided for a new evaluation within two years, resolutions adopted in 2015 and 2019 stated that the Assembly would make a new assessment when appropriate, thus taking a more flexible approach and recognising a degree of maturity attained.

3.2. Palestine

23. In Resolution 1680 (2009), the Assembly explicitly referred to the eligibility of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) to request partner for democracy status (paragraph 15). In October 2010, the Assembly decided that the Palestinian National Council (PNC), which had indicated its interest to obtain the status, was eligible to make a formal request to this effect. In November 2010, the Speaker of the PNC made an official request for the status.

24. In October 2011, the Assembly adopted Resolution 1830 (2011) "Request for partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Palestinian National Council".

25. When dealing with the request by the PNC, the Assembly broadly followed the procedure and the modalities introduced in the case of the first request for the status made by the Moroccan Parliament.

26. Resolution 1830 (2011) provided for an evaluation of the state of progress achieved in implementing the political commitments undertaken by the PNC within two years (paragraph 18) and specified the issues that the Assembly deemed of key importance for strengthening democracy, the rule of law and the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Palestinian territories (paragraph 12).

27. The first evaluation report on the partnership with the PNC, presented in January 2014, concluded that the continuation of the partnership was in line with the wishes of all political factions and welcomed the fact that the Palestinian delegation made full use of its possibilities to participate in the activities of the Assembly. Resolution 1969 (2014) "Evaluation of the partnership for democracy in respect of the Palestinian National Council" made an overall positive assessment of it while calling on the PNC to speed up the implementation of its general commitment to the core values of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms. The Assembly resolved to make a new assessment within two years.

28. The Assembly made a second evaluation of its partnership with the PNC in April 2016. The report provided a more nuanced assessment as compared to the one made in 2014. The rapporteur pointed out that, while the PNC would like to comply with the commitments it had undertaken when signing the partnership, it had become increasingly difficult, or even impossible, to meet some of them given the circumstances on the ground related to the Israeli occupation.

29. In Resolution 2105 (2016), the Assembly welcomed the active participation of the Palestinian parliamentary delegation in the work of the Assembly and its committees (paragraph 7.1) and noted that the Palestinian delegation regularly participates in regional interparliamentary activities organised by the Assembly with the aim of making its experience available to members and staff of the PNC (paragraph 7.2).

30. The Assembly further resolved to continue to review the implementation of political reforms in Palestine and to offer its assistance to the PNC, and to make a new assessment of the partnership when appropriate (paragraph 13). There have been no reports prepared since then.

3.3. Kyrgyzstan

31. The Speaker of the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan made an official request for partner for democracy status for the parliament in October 2011, the first to come from central Asia. The first rapporteur appointed by the Committee, Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, carried out two fact-finding visits to Bishkek in 2013 and presented a preliminary draft report to the committee in June 2013. However, the committee was reluctant to follow the rapporteur's positive view on the Kyrgyz Parliament's request, and decided to constitute an *ad hoc* Sub-Committee on Kyrgyzstan composed of the chairpersons of all political groups in order to visit the country.

Mr Çavuşoğlu left the Assembly in 2014 due to his appointment to a position in the Government of Türkiye. The committee then appointed Mr Andreas Gross who presented his report in April 2014 following a new fact-finding visit to Kyrgyzstan.

32. The report concluded favourably on Kyrgyz Parliament's application for the status, and argued that, in the regional context, Kyrgyzstan was the only country showing a serious commitment to parliamentary democracy and having a political system which sought to provide a balance between various political actors and did not rely on a single person.

33. In line with the previous practice, Resolution 1984 (2014) "Request for partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic" indicated a number of specific issues that the Assembly deemed of key importance for strengthening democracy, the rule of law and the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Kyrgyzstan. In this case, the list was particularly lengthy (29 items). The resolution also contained a provision on a review of the state of progress achieved in implementing the political commitments entered into by the Kyrgyz Parliament.

34. Due to various circumstances, neither of three rapporteurs appointed by the committee to evaluate the implementation of the partnership with the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan was able to complete their work.

35. Following a political crisis in the country after failed elections in November 2020, a new motion was tabled asking the Assembly for a review of the partnership with the Kyrgyz Parliament. The report presented in June 2022 noted the controversial evolution of the political and institutional situation in Kyrgyzstan and concluded that the partnership with the Kyrgyz Parliament had produced mixed results. Many political commitments undertaken by the parliament upon requesting the status remained unfulfilled. The country had not become party to any of the Council of Europe conventions or partial agreements. The members of the Kyrgyz partner delegation participated only rarely in the work of the Assembly. On this particular point, the rapporteur argued that there could be no genuine partnership without presence, participation and dialogue.

36. In Resolution 2453 (2022) "Review of the partnership for democracy in respect of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic", the Assembly resolved "…to continue the partnership with the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic in order to support the country's authorities along the path to democracy while at the same time maintaining a rigorous dialogue with them and reassessing the partnership in depth in two years' time based on an analysis of tangible progress." It further stressed that "The prolonged absence of Kyrgyz parliamentarians from the sessions and of concrete results, notably on the effective ratification of conventions or protocols, could lead to the partnership being terminated." (paragraph 14)

37. Since the constitution of the new parliament in December 2021 and the appointment of a new delegation in March 2022, Kyrgyz members were present, though in limited numbers, at the part-sessions of the Assembly in April, June and October 2022 and took the floor several times in our committee. This is a welcome development, but it remains to be seen whether it stands the test of time.

3.4. Jordan

38. The Parliament of Jordan presented an official request for partner for democracy status in July 2013. The first rapporteur appointed by the committee, Mr Mogens Jensen, left the Assembly in 2014 due to his appointment to a position in the government of Denmark. The committee then appointed Ms Josette Durrieu who presented her report in January 2016 following two fact-finding visits to Jordan (March 2014 and September 2015).

39. Resolution 2086 (2016) "Request for partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Jordan" largely followed the pattern laid down by the previous Assembly reports on granting the status. It also contained a provision on a review of the state of progress achieved in implementing the political commitments entered into by the Jordanian Parliament (paragraph 12), and a list of reforms and other steps which it deemed essential for strengthening democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the framework of a constitutional parliamentary monarchy (paragraph 9).

40. In October 2017, the Assembly made a first evaluation of the partnership with the Parliament of Jordan. The report concluded that Jordan was moving in the right direction, even though the reforms were advancing more slowly than planned. She regretted, in particular, that Jordan had not become party to any of the Council of Europe conventions or partial agreements.

41. Resolution 2183 (2017) "Evaluation of the partnership for democracy in respect of the Parliament of Jordan", while welcoming some positive developments with regard to implementing political commitments and democratic reforms, pointed to a number of shortcomings in this process. In particular, the Assembly regretted the executions carried out in Jordan from 2014 to 2017.

42. At the same time, the Assembly welcomed the Jordanian parliamentary delegation's active participation in the work of the Assembly and its committees and encouraged its members to keep a watchful eye on, and play an active role in, the implementation of the process of reforms needed for the establishment of the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, in line with the commitments entered into under the partnership. Consequently, the Assembly resolved to continue following very closely the implementation of reforms in Jordan and to offer the Jordanian Parliament its full assistance.

43. A new assessment of the partnership was to be done within two years of the adoption of Resolution 2183 (2017), but it was postponed for various reasons and was only presented in November 2022. The report concluded that Jordan had made advances in some areas whereas it had stagnated in others. Ratifying one Council of Europe convention was a welcome step and an encouraging sign for future signatures and ratifications. However, some recent constitutional amendments were controversial. The participation of the Jordanian delegation in the work of the Assembly dropped significantly in 2020-2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the pre- and post-election periods, but a new delegation appointed in January 2022 regularly attended the committee meetings since March 2022.

4. Re-thinking and upgrading the partnership

44. Overall, the partnership has reached its prime goal of establishing a structured and value-based co-operation with parliaments of neighbouring countries willing to perform a *rapprochement* with the Assembly on the basis of shared values. It has contributed, though to varying degrees, to the strengthening of the role of parliaments in consolidating democratic transformations and promoting stability, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. It has also offered to partner parliamentarians an opportunity to participate, on an institutionalised basis, in the European political debate.

45. However, as may be seen in section 3 above, the Assembly's partners for democracy have shown varying degrees of commitment to the use of the partnership, both in terms of practical results in implementing democratic reforms, and participating in the work of the Assembly.

46. It is therefore not surprising that those of our partners who are the most committed to the partnership have an appetite for greater opportunities to work in the Assembly and its committees, and would like to see their commitment and achievements recognised.

47. In this respect, I am particularly thankful for the position paper shared with me by the Moroccan delegation which contains a number of ideas and proposals for extending the possibilities of active participation in, and contribution to, our common work. My visit to Rabat in October 2022 was an opportunity to better understand the motivation behind it and to explore these proposals in a more detailed manner.

48. I am also grateful to members of the Jordanian and the Palestinian delegations who presented to us in June 2019 their written comments on the functioning of the partnership.

49. I remain convinced that we should not create an additional status for those partners who achieve more progress in implementing the goals of the partnership than the others do. Multiplying statuses may lead to confusion and complicate unnecessarily our institutional framework. However, I agree that the Assembly could decide to extend the rights currently enjoyed by partners for democracy, and make the access to some of these extended rights conditional upon the degree of progress achieved and engagement by some of the partners.

4.1. Existing rights of partners for democracy

50. The current Rule 64 offers to partners the following rights:"

> *"64.5. Members of delegations with partner for democracy status may **sit in the Assembly** but without the right to vote. They shall have **the right to speak** with the authorisation of the President of the Assembly.*
>
> *64.6. Members of delegations with partner for democracy status **may participate in committee meetings** as provided in Rule 48.5.[8] They may **submit** to the committee chairperson **proposals concerning the draft agenda** of committee meetings and **proposals for amendments** to draft texts*

*examined in these meetings. The committee chairperson shall decide on any further action. They may **sign motions** for resolutions and recommendations (except those under Rules 9.2. and 74) **and written declarations**. However, they shall not be taken into account for the number of signatures required. Members of such delegations may **participate in the work of political groups** according to the conditions established by the groups."*

4.2. Contributions and proposals from partners

51. The written contribution by the Moroccan delegation provided a positive assessment of the partnership. The three evaluation reports adopted by the Assembly underscored the voluntary efforts by Morocco to make progress in consolidating its democratic choice. The partnership brought about positive results in many areas and was instrumental for building multidimensional intergovernmental co-operation between Morocco and the Council of Europe. The partnership should not be a one-way street; a number of Moroccan experiences were of relevance for European partners. Morocco should be considered as a bridge between Europe and Africa and could help strengthen the South-South co-operation. The parliament was favourable to exploring new avenues in its co-operation with the Assembly.

52. The position paper presented by the Moroccan delegation suggests that the following rights might be granted to partners:

i. attend the work of the Standing Committee;

ii. be appointed as members of sub-committees and participate in drawing up of committees' and sub-committees' agendas;

iii. participate, on a voluntary basis, to Assembly's fact-finding visits and election observation missions;

iv. be proposed as rapporteurs or co-rapporteurs on general issues;

v. table, jointly with Assembly members, amendments to draft texts examined in meetings;

vi. co-sign motions for resolutions and recommendations, as well as written declarations.

53. Furthermore, the Moroccan position paper suggests:

i. allowing partners to participate in the work of political groups;

ii. establishing a group of friendship;

iii. holding regular bi-annual meetings between the President of the Assembly and the Speakers of partner parliaments in order to take stock of the partnership.

54. These concrete proposals are a welcome food for thought and are worth carefully considering. While granting some additional rights may require changes in the Rules of Procedure and/or standing practice (see my proposals in Section 4.3 below), other rights are already foreseen by the existing rules, for example 52.ii. drawing up of agendas; 52.v. proposing amendments in meetings; and 52.vi. co-signing motions and written statements (see paragraph 50 above). Likewise, participation of partner parliamentarians in the work of political groups is referred to in Rule 64.6, last sentence, and is already the current practice in several groups, including my own.

55. The only proposal which seems difficult to follow is 52.iv. referring to the right to be appointed as rapporteur or co-rapporteur. I believe that the capacity to act as rapporteur of the Assembly for a report or an opinion leading to the adoption of an Assembly text, or as General Rapporteur, shall remain reserved to the members of the Assembly. However, I suggest a few changes which would allow our partners to play a more active role in the work on substantial issues, including the right to prepare information reports (see paragraph 63 below).

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8. Rule 48.5: Subject to paragraph 6 below, members of special guest, observer and partner for democracy delegations appointed to a committee may participate in its meetings and speak if called by the committee chairperson; they shall not have the right to vote. However, a committee may decide in advance that members of such delegations may not attend a meeting or part of a meeting.

Rule 48.6: Meetings of the Joint Committee, the Monitoring Committee, the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs and the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights shall not be open to members of special guest, observer and partner for democracy delegations.

56. In its written contribution made in June 2019, the delegation of Jordan also stressed that they greatly valued the experience of partnership with the Assembly. The experience gained in several fields was positively reflected in Jordanian legislation. The delegation intended to continue working with the Assembly with a view to gradually embedding fundamental Council of Europe principles in legislation. The reform process would continue despite harsh economic problems and a difficult political situation in the region but would take time.

57. The Jordanian delegation made the following suggestions which, in their view, should contribute to strengthening the partnership:

i. widening the circle of parliamentarians involved from the Jordanian side through carrying out more Assembly activities (for example committee meetings) in the country;

ii. organising brainstorming sessions between Jordanian and European parliamentarians in Jordan;

iii. organise training and educational sessions for the parliamentary supporting staff at the Jordanian Parliament.

58. In my view, these proposals are welcome and could be implemented, without changing the Rules, at the level of committees and when planning the programmes of inter-parliamentary co-operation.

59. The 2019 contribution from the Palestinian delegation states that its members highly appreciate the participation in the work of the Assembly and its committees. The delegation learned a lot and appreciated the commitment of Europe to basic values and democratic principles. The partnership status was an important tool for learning and sharing experiences, and also a channel for voicing partners' concerns, such as the Palestinian issue. The exchanges with the European colleagues on a broad range of issues such as Islamophobia, intolerance and the need to seek a better understanding of others, were particularly appreciated. Setting up a youth assembly involving the young people from the Council of Europe member States and partners should be considered.

60. I welcome all these contributions, which show that our partners attach great importance to the partnership and the opportunities it offers for their participation in the political dialogue at the Assembly. I share the view that the framework for partners' input in the work of the Assembly and its committees may be improved.

4.3. Proposals for extending partners' rights

61. I believe that the Assembly may grant unconditionally some additional rights to all partner for democracy delegations. More specifically,

i. The chairpersons of partner for democracy delegations should have the right to participate in the meetings of the Standing Committee.[9] In the current practice, they may be invited to attend when a report on the partnership is on the agenda.

ii. Members of partner for democracy delegations should have the right to put spontaneous oral questions[10] to guest speakers in plenary sittings of the Assembly and in the Standing Committee.

iii. Partner for democracy delegations should have the right to designate their members to work in Assembly committees and sub-committees (including *ad hoc* sub-committees) open to them. The names of such designated members would appear on the lists of committees and sub-committees under reference "partners for democracy" and would be in addition to the number of committee members designated by the delegations of member States.

iv. Members of partner for democracy delegations should have the right to be appointed as full members in various networks set up in the Assembly.

62. Moreover, some extended rights may be granted to partner for democracy delegations on the basis of outstanding results in achieving the goals of the partnership and full participation in the work of the Assembly and its committees. These could be granted by decision of the Bureau, ratified by the Assembly, at the beginning of a new session (in January), based on a proposal from the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, for example for the duration of the session (one year) with possibility to extend or not to extend them in view of the results.

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9. Rule 17.
10. Appendix I – Additional provisions relating to Assembly debates, part vi. – Guidelines for questions to guest speakers, paragraph 8 (page 112).

63. Such extended rights may include:

i. the right to table motions for recommendation and resolution,[11] subject to co-signature of a member of the Assembly, with both names appearing as authors of the motion;

ii. the right to table amendments,[12] subject to co-signature of a member of the Assembly, with both names appearing as movers of the amendment;

iii. the right to request current affairs debates[13] and to be chosen to open such debates. If requested by an individual member of a partner for democracy delegation, this right should be subject to co-signature of a member of the Assembly, with both names appearing as authors of the request, and to collecting support from 19 more members. In case of a request made by a partner for democracy delegation, it should be supported by a political group, a national delegation or a committee as provided by Rule 53.2.

iv. the right to table written declarations,[14] subject to co-signature of a member of the Assembly, with both names appearing as authors of the written declaration.

v. the right to be appointed as rapporteurs for information reports[15] which do not contain a draft resolution and/or recommendation.

64. I am also in favour of granting to members of partner for democracy delegations the right to participate in *ad hoc* committees to observe elections.[16] However, I understand that, currently, such *ad hoc* committees are set up by the Bureau, following proposals by the political groups, which makes it impossible for members of the Assembly not belonging to a political group to participate. Under these circumstances, it would be difficult for me to propose granting to non-members of the Assembly a right which not all Assembly members are entitled to. Still, I believe this issue has to be looked at once the problem of participation of non-registered Assembly members in elections observation is solved. In the meantime, the political groups should be encouraged to include members of partner for democracy delegations participating in their work to election observation missions.

4.4. Further improving the partnership

65. In my view, the main added value of the partnership status is more the possibility for working together and engaging with the partners in a mutually constructive political dialogue rather than a formal opportunity for "reviewing progress" in the sense of a strict monitoring exercise going on in one direction.

66. Based on our joint experience of more than ten years, we should consider some other ways of making the status more effective and visible, and possibly more attractive and co-operative.

67. The committees should be encouraged to organise more meetings and/or other activities (for example conferences, seminars, etc.) in co-operation with the partner delegations, including in their countries. Members of partner delegations should be associated more closely to the preparation of various events and be given prominent roles in the programmes of such events.

68. In order to increase the visibility of the contribution of partners to the work of the committees, the agendas should contain a clear indication when an item is included following a proposal from a partner delegation.

69. In turn, the partner delegations should make their participation in the work of the Assembly better known in their parliaments as well as its activities, for example by presenting regular reports on the activities, priorities and key decisions of the Assembly.

70. The proposal to hold bi-annual meetings between the President of the Assembly and the Speakers of partner parliaments could be taken into consideration in the planning of Assembly Presidents' priorities. Such meetings would offer a good opportunity to overview the functioning of the partnership, make it more visible and better known both in the Assembly and in partner parliaments and provide political impetus to it.

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11. Rule 25.
12. Rule 34.
13. Rule 53.
14. Rule 56.
15. Rule 50.6.
16. Appendix XIII – Observation of elections by the Parliamentary Assembly (page 216).

71. For its part, the Assembly should continue to offer various training activities for members and the staff of partner parliaments on issues defined by common agreement.

72. Generally, there are many small moves which may be taken in order to facilitate and highlight the positive contribution of partners to our activities. The committees should be encouraged to show more creativity and flexibility to make it possible.

5. Conclusions

73. The partnership for democracy is probably the best tool that we have developed, in the Assembly, for building co-operation with our colleague parliamentarians from neighbouring countries, and this is our significant parliamentary contribution in bringing about democratic security.

74. More than ten years after the introduction of the status, it is the right moment to take stock of our experience and consider ways of improving the functioning of the partnership with a view to making it more meaningful both for the Assembly and the partners.

75. In my view, the partnership has reached its prime goal of establishing a structured and value-based co-operation with parliaments of neighbouring countries willing to perform a *rapprochement* with the Assembly on the basis of shared values. It has contributed to the strengthening of the role of parliaments in consolidating democratic transformations and promoting stability, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. It has offered to partner parliamentarians an opportunity to participate, on an institutionalised basis, in the European political debate.

76. At the same time, Assembly's partners for democracy have shown varying degrees of commitment to the partnership, both in terms of practical results in implementing democratic reforms, and participating in the work of the Assembly.

77. Therefore, I suggest, on the one hand, to grant additional rights of participation to all partner for democracy delegations in the work of the Assembly and its committees, and on the other hand, to make sure that the performance of the most active and committed partners is duly recognised by offering them, on conditional basis, extended rights.

78. My concrete proposals are contained in the draft resolution.