



## Resolution 2596 (2025)<sup>1</sup>

# Respect for the rule of law and the fight against corruption within the Council of Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls that, in the aftermath of the corruption scandal linked to the vote in the Assembly on the Strässer report in 2012 and the observation of the 2013, 2015 and 2016 elections in Azerbaijan, the Assembly set up, in April 2017, the ad hoc Independent Investigation Body on the allegations of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly. Since then, the Assembly has clearer codes of conduct and clearer rules on declarations of interests and gifts, on honorary status and on lobbying.
2. However, the Assembly emphasises that all ethical frameworks need regular reviews to ensure they are fit for purpose to address the latest challenges, expectations and standards. Moreover, it is important that an ethical culture is encouraged to flourish and develop within the Council of Europe, which includes ensuring that the Organisation has adequate – and adequately resourced – enforcement mechanisms to uphold its ethical standards.
3. The Assembly welcomes the Council of Europe Policy on reporting wrongdoing and protection from retaliation (Speak Up Policy) and the Rule on investigations, operational since 1 January 2023, which applies to the Secretariat and all members of the Council of Europe's organs and bodies, including members of the Assembly, members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the judges at the European Court of Human Rights. This enables whistle-blower-type complaints to be made to the Directorate of Internal Oversight, which can undertake an initial consideration and, thereafter, a preliminary assessment into any wrongdoing contrary to the public interest. An investigation can then follow (whether through the Directorate of Internal Oversight or the relevant organ's ethics body). The Assembly emphasises the importance of effective enforcement mechanisms in improving behaviours and standards, while being aware that only a small number of cases are currently reaching the directorate. The Assembly invites all instances of the Council of Europe, including the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to raise awareness of the availability of the whistle-blower contacts within the Speak Up Policy and to create an environment and culture in which reporting alleged wrongdoing is supported and enabled.
4. Acknowledging the need for a bespoke approach for the judiciary, the Assembly welcomes recent steps by the European Court of Human Rights to review and to make more transparent its own procedures and ethical standards, including in relation to recusal. The Assembly encourages the Court to foster the development of an ethical culture and to keep ethical questions under review.
5. The Assembly resolves to review its own ethical standards, procedures and practices on a regular basis, to ensure its standards are exemplary and its processes reflect best practices, while having regard to the importance of the separation of powers and the peculiarities of political life. In its activities, the Assembly

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1. *Assembly debate* on 9 April 2025 (14th sitting) (see [Doc. 16138](#), report of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Frank Schwabe). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 9 April 2025 (14th sitting).

See also [Recommendation 2293 \(2025\)](#).



will remain vigilant to the risks of political favouritism, exertion of influence and trading of influence within political life, and their potential impact on the Assembly and national parliaments. To improve the accessibility and visibility of its codes of conduct and ethical standards, the Assembly will:

5.1. revise the structure of its Rules of Procedure to make it more coherent, accessible and user-friendly, while placing the ethical standards upfront;

5.2. promote transparency, ethics and anti-corruption on its website and produce user-friendly infographics and guides on ethical standards, including for specific roles.

6. Desiring to consolidate the considerable progress made in relation to declarations of interests, the Assembly decides to have a single, updatable document, published online, containing all declarations of interests relating to a member's various mandates within the Assembly. Declarations of interests will identify how any perceived, potential or actual conflicts of interest will be addressed and will be required for all roles of significance within the Assembly. The Assembly decides to amend the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly (set out in [Resolution 1903 \(2012\)](#) "Code of conduct of members of the Parliamentary Assembly: good practice or a core duty?", as modified, contained in Appendix II to the Rules of Procedure), in relation to declarations of interests, as follows:

6.1. in order to clarify how to address actual or potential conflicts, to replace paragraph 9 with the following paragraph:

*"In their declarations of interests, members should identify any actual or potential conflicts between economic, commercial, financial or other interests on a professional, personal or family level on the one hand, and the public interest in the work of the Assembly on the other hand. In doing so, special regard should be paid to that member's particular roles within the Assembly. Once an actual or potential conflict of interest has been identified, members should set out steps that will be taken to avoid that conflict unduly affecting their work in the Assembly (for example by desisting from certain actions or roles). Conflicts of interest should thus be resolved in favour of the public interest and should be disclosed.";*

6.2. to replace paragraph 10 with the following paragraph:

*"Any member with interests relevant to a debate that are not yet adequately reflected in their written declaration must set them out in an oral declaration when speaking in any proceedings of the Assembly or its committees, or in any relevant communications.";*

6.3. while generally discouraging the seeking, giving or receiving of gifts, to replace paragraph 15 with the following paragraph:

*"Members shall not accept any gifts or benefits whose nature and/or value is not strictly within the bounds of parliamentary protocol or practices regarding hospitality.";*

6.4. to add, at the end of paragraph 18, the following sentences:

*"The declaration shall include a specific entry for every specific role that member has within the Assembly, including President or Vice-President of the Assembly, chairperson or vice-chairperson of committees, sub-committees, networks, platforms and alliances, rapporteur (including general rapporteur or co-rapporteur), chairperson and member of an ad hoc committee for the observation of elections, member of an ad hoc committee of the Bureau, or a role representing the Assembly or a committee. Such entries shall set out any interests specific to that role and shall identify how any perceived, potential or actual conflicts of interest that might arise would be addressed.";*

6.5. in order to reflect that gifts are now recorded in declarations of interests, to add, before the last sentence of paragraph 18, the following sentence:

*"Members shall update their declarations of interests, within 30 days, to include any relevant new information, including any gifts or similar benefits (such as travel expenses, accommodation, subsistence, meals or entertainment expenses) of a value in excess of €200 that they accept in the performance of their duties as Assembly members.";*

6.6. in order to encourage the submission of annual declarations of interests, to add, after paragraph 18, the following three paragraphs:

*"Any member who has not submitted an annual declaration of interests for the relevant year shall not be entitled to apply for, be granted or continue to hold any specific office within the Assembly, including President or Vice-President of the Assembly, chairperson or vice-*

*chairperson of a committee, sub-committee, network, platform or alliance, rapporteur (including general rapporteur or co-rapporteur), member of an ad hoc committee for the observation of elections, member of an ad hoc committee of the Bureau, or a role representing the Assembly or a committee. In case of the late submission of a declaration, this prohibition shall cease two months after the submission of that member's declaration for that year.*

*If intervening in a debate, a member who has not submitted an annual declaration of interests for the relevant year must start their intervention with an oral declaration of interests.*

*Upon the second consecutive year of a failure to submit a declaration of interests by a given member, the President shall write to the Speaker of the relevant parliament highlighting the continued absence of a declaration of interests for that member and asking the Speaker to consider (in accordance with national procedures and in consultation with the competent persons) whether that member is suitable to remain a member of the national delegation given the continued failure to provide a declaration of interests.”*

7. The Assembly consequently decides to modify other provisions of its Rules of Procedure as follows:

7.1. in order to apply similar standards to those for rapporteurs in paragraph 1 of the Code of conduct for rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly (as set out in [Resolution 1799 \(2011\)](#) “Code of conduct for rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly”, as modified, contained in Appendix III of the Rules of Procedure), to members with similarly significant mandates within the Assembly, to add, after paragraph 18, the following paragraphs:

*“Rules of conduct applicable to the President and Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, the chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of committees, sub-committees, networks, platforms and alliances, and the chairpersons of political groups*

*Rules of conduct for the President and Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, the chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of committees, sub-committees, networks, platforms and alliances, and the chairpersons of political groups:*

– *principle of neutrality, impartiality and objectivity, including in particular:*

*- obligation to declare any economic, commercial, financial or other interests, on a professional, personal or family level, connected with the work of the Assembly, committee, sub-committee, network, platform, alliance or political group, as the case may be;*

*- undertaking not to seek or accept instructions from any government or governmental or non-governmental organisation, or pressure group or individual;*

*- undertaking not to accept any reward, honorary distinction, decoration, favour, substantial gift or remuneration from a government or governmental or non-governmental organisation, a pressure group or an individual in connection with activities carried out in the exercise of their duties;*

– *obligation of discretion, in particular the undertaking not to make personal use of information acquired in the course of their duties;*

– *undertaking of availability, in particular undertaking to attend Assembly sessions, Standing Committee meetings and meetings of committees, sub-committees, networks, platforms and alliances, in connection with their duties;*

– *undertaking to respect the values of the Council of Europe.”;*

7.2. at the end of paragraph 1.1.1 of the Code of conduct for rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly, to add the following sentence:

*“Such a declaration shall be in writing and shall be made public by being added to the existing annual declaration of interests for that member.”;*

7.3. to replace paragraph 20 of the Guidelines for the observation of elections by the Parliamentary Assembly (adopted by the Bureau of the Assembly and set out in Appendix XIV to the Rules of Procedure) with the following paragraph:

*“All candidates for membership of an ad hoc committee, at the time of putting forward their candidacy, shall make a written declaration of interests in connection with the country concerned by an election observation; this declaration shall be added to their declaration of interests*

*published on the Assembly website. In that addition to their declaration of interests, members shall identify any actual or potential conflicts between any economic, commercial, financial or other interests on a professional, personal or relational level on the one hand, and the public interest in the work of the ad hoc committee for observing those elections on the other hand. The term “relational” includes direct and indirect family relations as well as people with whom they are in regular contact. Once an actual or potential conflict of interest has been identified, members should set out steps that will be taken to avoid that conflict unduly affecting their work in that role (for example desisting from certain actions or roles). Political groups shall not submit the candidatures of members with noteworthy conflicts of interest in respect of a particular country.”;*

7.4. to incorporate the Code of conduct for rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly into the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly, adding it after the final paragraph of the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly;

7.5. in order to strengthen the test to be applied to the President and Vice-Presidents to include untruthful declarations or failing to declare relevant interests, so as to align it with that for rapporteurs as set out in Appendix III, paragraph 4, in Rule 54.1 to replace the words “*no longer fulfils the conditions required for the exercise of that office or is guilty of serious misconduct by seriously or repeatedly violating the provisions of the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly*” with the following words:

*“no longer fulfils the conditions required for the exercise of that office, or if he or she fails to honour one or more undertaking in the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly, including if he or she failed to declare any relevant interests or made an untruthful declaration, or if he or she is guilty of serious misconduct by seriously or repeatedly violating the provisions of the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly”;*

7.6. in order to strengthen the test to be applied to the chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of committees to include untruthful declarations or failing to declare relevant interests, so as to align it with that for rapporteurs as set out in Appendix III, paragraph 4; and in order to apply the same standards to the chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of sub-committees, networks, platforms and alliances, to modify Rule 55 as follows:

7.6.1. at the end of the title, to add the following words:

*“; sub-committees, networks, platforms and alliances”;*

7.6.2. in Rule 55.1, to replace the words “*no longer fulfils the conditions required for the exercise of that office or is guilty of serious misconduct by seriously or repeatedly violating the provisions of the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly*” with the following words:

*“no longer fulfils the conditions required for the exercise of that office, or if he or she fails to honour one or more undertaking in the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly, including if he or she failed to declare any relevant interests or made an untruthful declaration, or if he or she is guilty of serious misconduct by seriously or repeatedly violating the provisions of the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly”;*

7.6.3. after Rule 55.6, to add the following paragraph:

*“References, in this paragraph, to committee include sub-committee, network, platform and alliance.”.*

8. In order to improve transparency and to better emphasise the obligations on rapporteurs, the Code of conduct for rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly is amended as follows:

8.1. after paragraph 1.5, to add the following paragraph:

*“Obligation on rapporteurs to sign an undertaking, when updating their declaration of interests, to abide by the obligations of neutrality, impartiality, objectivity, discretion and availability as part of that role”;*

- 8.2. to replace paragraph 3 with the following paragraph:

*“The rapporteur should, unless there are good reasons for not doing so, publish the list of individuals, experts and representatives of governmental or non-governmental organisations consulted, met or received in the process of drafting the report.”.*

9. Reiterating the importance of effective enforcement mechanisms in improving behaviours and standards, the Assembly decides to amend the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly to better highlight reporting options and to indicate some types of expertise that can be used in an investigation, as follows:

- 9.1. after paragraph 20, to add the following paragraph:

*“Concerns about wrongdoing affecting the public interest, including breaches of the Assembly’s codes of conduct or inaccurate declarations of interests, can be reported to the President of the Assembly or the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs.”.*

The Assembly website should be similarly updated to highlight relevant reporting options;

- 9.2. at the end of paragraph 22, to add the following sentence:

*“The committee may avail itself of the expertise of internal and national experts to assist in such an investigation.”;*

- 9.3. after paragraph 25, to add the following paragraph:

*“Where the committee decides to open an investigation, it may refer the matter to the Conduct Investigation Panel of the Parliamentary Assembly to gather evidence and to establish the facts on its behalf. The Conduct Investigation Panel of the Parliamentary Assembly is composed of seven former judges of the European Court of Human Rights and is supported by a secretariat composed of Council of Europe staff members. For each referral, three of those former judges will serve as the panel for that matter. The provisions of paragraphs 23 and 24 above apply to the Conduct Investigation Panel of the Parliamentary Assembly, as if it were the committee. Any final determination shall remain for the committee itself.”.*

10. The Assembly will develop an improved checking mechanism for declarations of interests by its members:

- 10.1. the Secretariat would undertake initial checks of declarations of interests to raise any potential obvious omissions or potential conflicts with the member concerned;

- 10.2. this mechanism should focus, as a priority, on checks in relation to those members who have specific offices within the Assembly (the President, the Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of committees, sub-committees, networks, platforms and alliances, chairpersons of political groups, rapporteurs, co-rapporteurs and members of ad hoc election observation committees);

- 10.3. appropriate additional resources should be placed at the disposal of the Secretariat of the Assembly in order to facilitate this checking mechanism;

- 10.4. the Secretariat should produce an annual information note, for the attention of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, on its progress in this work checking the declarations of interests of the Assembly members. The President of the Assembly should also receive a copy.

11. In order to address concerns in respect of conduct by members who have left the Assembly, the following amendments are made to the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly:

- 11.1. after paragraph 28, add the following two paragraphs:

*“In respect of a member who has left the Assembly, where allegations arise of significant breaches of the rules of conduct, or conduct likely to bring the Assembly into disrepute through association with that former member, the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs may examine alleged breaches of the Code of conduct as for current members.*

*Where a member leaves the Assembly following allegations of serious or repetitive breaches of the rules of conduct, the President of the Assembly or the President of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, should send information concerning those*

*concerns to the Speaker of the relevant national Assembly, inviting him or her to consider taking appropriate action pursuant to their own ethical standards and enforcement mechanisms and to keep the President and the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs informed.”;*

11.2. after paragraph 29, add the following paragraph:

*“In cases of serious or repetitive breaches of the rules of conduct by a former member, or of conduct by that member likely to bring the Assembly into disrepute through association with that former member, the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs may remove that former member’s honorary status and may ban the former member from accessing the Council of Europe’s premises.”*

12. Recalling concerns that members could seek to avoid investigations by leaving the Assembly and rejoining, the Assembly notes that sanctions under paragraph 29 of the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly could also be taken in relation to previous serious or repetitive breaches, where a member rejoins the Assembly.

13. Recognising the unique pressures on election observation missions, the Assembly:

13.1. welcomes its new Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections and encourages it to undertake work to further strengthen ethical standards related to election observation missions, including the issue of suitability of appointments to an ad hoc committee for election observation, declarations of interests, impartial conduct during an election observation mission (including by declining any individual gift or bilateral invitation by the hosting authorities, making public statements and the overall attitude of members during the mission) and the enforcement of the rules;

13.2. acknowledging the potential for unofficial election observation missions to damage the reputation of the Assembly and the viability of election observation in general, and noting the need for clarity as to the criteria for appointment, decides to replace paragraph 13 of the Guidelines for the observation of elections by the Parliamentary Assembly with the following text:

*“In making appointments to an ad hoc committee for election observation, political groups must exercise due diligence, ensuring appropriate, impartial and skilled members for such missions. In particular, political groups must respect:*

*– the principle of gender balance having regard to gender membership of their respective groups;*

*– the principle of fair geographical representation;*

*– the need for the candidate to participate meaningfully in the work of the mission, having regard to the candidate’s linguistic capability, given that, in situ, interpretation is only provided to and from English or French;*

*– the prohibition on members observing elections in their own country;*

*– the prohibition on appointing members who took part in non-official missions conducted for the purposes of observing elections or in connection with elections in the country concerned and which were sponsored by or undertaken at the invitation of a State, a parliamentary, governmental or non-governmental organisation, association, foundation or any other natural or legal person, which includes any mission that would contradict the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, including the principle of impartiality.”*

14. Acknowledging that political groups have an important and powerful role within the work of the Assembly, the Assembly:

14.1. encourages consideration as to whether ethical standards should be developed for political groups;

14.2. calls on political groups to act to ensure improved transparency of their expenditures;

14.3. calls on political groups to have regard to the reputation of the Assembly in their work and to exercise due diligence in their decisions to nominate members to committees, as well as in proposing or supporting candidates for significant roles within the Assembly, including as President of the Assembly or chairperson or vice-chairperson of committees;

14.4. after paragraph 7 of [Resolution 1115 \(1997\)](#) “Setting up of an Assembly committee on the honouring of obligations and commitments by member states of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)”, as modified, set out in Appendix IX to the Rules of Procedure – Honouring of obligations and commitments by member states of the Council of Europe, decides to insert the following paragraph:

*“Political groups must exercise due diligence in their decision to nominate members to the Monitoring Committee, as well as in proposing or supporting candidates as a co-rapporteur, noting the importance of ensuring appropriate, impartial and skilled co-rapporteurs.”*

15. The Assembly decides to instruct the Bureau to review the special rules on honorary status and, in order to improve transparency, decides to publish on its website a list of those with honorary status. The Assembly emphasises that it should be possible to remove honorary status due to disreputable conduct that could have an impact on the reputation of the Assembly.

16. Conscious that links between parliamentarians and lobbyists require clear ethical guidance, the Assembly will develop a code of conduct for lobbyists at the Assembly, taking account of the work on the framework of principles for lobbyists to the Council of Europe.

17. Given the well-known potential for conflict with the work of the Assembly for members acting in a consultancy role, the Assembly decides to replace paragraph 11 of the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly with the following sentence:

*“No member shall act as a paid advocate or consultant in any work relating to activities of the Assembly.”*

18. In order to better reflect the importance of ethical standards in the work of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, the Assembly decides to change the name of the committee, as follows:

*Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities.*

19. The amendments to the Rules of Procedure contained in paragraphs 6.4, 7.2, 7.3 and 8.1 to this Resolution, which require the establishment of a single consolidated declaration of interests, shall enter into force on 1 January 2026. All the other amendments to the Rules of Procedure set out in this Resolution shall enter into force upon its adoption.