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Increasing members' active participation in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly

Report[1]
Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities
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1. Reference to committee: Doc. 15518, Reference 4655 of 20 June 2022.

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. Since its establishment, the Parliamentary Assembly has embodied a pioneering vision: placing parliamentarians at the heart of a multilateral organisation dedicated to the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. At a time when both multilateralism and democracy are under strain, active commitment by its members is more crucial than ever to preserve the Assembly's authority and strengthen its role as a guardian of Europe's shared values.

2. The Assembly recognises the unique value of the dual mandate of its members, as both national legislators and members of a pan-European forum, enabling them to enrich European debates and return home as ambassadors of the Council of Europe. It recalls that this dual mandate is both a strength and a challenge, requiring careful organisation and support by political groups and national parliaments. Participation is not merely a procedural formality but a political responsibility. It lends legitimacy to the decisions of the Assembly, reflects the democratic will of Europe's citizens, and ensures that the Assembly remains responsive, effective, and representative.

3. Building on past reforms and extensive recent consultations, the Assembly considers that its internal procedures and practices must evolve towards a framework that inspires purpose, fosters ownership, recognises effort, ensures real impact, promotes equality and fairness and creates the conditions for engaged and effective participation – thereby enabling all members to fulfil their full potential in the work of the Assembly. The Assembly also reaffirms the importance of ensuring that its activities remain accessible and inclusive, while safeguarding high standards of political deliberation.

4. Consequently, the Assembly decides, as a central and forward-looking reform, to strengthen institutional capacity and the pertinence of its work by creating the possibility for its Bureau to establish special committees. This measure will provide flexibility and ensure that priority or cross-cutting challenges can be addressed with dedicated parliamentary focus. Hence, the Assembly decides, after Rule 50 of the Rules of Procedure, to insert the following provision:

> *"Rule 51 – Special committees"*
>
> *1. The Bureau of the Assembly may establish up to two special committees at any given time, each with a clear, time-limited mandate addressing priority or transversal issues requiring focused parliamentary consideration.*
>
> *2. Each special committee shall be established for a mandate of one year, which may be renewed once by a decision of the Bureau.*
>
> *3. The mandate, composition, duration, and specific tasks of each special committee shall be defined by the Bureau upon its establishment.*
>
> *4. Special committees shall submit their reports and recommendations within the timeframe set by the Bureau and shall automatically cease to exist upon completion of their mandate, the expiry of the one-year period, or at the end of the renewal period.*
>
> *5. Members of special committees shall be nominated by the Bureau, taking into account political, geographical, and gender balance.*
>
> *6. Special committees shall operate under the general rules applicable to general committees, unless otherwise specified by the Bureau.*
>
> *7. Members serving on special committees shall be exempt from the membership limitation set forth in Rule 44.6."*

5. To add dynamism to its work and debates, the Assembly decides to:

5.1. introduce a "blue card question" mechanism allowing direct, concise questions from rapporteurs and political group speakers to other speakers during debates. Hence, the Assembly decides, after Rule 37 of the Rules of Procedure, to insert the following paragraph:

"During a debate, the President may give the floor to the rapporteur(s) and to members speaking on behalf of their political groups who indicate, by raising a blue card, their intention to ask another member not belonging to the same political group, in response to that member's speech, a question lasting no more than thirty seconds, directly related to the speech and the subject of the debate. The

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 1st October 2025.

member to whom the question is put may respond within the same time limit. The rapporteur(s) may make use of at most two blue cards per debate, and members speaking on behalf of their political groups one blue card per debate. This procedure shall not apply to exchanges with guest speakers.";

5.2. while valuing the contribution of its networks in promoting dialogue and co-operation on important themes, invite the Bureau to review the Assembly's list of networks on a regular basis to ensure that they remain focused on priority objectives, are adequately resourced, and can evolve or be phased out once their tasks have been fulfilled;

5.3. require from guest speakers to respond to questions from members of the Assembly, so as to ensure a genuine and fruitful exchange within the remit of the Council of Europe;

5.4. encourage opportunities for meaningful exchanges with representatives of the Council of Europe and its bodies, such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), expert bodies, and steering committees within the Council of Europe or its institutions, depending on the subject matter. The aim should be genuine co-operation and constructive dialogue, rather than interactions of a purely formal or procedural nature.

6. As regards enhancing participation by a higher number of its members, the Assembly:

6.1. welcomes the Bureau's recent practice of reducing speaking time from three to two minutes for registered speakers while proposing to preserve longer time for political group representatives. It further decides, in the additional provisions relating to Assembly debates, concerning the speaking time, to:

6.1.1. replace paragraph 1 with the following paragraph:

"Speakers registered for a debate, including youth rapporteurs, shall have three minutes' speaking time, unless the Bureau decides at the start of the part-session, owing to a high number of registered speakers for a particular debate, to reduce speaking time for that debate to two minutes. Speakers on behalf of the political groups shall have three minutes' speaking time.";

6.1.2. add, at the end of paragraph 4, the following words:

"or two minutes if the speaking time has been reduced to two minutes for the other speakers.";

6.2. considers that, to ensure orderly proceedings and equitable opportunities for all members, one possible way is to automatically cut the microphone once a speaker has reached the time limit;

6.3. decides to recognise consistent engagement in voting by moving the ten members who have participated in the highest number of votes in plenary up seven positions on the lists of speakers. It therefore decides to replace, in the additional provisions relating to Assembly debates, concerning the order of speakers, in paragraph 10, the word "three" with the word "seven";

6.4. decides to set limits on simultaneous rapporteurships held by members and per committee. It therefore decides to replace, in Rule 50.1 of the Rules of Procedure, the sentence "*A member of the Assembly who is simultaneously rapporteur for five reports or opinions under preparation, on behalf of one or more committees, may not be appointed rapporteur.*" with the following text:

"No member may be appointed to prepare more than three reports simultaneously, excluding reports prepared in the Monitoring Committee, under the urgent procedure, opinions on the reports of other committees and those for which the chairperson of a committee is required to act as rapporteur. No member may hold more than one general or youth rapporteurship at any one time. No committee may have more than four general rapporteurs at once.";

6.5. entrusts the Secretary General of the Assembly, on the basis of guidelines approved by the Bureau of the Assembly, with the implementation of Resolution 2615 (2025) "Promoting inclusive participation in parliamentary life: gender equality, accessibility and inclusive policies", including support for limited, exceptional online attendance in committee work for pregnant members, members caring for children under the age of three, or facing health and caregiving challenges.

7. As regards transparency and the optimisation of its order of business, the Assembly decides:

7.1. that the provisional lists of speakers be published at least twelve hours before the debate, except under urgent procedures. It therefore decides, in the additional provisions relating to Assembly debates, concerning the list of speakers, in paragraph 4, after the first sentence, to insert the following sentence:

"The provisional list of speakers for a debate, except for a debate under the urgent procedure, shall be published at least twelve hours before the opening of the sitting in which that debate takes place.";

7.2. to debate the progress report of the Monitoring Committee once every two years, aligning its duration with that of the typical term of office of the committee chairperson. It therefore decides to amend Resolution 1115 (1997), as modified, by replacing in paragraph 15 the words "*once a year*" with the words "*once every two years*";

7.3. that the chairperson or, in his or her absence, a vice-chairperson of the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights be invited, during the debate on the Bureau's progress report, to make a brief oral intervention in order to present the committee's recommendation on the list of candidates submitted by a member State for the post of judge.

8. As regards visibility, support and outreach, the Assembly resolves to:

8.1. further develop and maintain pace-apps, turning it into a dedicated mobile application and member portal, offering real-time information on debates, lists of speakers, procedures, voting and resources for members;

8.2. further improve public visibility and communication of its work, including by making available tools more known, using concise media-friendly report titles, enhanced press and social media outreach, and clearer online presentation on the Council of Europe website;

8.3. expand induction, mentoring, and training programmes for new members, including handbooks, especially drawing on the Assembly handbook entitled "National parliaments as guarantors of human rights in Europe", briefings, digital tools, and peer support initiatives;

8.4. facilitate joint committee meetings, hearings, and best-practice exchanges, promoting collaborative and transversal work for greater coherence and impact;

8.5. collect and analyse data on travel connections to Strasbourg, advocating for improved public transport and access for members.

9. The Assembly invites national parliaments to support and facilitate members' participation in its work by:

9.1. ensuring members attend plenary sittings and committee meetings regularly and taking appropriate measures to promote active participation;

9.2. treating Assembly work as an integral component of their members' parliamentary service and providing all necessary practical and political support;

9.3. facilitating "pairing agreements" and similar co-operation among parliamentary groups belonging to the majority and the opposition to ease attendance at sessions and committee meetings;

9.4. aiming at aligning national parliamentary calendars and meetings of other international parliamentary bodies with Assembly sessions;

9.5. encouraging and enhancing internal reporting of Assembly activities by supporting parliamentary TV, briefings, newsletters, and plenary debates in national chambers;

9.6. fostering co-operation and information exchange between national parliamentary committees and Assembly committees, including joint hearings and exchange opportunities for officials;

9.7. facilitating parliamentary staff study visits and learning opportunities on the Assembly and on the Council of Europe in general;

9.8. monitoring member attendance and working constructively to restore regular participation where needed.

10. The Assembly decides that the amendments to the Rules of Procedure set out in this resolution shall enter into force at the opening of the January 2026 part-session.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Petra Bayr, rapporteur[3]

1. Introduction

1. The members of the Parliamentary Assembly are its greatest asset. Deeply rooted in their constituencies, they guide its deliberations, drive its actions and guarantee the legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of its work. At a time when both multilateralism and democracy are under threat, the role of Assembly members becomes even more critical in demonstrating that parliamentarians have a place in international affairs, parliamentary diplomacy has an impact, and that the voice of elected representatives should also be heard in intergovernmental organisations.

2. A unique feature of Assembly members is their dual mandate, serving simultaneously as parliamentarians at both the national and European levels. This dual role is invaluable because it enables members to bridge national and European political arenas, enriching debates with perspectives grounded in their domestic contexts while advancing shared European values. It creates an interface between the Council of Europe and the 700 million Europeans living in its 46 member States, in their diversity of backgrounds, needs, expectations and political views.

3. The fundamental premise of this report is that the Assembly's strength depends on the full engagement of its dual-mandate members. Increasing participation, however, presents a multifaceted challenge based on a wide range of personal and institutional factors.

4. The issue of member participation has been considered by the Assembly on several occasions. In 2007, the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs conducted extensive work, which culminated in the adoption of Resolution 1583 (2007) "Improving the participation of members in Parliamentary Assembly plenary sessions and committee meetings". The related report examined attendance at plenary sessions and committee meetings, proposing measures to make meetings more interesting and livelier, reduce scheduling conflicts and ensure that participation statistics were collected and analysed systematically.[4]

5. The issue of participation was examined again in 2011 by the ad hoc Committee on the Reform of the Parliamentary Assembly, which was tasked with drawing up a report containing measures to make the Assembly more politically relevant, effective and visible, and to improve participation of Assembly members, while reinforcing interaction between the Assembly and national parliaments.[5] This work resulted in the current committee structure of the Assembly as well as in innovations to working methods which are still applied today.[6]

6. Subsequently, in 2018 the ad hoc Committee on the role and mission of the Parliamentary Assembly brought to the attention of the Bureau a number of issues pertaining to the internal functioning of the Assembly, including the number of part-sessions per year and their duration, as well as members' participation in plenary sittings and in committee meetings.[7]

7. Building on previous reflections, the present report addresses the issue of members' participation in the work of the Assembly. It takes into account lessons learned from previous reforms and recent experiences, such as remote working methods. The report aims to propose measures that would enable Assembly members to engage more extensively in its deliberations, while enhancing the relevance, timeliness, dynamism and inclusivity of these activities.

2. Consultation process

8. To ensure that this report addresses the real concerns and aspirations of Assembly members, the Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities (hereafter the Rules Committee) initiated an extensive consultation process. A questionnaire was distributed to all members, inviting detailed responses on a wide range of participation-related issues. Questions addressed members' experiences with plenary and committee

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3. The explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.
4. Doc. 11295.
5. Doc. 12627.
6. Assembly Resolution 1822 (2011).
7. AS/Bur/MR-PA(2018)06rev, "Revised memorandum prepared by the Chairperson of the ad hoc Committee on the role and mission of the Parliamentary Assembly"; AS/Bur/MR-PA(2018)8, "Report of the ad hoc Committee on the role and mission of the Parliamentary Assembly".

attendance, speaking opportunities, motivations for engagement, barriers encountered, and suggestions for improvement. The questionnaire also solicited views on procedural innovations such as interactive debate tools and remote participation.

9. In addition, the Rules Committee consulted all Assembly committees to gather concrete feedback on participation challenges faced during their work.

10. Finally, this report is informed by valuable feedback from a committee hearing with a member from the Greek delegation and a former member from the United Kingdom delegation to the Assembly, featuring national examples.

2.1. Key findings from the questionnaire

11. Eighty-seven members of the Assembly replied to the questionnaire. Their responses highlighted several impediments to active participation, including insufficient time for Assembly work and session preparation. Some members noted that distance between the matters dealt with by the Assembly and their constituents' concerns diminished their engagement, while other challenges cited were limited time to accommodate speakers, insufficient prioritisation by their national parliaments, and overlapping Assembly and national parliamentary sessions. A few respondents also mentioned travel difficulties to Strasbourg. Scheduling conflicts, particularly between Assembly committee meetings held during part-sessions, emerged as another issue.

12. A significant majority – 78% – of respondents felt that their voices were heard within the Assembly. All respondents from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and the Group of the Unified European Left (UEL), as well as respondents not belonging to a political group reported feeling adequately heard. The European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates (ECPA) group, however, registered the highest percentage of negative responses, with 43% of the ECPA respondents indicating they did not feel heard. In general, opposition members felt less heard than those in the governing majority, with 35% of opposition respondents as opposed to 11% among the majority expressing this sentiment.

13. Other key findings from the questionnaire include:

– Strong desire for clearer purpose and visible impact: Many respondents emphasised that feeling their work contributes meaningfully to Council of Europe values is a primary motivator for participation. Some members reported frustration when contributions seemed to have limited visibility or practical effect.

– Recognition and encouragement are important: Responses highlighted that recognition could sustain members' motivation. Enhanced visibility of Assembly work remains a priority, as many members report that their efforts are insufficiently recognised by both constituents and national parliaments. This perceived lack of recognition impacts their ability to justify greater participation. Suggestions included public acknowledgment of active participation, transparent reporting of contributions and voting records, and incentives such as priority in the lists of speakers.

– Challenges for smaller delegations: Members from smaller delegations frequently cited difficulties in covering all committee work due to their limited number. This creates pressure and may reduce the quality or breadth of their involvement. They recommended more equitable distribution of roles and enhanced support for multitasking members.

– Need for transparent and timely management of the lists of speakers: Perceived lack of transparency about the rules defining the compilation of the lists of speakers and late publication were identified as deterrent to effective debate preparation and delegation co-ordination.

– Remote participation as a vital accommodation: The value of in-person meetings for fostering international parliamentary dialogue was constantly highlighted. Health issues, caring responsibilities, and travel constraints were however repeatedly mentioned as factors limiting physical attendance at committee meetings. There is growing support for enabling remote participation under specific, justified circumstances, such as parental leave or serious health condition. This approach aligns with the provisions of Resolution 2615 (2025) "Promoting inclusive participation in parliamentary life: gender equality, accessibility and inclusive policies", which advocates the facilitation of online participation in committee meetings for members unable to attend in person due to caring responsibilities. Allowing remote attendance under defined conditions was seen as an important step toward inclusivity.

– Communication and support services: Several respondents requested better advance communication about meeting schedules, lists of speakers, and deadlines. Calls for improved media coverage and strategic communications were reiterated. There was widespread appreciation for the pace-apps Help

Desk but there were calls to enhance its visibility and capacity. It was also suggested that training sessions, informational resources, introductory seminars, and mentoring programmes would benefit new members and enhance their active involvement.

14. Members expressed differing views on committee membership, with some preferring to focus on a single committee and others supporting involvement in multiple committees. To incentivise participation, proposals included offering prioritised positions on the lists of speakers for active members in committee meetings and improving follow-up mechanisms for Assembly resolutions, alongside clearer national-level guidance. Frustrations were noted about time constraints limiting speaking opportunities.

2.2. Key feedback from committees

15. On 18 December 2024, the Chairperson of the Rules Committee initiated a consultation with chairpersons of other committees to explore measures that would encourage greater participation of parliamentarians in the Assembly's work. Responses were received from the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, and the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, providing valuable insights.

16. The committees offered recommendations on the format and structure of meetings, with the majority favouring in-person committee meetings as the standard, reserving hybrid formats for exceptional cases. They also suggested more engaging and collaborative meeting formats, such as targeted workshops and increased co-operation between committees and networks. While there was general satisfaction with the frequency of meetings, concerns were raised about agenda clashes during part-sessions and whether the current committee structure adequately addresses pressing issues.

17. Additionally, the need to enhance the Assembly's visibility at national level through more frequent oral debriefings in national parliaments and broader dissemination of decisions via social media was highlighted. While digital tools like pace-apps were valued, their usability was sometimes problematic. Suggestions to boost engagement included organising more country visits and strengthening co-ordination through parliamentary networks and alliances.

18. The consultation outcomes have informed the proposals set out in this report, ensuring they reflect both practical concerns and motivational dynamics reported by members themselves.

3. Active participation and motivation

19. This report's fundamental aim is to increase both the number of members participating in the Assembly work and the extent and quality of their engagement. Engagement encompasses attendance, speaking opportunities, contributions across committees and debates, and the role in shaping Council of Europe policies.

20. Increasing active and meaningful participation in a parliamentary assembly requires more than procedural obligations, it depends on fostering the right internal motivators: sense of purpose, ownership, recognition and impact. To truly strengthen participation, parliamentary institutions must nurture all four creating an environment where members not only feel that their work matters, but also see that it belongs to them, is valued, and makes a difference.

21. Four key motivators should guide the aim of increasing participation:

– ***Sense of purpose***: It is essential that members understand and embrace the vital role of the Assembly as the "engine" of the Council of Europe, where ideas are generated, momentum is built, and the Organisation's values are promoted through permanent interparliamentary dialogue. Members are more willing to participate in the Assembly's activities when they feel that their motivations and values are aligned with those of the Assembly. A strong sense of purpose can come from members feeling that their work contributes to a meaningful purpose and that they are participating in a "mission" rather than a mere duty. This sense of purpose can foster a feeling of belonging to the institution, the Assembly, and the Council of Europe, as well as the "European family" at large, thereby encouraging collaboration. It must go beyond simple partisan logics and remind members that their work has practical value for many people beyond short-term interests. This fosters long-term engagement, where members feel committed even after they have left the Assembly.

– ***Ownership***: Members should feel that their influence on the Assembly agenda and outcomes is real and valued, fostering greater investment and initiative. when members feel that they are the driving force behind what happens in the Assembly, they are encouraged to contribute more actively and to be

more critical and proactive. This, in turn, increases their sense of responsibility and accountability, resulting in more consistent attendance and engagement. The Assembly needs to find more ways to encourage all members to become proactive participants who can influence its work. While this is already the case for many members, it should be the norm. Moreover, a sense of ownership encourages members to propose new ideas and innovations. They invest in the Assembly's future rather than being temporary participants, and this makes the Assembly, on the one hand, more sustainable and, on the other, more responsive to members' needs and proposals. At the same time, members are more willing to defend and promote the Assembly and the values of the Council of Europe when they feel they are part of it and are proud of their contribution, impact and legacy

– ***Recognition***: Active members should receive visibility and formal acknowledgment, reinforcing motivation and rewarding contributions. the Assembly should do more to recognise the work and contributions of its members. This would foster continued engagement and motivate members to stay active and committed. Recognising members' work can lead to increased engagement, highlight positive role models and set standards for new members of the Assembly. Effective recognition of their merits within the Assembly can also create future opportunities and become a strong motivator

– ***Impact***: Member participation must produce tangible outcomes both in the Assembly and nationally, positioning Assembly members as influential ambassadors of the Council of Europe. If members can visualise the result of their efforts and realise that their work has led to real change (e.g. shaping national laws, influencing policy, improving constituents' lives and fostering and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law across Europe and the world) they are more likely to stay engaged. This can be particularly effective if members can see that their contribution to the Assembly's work (motions, reports, speeches and amendments, for example) influences debates in their national parliaments. Working in the Assembly, a pan-European parliamentary body, where members from different countries, cultures, languages, and religions can co-operate towards a shared goal, can foster members' views of their role as public servants and their sense of belonging to an organisation that transcends party, election periods, and national boundaries

22. These four elements are not standalone, they are interdependent. A sense of purpose might remain abstract without concrete results, and a sense of ownership can help engagement, but it needs to be recognised in order to be sustainable. These four dimensions – purpose, ownership, recognition, and impact – must be balanced and mutually reinforcing for sustainable engagement.

4. How to increase active participation and enhance motivation?

23. To meet these ambitions, the report proposes a set of concrete measures, articulated under four broad priorities:

– sustaining the Assembly's engagement with Council of Europe priorities and its responsiveness to the evolving political context;

– strengthening member engagement;

– facilitating participation;

– amplifying impact and visibility.

4.1. Sustaining the Assembly's engagement with Council of Europe priorities and its responsiveness to the evolving political context

24. To remain effective and relevant, the Assembly must not only uphold its core functions but also adapt its working methods to evolving political realities and emerging priorities of the Council of Europe. This requires a careful balance between innovation and the preservation of established procedures, ensuring that new initiatives strengthen – rather than dilute – the Assembly's deliberative and oversight roles. The following measures are aimed at enhancing responsiveness, fostering engagement, and aligning parliamentary work more closely with the Organisation's strategic objectives.

4.1.1. Strengthening collaboration through networks to enhance member engagement and committee work

25. One of the most significant innovations in the last decade within the Assembly has been the emergence of networks, which offer a valuable platform for fostering connections among members, enabling more dynamic collaboration and dialogue on specific themes or areas of interest. Their number having increased

over the years, the Assembly currently counts six networks: on the situation of the children of Ukraine, for a healthy environment, women free from violence, No Hate Parliamentary Alliance, for free and fair elections and for the rights of LGBTI people.[8] The characteristic of networks is that their membership is open across committees, which enables them to potentially attract a diversified pool of members.

26. While networks have succeeded in adding dynamism and encouraging a broader range of contributions, a balanced approach is necessary to ensure that members continue to invest time and effort in committee work, as the latter is central to the Assembly's deliberative function.

27. Further adjustments may be introduced to ensure that networks are designed, managed and phased out in a way that complements rather than divert attention from committees, ensuring that they act as a catalyst for deeper involvement on a few priority issues. This balanced approach would ultimately strengthen both member engagement and the quality of the Assembly work, ensuring that efforts are focused rather than dispersed.

4.1.2. Special committees

28. To strengthen the Assembly's capacity for in-depth examination of specific issues – particularly those aligned with the priorities defined by the Committee of Ministers – the Bureau may consider establishing special committees, subject to ratification by the Assembly or the Standing Committee. These committees would operate under a clear, time-limited mandate (one year, renewable once); deliver a single, high-quality output (typically a report); and be limited in number (no more than two active at any given time). When deciding on establishing such a special committee, the Bureau will decide on its exact size and composition, including on whether the members will be appointed by national delegations or political groups.

29. Special committees would enable focused analysis of matters of cross-sectional importance – such as, for example, artificial intelligence or the New Democratic Pact – while promoting interdisciplinary approaches, encouraging targeted research, and enhancing the quality of resolutions and recommendations.

30. This model would allow the Assembly to address emerging or complex issues effectively, without overburdening existing structures or creating new permanent bodies.

4.1.3. Meaningful participation of high-level speakers invited to address the Assembly

31. While the presence of guest speakers at the Assembly adds visibility and prestige, their contribution to the substantive work of the Assembly can appear limited at times. This raises the question of how the Assembly could make the most of these opportunities, not only in terms of visibility, but also in terms of meaningful engagement for members, for the Organisation, and for the guest speakers.

32. Speakers invited to address the Assembly should, irrespective of their status, answer questions from members of the Assembly. This should ensure that their presence can be part of a fruitful exchange. This is important because of the function and nature of the Assembly as the deliberative organ of the Council of Europe and as a forum for discussion and debate.

4.1.4. Having a holistic picture of the whole Organisation to create synergies

33. It is essential to maintain a comprehensive view of the Organisation as a whole in order to identify and strengthen possible synergies. This includes opportunities for meaningful exchanges with representatives of the Council of Europe and its bodies, such as the Court, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), expert bodies, and steering committees within the Organisation or its institutions, depending on the subject matter. The aim should be genuine co-operation and constructive dialogue, rather than purely formal or procedural interactions.

4.2. Strengthening member engagement

4.2.1. Introducing "blue card questions"

34. The Assembly will trial a "blue card" mechanism inspired by the European Parliament, allowing speakers on behalf of political groups and rapporteurs to ask direct questions to speakers from other political groups. This will increase interaction and foster structured, timely interventions. Additional time (thirty

8. PACE's Parliamentary Networks.

seconds) will be afforded for replies. The procedure will be trialled and may be adapted or discontinued if ineffective. The Rules of Procedure will be amended by inserting a paragraph after Rule 37 to provide the legal basis for this measure.

35. In order to improve the interactivity of parliamentary debates and to encourage more interactive and responsive discussions, a system of “blue card questions” could be introduced, modelled on Rule 178(10) of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament. While Rule 37 of our current Rules of Procedure allows a speaker to be interrupted with the President's permission for a question or a point of order, this possibility is seldom exercised and primarily serves as a procedural device for raising points of order. In contrast, the “blue card” system provides a more structured framework designed to enhance the interactivity – and therefore the quality – of debates.

36. This mechanism should be adapted to fit the specific context of our Assembly and, for now, be limited to speakers who are representing political groups and to the rapporteur(s). Each of these speakers would be permitted to use a maximum of two blue cards per debate, and this rule would apply equally to current affairs debates and debates held under urgent procedure.

37. It is important that the "blue card" system be used only in debates where the President deems it appropriate. Notably, this system would not apply to exchanges involving guest speakers. The primary objective of this measure is to stimulate greater interaction and engagement among speakers and to enable timely, well-structured interventions that contribute to a more dynamic and deliberative debate.

38. To implement this proposal, a new Rule should be introduced, to follow Rule 37 of the Rules of Procedure. The proposed rule would read as follows: “During a debate, the President may give the floor to rapporteur(s) and to members speaking on behalf of their political groups who indicate, by raising a blue card, their intention to ask another member not belonging to the same political group, in response to that member’s speech, a question lasting no more than thirty seconds, directly related to the speech and the subject of the debate. The member to whom the question is put may respond within the same time limit. The rapporteur(s) may make use of at most two blue cards per debate, members speaking on behalf of their political groups one blue card per debate.”

39. Discussions at committee level showed that members would welcome the idea of “blue card questions” or similar mechanisms to increase interactivity during debates. Many expressed the view that such features would make sessions livelier and foster more dynamic exchanges. Nevertheless, the use of “blue card questions” should be introduced on a trial basis during a specific part-session, with the possibility of discontinuing the practice if it is found to disrupt the debate or fails to be utilised.

4.2.2. Increasing speaking opportunities

40. To allow more members to participate in debates with many registered speakers, the Bureau may reduce individual speaking time from three to two minutes at the start of a part-session, with early notification to speakers for better preparation, while political group representatives would keep three minutes; strict enforcement of these limits, possibly by cutting microphones, is also recommended to ensure fairness and order. When speaking time is reduced for others, committee chairpersons’ reply time would also be shortened accordingly.

41. In their contributions to the work on this report, members of the Assembly often mentioned the importance of being able to speak during a debate and the need, where possible, to avoid cutting the list of speakers. While one way of addressing this in recent years has been to reduce the speaking time to two minutes rather than three, after thorough discussions in the committee, it is proposed to keep to the existing rule which sets three minutes’ speaking time per speaker. Should there be a particularly high number of registered speakers, the Bureau of the Assembly will continue the practice it has already put in place over the past few years to reduce the speaking time to two minutes, on an ad hoc basis, to allow a greater number of members to take the floor in the relevant debates. It is proposed that speakers on behalf of political groups should continue to have three-minute speaking time. This decision shall be taken by the Bureau at the start of the part-session, so that members are informed early enough to adjust their speeches to the allocated time.

42. Consequently, I propose that the Bureau should reduce the speaking time to two minutes only for debates where there is a high number of registered speakers, in order to maintain a reasonable pace and allow more members of the Assembly to express their views. This practice, which has already been successfully applied in recent part-sessions in such circumstances, appears to make discussions more fluid and inclusive.

43. Therefore, in the additional provisions relating to Assembly debates concerning “Speaking time”, paragraph 1 should state: “Speakers registered for a debate, including youth rapporteurs, shall have three minutes’ speaking time, unless the Bureau decides at the start of the part-session that, due to the high number of registered speakers, the speaking time for that particular debate shall be reduced to two minutes. Speakers on behalf of political groups shall have three minutes’ speaking time.”

44. It should be noted that speakers are also expected to conclude their remarks within the allocated time, which is not always observed. It has been noted in discussions that members who frequently use more than the allotted three minutes are, in essence, depriving other colleagues of the opportunity to speak, especially when the list of speakers must be cut. Rules Committee discussions have suggested that the President or the vice-President presiding over the sitting should intervene to enforce time limits, thereby ensuring orderly proceedings and an equitable opportunity for all members. It is suggested that one way of ensuring this may be to automatically cut the microphone once a speaker has reached the time limit.

45. Chairpersons of committees submitting a report could also have a reply time of two minutes instead of three, when the speaking time has been reduced to two minutes for other speakers. Thus, in the additional provisions relating to Assembly debates concerning the “Speaking time”, at the end of paragraph 4, I propose adding at the end of the paragraph the sentence “It shall be two minutes if the speaking time has been reduced to two minutes for the other speakers.”

46. If a member asks for the floor for the very first time, he or she should be placed on a position on the list of speakers that would allow him or her to take the floor.

4.2.3. Rewarding voting participation

47. To foster consistent active involvement in plenary debates, the ten members with the highest voting participation during the previous part-session will advance seven places on the list of speaker for the next part-session (currently they are only moved up three positions). The additional provisions relating to Assembly debates, paragraph 10 on the order of speakers, should be amended accordingly.

4.2.4. Distribution of rapporteurships

48. The responses to the questionnaire revealed that 51% of respondents had never held a “special role”, such as rapporteur, (vice-) chairperson, member of an election observation mission or general rapporteur. In contrast, a minority of respondents (3%) had held one of these “special roles” more than 15 times. This suggests that more can be done to encourage more active engagement by a broader range of members of the Assembly.

49. To better distribute roles and positions in the Assembly, the maximum number of regular reports a member can hold at any one time should be limited to three. This number would not include reports prepared in the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee), under the urgent procedure, opinions on the reports of other committees and reports where the chairperson necessarily needs to be the rapporteur as is the case for certain reports of the Monitoring Committee and the Rules Committee.

50. For similar reasons, youth rapporteurships and general rapporteurships should also be subject to a limitation on the number of mandates. I propose that no member can have more than one role as general or youth rapporteur at any one time.

51. Additionally, I propose that no committee may simultaneously have more than four general rapporteurs at any one time. This will allow committees to allocate adequate time, resources, and attention to each general rapporteurship, ensuring that the work produced is of consistently high quality.

4.3. Facilitating participation

4.3.1. Helping new members integrate

52. In recent years, the Assembly's accelerated pace of work has significantly enhanced its ability to respond promptly to emerging and pressing issues. This has proven invaluable in times of rapid political change. However, the intensity and speed of proceedings can present challenges for newcomers, who may need additional time to familiarise themselves with the Assembly and its procedures before they can

contribute fully and confidently. This could be addressed through more continuous training for new members, introductory seminars, mentoring schemes and regular informational sessions, building on existing practices, that explain procedures and share practical insights into the Assembly's work.

4.3.2. Remote participation in committees

53. Ensuring diverse participation – particularly by pregnant women or parents of very young children and those facing health or caregiving challenges – strengthens the Assembly's inclusivity and decision making, and the Assembly Resolution 2615 (2025) "Promoting inclusive participation in parliamentary life: gender equality, accessibility and inclusive policies" supports limited, exceptional online participation to accommodate such circumstances, with safeguards to maintain the quality of committee work. Proposed changes would trial and review remote attendance options, aligned with the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy.

54. Ensuring a diversity of voices is essential to making the work of committees and the Assembly as robust and inclusive as possible.

55. Full participation of women in all Assembly activities – including panels, hearings, debates, and expert consultations – is crucial for inclusivity and representative decision making. The Assembly should be especially vigilant in avoiding all-male panels and should systematically invite female experts to hearings and events. This practice aligns with the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy, which highlights the importance of equal access to political decision-making spaces.

56. It should be recalled that paragraph 14 of Resolution 2615 (2025) states: "The Assembly invites the Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities and the Bureau of the Assembly to consider taking necessary steps to enable the online participation in committee meetings of members who are unable to attend in person due to care responsibilities, including caring for children under the age of three."

57. In their responses to the questionnaire, members emphasised the value of in-person exchanges and the need to prevent a shift towards predominantly online meetings. While alternates may attend in place of absent members, accommodations should exist for those facing significant difficulties. Such provisions should extend online attendance to those with serious health conditions preventing travel, as well as to primary carers of children under the age of three. Third-trimester pregnancy, complicated pregnancies, childbirth, or miscarriage should also qualify as grounds for requesting online attendance due to "serious health issues." These measures should be introduced on a trial basis and regularly reviewed to ensure they do not adversely affect the quality of Assembly committee meetings, bearing in mind that alternates can attend meetings as needed.

58. To enable exceptional online attendance, the Assembly should entrust the Secretary General of the Assembly, on the basis of guidelines approved by the Bureau of the Assembly, with the implementation of Resolution 2615 (2025), including support for limited, exceptional online attendance in committee work for pregnant members, members caring for children under the age of three, or facing health and caregiving challenges.

4.3.3. Managing the lists of speakers in a timely and transparent manner

59. It is recommended to enhance transparency of the list of speakers by creating clear explanatory materials, publishing the provisional list earlier before debates, giving new members priority speaking positions to encourage participation, and better distributing the Members' Handbook through QR-coded posters and delegation secretaries. These measures aim to improve communication, accessibility, and inclusivity within the Assembly.

60. Several members have expressed concerns about insufficient clarity and transparency regarding the criteria and procedures for compiling the list of speakers, as set out in the additional provisions relating to Assembly debates, on "Order of speakers", of the Rules of Procedure. This lack of accessible information, particularly for new members, has fostered a perception of opaqueness and hindered engagement.

61. To address these concerns, several measures could be proposed:

– The secretariat should prioritise the creation of clear, user-friendly explanatory materials on the list of speakers process and relevant Rules of Procedure. This should include succinct info-graphics, step-by-step guides, and, in particular, a one-pager outlining how the list of speakers is formed and managed. Distribution of these materials should target new members but they should remain accessible to all.

– To facilitate transparency and allow members adequate time to review and raise any issues, the provisional list of speakers for upcoming debates (except under urgent procedure) should be published at least 12 hours before the opening of the relevant sitting, subject to necessary revisions. Implementing this measure would require amending paragraph 4 in the additional provisions relating to Assembly debate concerning the list of speakers, ensuring a sufficient interval between the closure of the list and its publication.

– The "Members' Handbook" provides a helpful summary of plenary rules and the list of speakers procedure. To increase its visibility and ease of access, I recommend displaying posters with QR codes linking directly to the handbook throughout Council of Europe premises and ensuring that secretaries of national delegations share this resource with their members.

4.3.4. Encouraging joint committee hearings and timely rapporteur appointments

62. Joint hearings have proven effective in enhancing co-operation and limiting duplication. Committees are encouraged to continue this practice. Rapporteurs for opinions should be invited to relevant hearings in the committees preparing the report (at no extra cost for the Assembly).

63. Since committee and plenary meetings are limited and members of parliament must travel from all the member States, it is important that the Assembly focuses on its main work when it meets. Therefore, administrative tasks should take as little time as possible, so there is more time for discussions, debates, and hearings. Tasks like candidate calls, progress reports, reporting back on the participation to events should be handled insofar as possible quickly, ideally in writing or without debate, unless explicitly asked for, to save time for substantive matters.

64. Committees could inform members immediately when they receive a reference and start a written process to invite candidates for rapporteur roles. This would give members more time to think about standing and encourage wider participation. It would also save time in meetings by speeding up the appointment of rapporteurs and allowing work to begin sooner.

4.3.5. Streamlining periodic tasks to prioritise Assembly debates

65. It would be helpful to review how periodic tasks are managed in the Assembly and committees to make sure they take the minimum necessary time. This would free up more time for debates and hearings.

66. The Monitoring Committee's progress report could be debated every two years, matching the term of its chairperson. This would make the debate more focused and thoughtful, highlighting progress and challenges, including in countries where no report has been possible.

67. Likewise, the chairperson of the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights could present a short report every two years as part of the Bureau's progress report. This would provide a useful update on working methods.

68. Furthermore, in order to ensure that all members are fully informed, the chair or vice-chair of the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights could be invited, at the opening of the relevant agenda item during the debate on the progress report of the Bureau of the Assembly, to make a very short oral intervention – for example, one minute per list – to present the committee's recommendation on the list of candidates submitted by a member State for the post of judge.

4.3.6. Good practices in national parliaments to avoid scheduling conflicts and improve participation

69. National parliaments can introduce formal or informal methods to help their members take part in Assembly work. Raising awareness of these best practices can encourage wider use across different countries.

70. Some parliaments, like those in Austria, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK, use a system called "pairing". This pairs members from the majority and opposition, allowing each paired member to miss a vote without changing the overall balance.

71. Parliaments in Andorra, Austria, North Macedonia, and Ukraine co-ordinate their schedules with the Assembly calendar to avoid conflicts and better plan plenary sessions.

72. Enhancing co-ordination of dates with other supranational parliamentary bodies, such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Parliamentary Assembly of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), is important, as many Assembly members also serve as delegates to these assemblies.

73. Additionally, when holding meetings between part-sessions, notably in Paris, committees should consider rotating the days of the week on which they meet. This would accommodate members who have recurring national obligations on specific weekdays and enable them to participate more often.

4.4. Amplifying impact and visibility

74. Impact and visibility are key elements, both for the institution and for its members. For the Assembly, greater visibility increases its capacity to shape policy, attract broader support, and demonstrate accountability to citizens and stakeholders. From the perspective of members, enhanced impact and recognition make their efforts more valued, motivating them to participate actively and ensuring that their contributions resonate both within the Assembly and in their home parliaments. This, in turn, enables members to act as stronger ambassadors of the Council of Europe's values, building closer connections between the Assembly and national legislatures.

4.4.1. Pace-apps and help desk visibility

75. The ease of use of IT tools was highlighted in both the survey and consultations with committees. It would certainly ease the members' work if the Assembly were to develop a dedicated mobile application for pace-apps, ensuring that it integrates best practices by reviewing and considering existing applications used by other international parliamentary bodies.

76. One should also consider implementing appropriate communication tools, such as Signal or WhatsApp Channels, to enable members to quickly and easily receive relevant public updates about the Assembly's activities. Participation should remain voluntary, with special attention given to how to keep former members who wish to stay informed about the Assembly's work engaged. An acoustic voting alarm in the building and, if possible via an app should be introduced 5 minutes before the rapporteur's reply to the debate.

77. The visibility and accessibility of the pace-apps help desk during part-sessions should be increased to provide enhanced user support and facilitate quicker resolution of technical issues.

78. Furthermore, a number of members would appreciate if the secretariat could evaluate the possibility of streamlining the login process by reconsidering the necessity of two-factor authentication where it is reasonable to do so, in order to improve ease of access to pace-apps.

4.4.2. Clearer communication in report titles

79. Since the title of a report is often the first thing that external audiences – such as journalists, parliamentarians and the public – see, the use of clear and concise titles should be encouraged. To help with this, the secretariat, especially the communications team, could offer editorial support to rapporteurs and committees to create titles that are expressive, easy to understand and suitable for the media.

4.4.3. Improving communication and co-ordination with national parliaments

80. To increase the visibility of the Assembly and its members at the national level, the secretariat of the Assembly could set up arrangements with national parliaments to broadcast its plenary sessions live on national parliamentary TV channels, where possible. These broadcasts could focus on highlighting the contributions and activities of the national delegations through their own parliamentary television channels or other media platforms.

81. To strengthen the connection between the Assembly and national parliaments, national delegations are also encouraged to take a more active role in promoting and reporting on the Assembly's work within their own countries. This could include:

– Actively sharing information about the Assembly's work. National delegations could establish regular briefings for their national parliaments. These could cover the outcomes and priorities of each part-session, committee meetings and special events. Briefings might be written summaries, oral presentations during parliamentary sessions, dedicated meetings for relevant parliamentary committees or informal meetings for interested fellow MPs.

– Using the Assembly's newsletter, "PACE – This Week in Brief", which is prepared by the Secretariat and sent out every Friday, as a resource for these briefings. This newsletter provides a clear overview of the week's key events. Delegations are also invited to inform the secretariat about any communication tools that might improve information sharing and understanding between the Assembly and national parliaments.

– Adopting more formal approaches such as regular plenary debates, written reports to parliamentary offices or specific agenda items at committee meetings, which are directly related to the Assembly's work.

82. Some national delegations already have reporting systems in place. For example:

– The French national delegation publishes a report on attendance[9] for each part-session and committee meeting. After each part-session, the head of the delegation produces a detailed report[10] covering all topics discussed in the plenary and all members' contributions.

– The Swiss Parliament maintains a dedicated webpage[11] for its Assembly delegation's activities. They publish annual reports on this page, which are submitted to both parliamentary chambers, along with summary reports after each part-session. These include key topics, members' speeches, the list of elected European Court of Human Rights judges, and any special events held during the week.

– The Italian Chamber of Deputies has a webpage[12] where all adopted resolutions are published in Italian. After each part-session, they release a newsletter that summarises the main discussions and members' participation, following a similar format to the Swiss reports.

– The Swedish parliament (Riksdag) requires its delegation to submit an annual report on its activities. This report is considered by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, followed by a debate in the full Chamber.[13]

– In the UK Parliament, internal reports are produced on part-session activities. Occasionally, debates are organised to discuss specific issues related to the Council of Europe or the work of the Assembly.

83. To complement or follow up this report, best practices should be collected on how parliaments of the member States follow up on and increase the visibility of Assembly activities at the national level. This could start with a request through the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) to national delegations and might then include discussions with heads and secretaries of national delegations to share good practices.

84. Some parliaments already have arrangements, such as designating rapporteurs for international co-operation or human rights or including regular agenda items on Assembly developments. By identifying and sharing these examples, we can offer practical guidance and inspiration to other delegations and parliaments.

85. Each Assembly committee should be encouraged to establish links with its equivalent committees in national parliaments. The goal would be to develop a more complementary network between committees at the national and Assembly levels. This could include holding joint hearings – for example, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights has done this with the UK Joint Committee on Human Rights – as well as regular meetings between committee chairs, both in person and online. These meetings might take place during visits or events in member States. There could also be more structured communication on topics of mutual interest between the relevant national and Assembly committees.

86. Communication should go both ways. National parliaments reporting on Assembly activities should also be encouraged to share information on their own debates, decisions and initiatives related to Council of Europe values and priorities. This would ensure that discussions in the Assembly benefit from national parliamentary input. It would also promote coherence between the Assembly's work and national priorities, as well as encourage parliamentary diplomacy.

87. The Assembly should continue to promote study visits by staff from national parliaments. These visits help increase mutual understanding and awareness of the Assembly's work and procedures.

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9. Participation des députés à la session de printemps (avril 2025) de l'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe – Délégation française à l'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe – Assemblée nationale.
10. https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/rapports/ceur/l17b0785_rapport-information.
11. Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe DCE.
12. CDE – Scheda sull'organizzazione | Internazionale.
13. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) | Sveriges riksdag.

88. Parliamentarians are strongly encouraged to consult the handbook, "National parliaments as guarantors of human rights in Europe", which is available in 13 languages. This practical guide offers useful advice and examples of how Assembly members can improve their legislative, oversight and representative roles to better protect human rights. Chapter 6 highlights the special role of national parliamentarians, especially Assembly members, as key links between the Council of Europe and national parliaments. It explains how Assembly members help ensure that international human rights standards are reflected in national laws and practices. The chapter encourages all parliamentarians to engage with the Council of Europe's bodies, use its resources, follow up on its recommendations and learn from the human rights work of other member States.

89. These actions will strengthen the connection between national parliaments and the Council of Europe, highlight the Assembly's important role in human rights, and provide members with tools to help in their daily work. Ultimately, this will encourage greater participation and commitment across member States.

4.4.4. Addressing Strasbourg accessibility

90. Travelling to Strasbourg is a challenge for the Assembly members. Data on travel to Strasbourg for official purposes at the Council of Europe should be collected and shared with regional and national authorities to advocate for improved public transport connections.

5. Conclusion

91. Since its establishment, the Assembly has embodied a pioneering vision: ensuring that parliamentarians are involved in a multilateral organisation and contribute to its ambitious mission of promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

92. However, today this mission is facing unprecedented challenges. In an era characterised by democratic decline and diminishing support for multilateral institutions, the Assembly's role is more crucial than ever. Whether the Assembly remain an authoritative interlocutor within the Council of Europe's institutional framework depends on its members. Their knowledge, expertise, commitment, and unique dual mandate – representing both their national parliaments and the broader Council of Europe – form the very foundation upon which the Assembly's legitimacy and effectiveness rest.

93. The proposals in this report are intended to create a framework to enable Assembly members to fulfil their role. Only a framework that values purpose, offers ownership, recognises effort, ensures impact and protects equality can empower Assembly members to act as true ambassadors of Council of Europe values, bridging European ideals and national realities.

94. Implementing these measures will reinforce the Assembly's relevance and enhance its institutional legitimacy, ensuring its continued impact in shaping a Europe grounded in shared values and capable of withstanding the complex political challenges of our time.