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Activities of the Assembly's Bureau and Standing Committee (28 June 2024)

Progress report
Bureau of the Assembly
Rapporteur: Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER, United Kingdom, European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance

1. Decisions of the Bureau of 28 June 2024 requiring ratification by the Assembly

1.1. Parliamentary Assembly Network of Election Observers

The Bureau considered and approved the terms of reference of the Parliamentary Assembly Network of Election Observers (Appendix 1).

1.2. References and transmissions to committees

The Bureau considered and approved the following references:

– Political parties and democracy, Doc. 16005, Motion for a resolution: reference to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy *for report*;

– Call for increased support for refugees in Lebanon, Doc. 16006, Motion for a resolution: reference to the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons *for report*;

– Procedure for the election of judges to the European Court of Human Rights Doc. 16011, Motion for a resolution: reference to the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights *for report*;

– Bürgenstock summit on peace in Ukraine: paving the way, Doc. 16015, Motion for a resolution: reference to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy *for report* and to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights *for opinion*;

– Journalists matter: the need to step up efforts to liberate Ukrainian journalists held in captivity by the Russian Federation, Doc. 16020, Motion for a resolution: reference to the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media *for report* and to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights *for opinion*;

– Support for political negotiations to enforce exchange and release of prisoners of war, Doc. 16021, Motion for a resolution: reference to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy *for report* and to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights *for opinion*;

– Bureau decision: Modification of various provisions of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure: reference to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs *for report* (follow-up to Resolution 2553 (2024) Strengthening a youth perspective in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly);

– Bureau decision: Legal and human rights aspects of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine: reference to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights *for report*;

– Bureau decision: Resolution 2561 (2024) Challenges to democracy in Georgia: reference to the Monitoring Committee *to be taken into account* in the preparation of its report on "The honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia";

– Bureau decision: Current affairs debate on "War in Gaza: ensuring the release of the hostages, the implementation of an immediate ceasefire and the provision of humanitarian aid": reference to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy *to be taken into account* in the preparation of its report on "Situation in the Middle East".

1.3. Issues raised by committees

1.3.1. Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

The Bureau decided to set up an ad hoc committee of the Bureau to participate in the conference of the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment network (EPTA), on the theme "Artificial Intelligence and Democracy", in Oslo, on 21 October 2024.

1.4. Composition of the Monitoring Committee

The Bureau, on the basis of a proposal by the EPP/DC Group, appointed Ms Zdravka Bušić (Croatia) as a member.

The Assembly is invited to ratify these Bureau decisions.

Appendix – Terms of Reference of the Parliamentary Assembly Network of Election Observers

The Parliamentary Assembly has been committed to election observation since 1991, providing essential recommendations that have helped shape the electoral legislation of member States and informed the endeavours of both the Monitoring and the Political Affairs Committees.

Confronting emerging challenges that threaten electoral integrity and undermine public trust in democratic processes, the Assembly has decided to take a more proactive stance in advocating for activities aimed at enhancing the legal frameworks and improved electoral practices in member States. In 2022, its Elections Division co-initiated the Council of Europe's Electoral Cycle, in 2023 it organised the Bern Conference on "Elections in times of crisis", which drew on the synergies of various stakeholders, including members of International Election Observation Missions (IEOM), electoral management bodies, civil society organisations, and academic institutions.

In response to the "Reykjavik Principles for Democracy" adopted at the Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State and Government (16-17 May 2023) and the subsequent Riga Declaration which committed the Assembly to "strengthening its initiatives to uphold the integrity of elections", the Assembly has realigned its activities, including by incorporating intergovernmental election cooperation in its structures as of January 2024 to enhance support for member States throughout the electoral process. It is now also managing the Council of Europe Electoral Cycle and focusing more on the preparation and follow-up to the Assembly's thematic reports on topics such as foreign interference, crisis situations, migrant portrayal in campaigns, reconstruction of Ukraine, etc.

In this context, the creation of a Parliamentary Network of election observers will facilitate cross-cutting dialogue on electoral issues and will formally represent the Assembly in external forums, without altering the operational mechanisms of existing election observation missions (EOMs) or new cooperation activities. The terms of reference for this newly established network are delineated below.

Aim of the Network

1. In accordance with Resolution 2538 (2024) "Promoting the revised Code of Good Practice on Referendums", the Parliamentary Assembly decides to create the Parliamentary Assembly Network of Election Observers to enable a more effective exchange among PACE observers, reinforce electoral activities and enhance the visibility of the Assembly's electoral endeavours in light of post-Reykjavik Summit and the addition of a co-operation component.

2. In particular, as platform of exchange, the Network should:

2.1. foster exchange of information on electoral activities and election observation missions (EOMs) between PACE observers;

2.2. promote the Council of Europe reference standards in electoral matters, in particular:

– Venice Commission's Code of good conduct in electoral matters, Revised Code of Good Practice on Referendums and its legal opinions on (draft) legislation on elections, referendums and political parties,

– The Committee of Ministers' Recommendations in electoral matters,

– The European Court of Human rights' case-law on the right to free and fair elections as set out in Protocol 1, Article 3,

– PACE Resolutions related to electoral matters, as well as:

– PACE Guidelines for the observation of elections by the Parliamentary Assembly, the Declaration of principles for international election observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers,

– PACE reports on election observation.

2.3. organise dedicated seminars;

2.4. ensure the representation of the Assembly in external electoral activities;

2.5. promote visibility of the Assembly's electoral activities its contribution to the Council of Europe Electoral Cycle.

3. The Bureau of the Assembly remains responsible for the appointment of PACE ad hoc committees to observe elections and referenda in line with the Assembly's Rules of Procedure (Appendix XIII).

Composition of the Network

1. The Network shall be composed of members approved by the Bureau of the Assembly, as follows:

   1.1. in respect of the member States of the Council of Europe: members of the Parliamentary Assembly on the basis of candidatures presented by the political groups and taking into account active participation in PACE election observation missions, gender balance and regional balance. The Bureau of the Assembly shall approve additional members to the Network from among the representatives and substitutes of the Assembly who do not belong to any political group upon proposal of the Bureau of the Network;

   1.2. in respect of the parliaments with Observer or Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: one member of parliament for each unicameral parliament, and one member of each Chamber for bicameral parliaments, appointed by the national delegation;

   1.3. a representative appointed by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

   1.4. a representative appointed by the Venice Commission.

2. The President of the Assembly, the Chairpersons of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, of the Monitoring Committee and of the Committee of Legal Affairs and Human Rights, the chairpersons of political groups, the General Rapporteur on Democracy, as well as the representatives of the Assembly in the Council for Democratic Elections of the Venice Commission (members and substitutes), shall be ex officio members of the Network.

Working methods of the Network

1. In terms of application of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, the Network shall follow the rules applicable to sub-committees of the Assembly (article 49 of the Rules), except as otherwise provided.

2. The working languages of the Network shall be English and French.

3. The Bureau of the Network shall be composed of one member designated by each political group and approved by the Bureau of the Assembly. The Chairperson of the Network shall be designated among the members of the Bureau of the Network on the basis of an agreement reached among the political groups ensuring the rotation amongst political groups. The chairperson and the vice-chairpersons of the Network shall remain in office until the opening of the next ordinary session of the Assembly. They may serve for one further term, consecutive or not. A chairperson or vice-chairperson of the Network designated in the course of a session for an incomplete term may be designated for maximum two further terms.

4. The costs of participation of members of the Network in its meetings and events shall be borne by the respective national parliaments.

5. The Network shall develop co-operation with all Council of Europe parties active in electoral matters within the framework of the Council of Europe Electoral Cycle, in particular the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM) and the Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM).

6. The Network shall actively co-operate with national parliaments and parliamentarians in and beyond Europe, as well as parliamentary networks and regional and international parliamentary assemblies, including but not limited to the Assembly's partners in the framework of the International Election Observation Missions, in particular the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ ODIHR), OSCE PA, EP and NATO PA.

7. The Network shall also co-operate with other international organisations, election management bodies, NGOs as well as representatives of the media and the academia dealing with electoral matters.

8. The Network shall periodically, and at least once a year, report to the Bureau of the Assembly of its activities, which shall approve its decisions.