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Election observation activities of the Parliamentary Assembly in 2025

Summary report and recommendations

Progress report¹

Bureau of the Assembly

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1. Introduction

1. In 2025, elections across Europe continued to unfold in an increasingly complex and contested environment. Growing polarisation, populism and extremism, and pressure on democratic checks and balances were compounded by foreign interference, online manipulation, illicit financing, cyber-attacks and pervasive disinformation. In many contexts, restrictive campaign conditions, insufficient transparency, and disparities in campaign resources and financing undermined the level playing field, while out-of-country voting raised practical and integrity-related challenges requiring clear safeguards.

2. In this context, election observation is an essential tool to safeguard democracy: it provides an impartial assessment, promotes transparency and accountability, and helps sustain public confidence in the legitimacy of elections. By identifying shortcomings and issuing recommendations, election observation contributes to strengthening democratic institutions and reinforcing respect for democratic principles.

3. The Parliamentary Assembly has long experience in observing presidential and parliamentary elections as well as national referendums. It also carries out pre-electoral and, where necessary, post-electoral visits to countries under monitoring or post-monitoring procedure or enjoying “Partners for Democracy” status with the Assembly. Since 1989, PACE has observed over 250 parliamentary and presidential elections in Europe and organised over 370 election-related visits. Over 3000 PACE members have been deployed to observe these elections.

4. For over three decades, the Assembly has played a crucial role in assessing member States' compliance with their Council of Europe electoral obligations through its robust election observation, monitoring and follow-up procedures. In 2024, this commitment was further strengthened by integrating election cooperation activities into the Assembly's work, thus positioning the Assembly as the main coordinator of the [Council of Europe's Electoral Cycle](#). In 2025, the Bureau of the Assembly updated the Guidelines for Election Observation by the Parliamentary Assembly and worked on the new electronic forms for declarations of conflict of interest.

5. In response to the growing challenges threatening electoral integrity and public confidence in democratic processes, the PACE 2023 Bern Conference on “Elections in times of crisis” underlined the urgent need to address these issues decisively. It highlighted the importance of enhanced exchanges between PACE observers and national parliaments and the need for increased election-related activities. To increase the visibility of the Assembly's electoral work, the conference led to the creation of the PACE Network of Election

1. Its original English version was translated into French by a machine translation tool.



Observers (NEO). The Network held its inaugural meeting on 29 January 2025 and was renamed Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair elections (PAFFE) in June. One of the Alliance's main tasks, as set out in the Terms of Reference, is to produce an annual report on the organisation's electoral activities.

6. This report, which I present in my capacity of Chairperson of the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFE, hereafter also 'the Alliance'), highlights the Assembly's electoral work in 2025, including observation missions, activities of the Alliance and the Parliamentary and Electoral Cooperation Division, and to propose avenues for future action to address emerging and persistent challenges.

7. I wish to thank all national delegations, political groups, PACE members and Council of Europe staff who contributed to the 2025 election observation missions. They devoted time and expertise to this unique exercise, which assesses not only election day procedures but also the broader electoral environment and campaign conditions, and helps identify issues to be addressed through the Assembly's committee work and electoral co-operation activities.

2. Election observation by PACE in 2025: facts and figures

8. The Parliamentary Assembly is the only parliamentary institution which, through the conduct of regular pre-electoral missions about one month prior to the elections, assesses the overall electoral environment and makes a public statement.² These pre-electoral missions are most useful in allowing members to gain insights and detailed information and to increase the level of understanding through a continuous political dialogue. They are also complementary to PACE monitoring activities, when onsite monitoring visits just before and after elections are not possible, while relying on the expertise of PACE monitoring co-rapporteurs (who are ex officio members of PACE ad hoc committees of observers).

9. In 2025, PACE members participated in 11 pre-election and election observation missions (EOMs) in 5 countries:

- Kosovo³:
 - elections to the Assembly on 9 February 2025 (Head of Delegation (HoD) Ms Petra Bayr, Austria, SOC, 17 members from 11 countries, out of which 7 women);
 - early elections to the Assembly on 28 December (HoD Mr Yunus Emre, Türkiye, SOC, 6 members from 5 countries, out of which 2 women);
- Albania: parliamentary elections on 11 May 2025 (HoD Mr Simone Billi, Italy, ECPA, 18 members from 11 countries, out of which 5 women);
- Poland: presidential election on 18 May and 1 June 2025 (HoD Mr Iulian Bulai, Romania, ALDE, 29 members from 18 countries, out of which 15 women);
- Republic of Moldova: parliamentary elections on 28 September 2025 (HoD Mr Chris Said, Malta, EPP/DC, 20 members from 15 countries, out of which 8 women);
- Kyrgyz Republic: early parliamentary elections on 30 November 2025 (HoD Mr Georgios Stamatis, Greece, EPP/DC, 11 members from 9 countries, out of which 3 women).

10. PACE members demonstrated considerable interest in these EOMs, as seen from the membership of each mission above. The list of election observation reports presented to the Assembly is appended (Appendix 1).

11. The Assembly's election observation missions include members or legal experts from the Venice Commission who advise the PACE delegation and the International Election Observation Missions (IEOMs) on Council of Europe and international standards in the field of elections, in accordance with the co-operation agreement signed on 4 October 2004 between the Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). This long-standing co-operation with the Venice Commission is of great

2. Pre-electoral missions consist of one representative per political group, and the country specific rapporteur(s) (from the Monitoring Committee, or from the Political affairs Committee). Pre-electoral missions aim at assessing the election legislation and its application, including the availability of appeals; the political situation; the arrangements for the election campaign; and coverage of the election campaign by the media, the administration of the election and the work of the election authorities. See the Guidelines

3. * All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council [Resolution 1244](#) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

benefit in strengthening the credibility of our missions. The contribution of the Venice Commission to the Assembly's election observation is highly appreciated by our members and all our partners and provides a real added value to our missions.

12. The participation of women in EOMs increased from 28.8% in 2022 to 37.5% in 2024 and to 39,6% in 2025. This trend is of course to be welcomed. However, exactly as in 2024, only one of the six PACE EOMs in 2025 was led by a woman, which remains unacceptable. Both the participation of women in EOMs and in particular as heads of delegation needs to be improved. Political groups should aim to include at least 40% of the under-represented sex, namely women, when submitting their quotas of members for ad hoc committees. This would increase the pool of women observers as well as the pool of potential heads of delegations. I therefore invite the Bureau to pay particular attention to this issue. I also encourage the Women@PACE network to exchange views on ways to increase women's participation in – and chairmanship of – PACE ad hoc observer committees.

13. The political rotation of EOM chairmanships in 2025 was slightly more balanced than in 2024, with 2 out of 6 electoral missions having been led by the SOC group, 2 by the EPP/DC group, 1 by the ALDE group and 1 by the ECPA group. I encourage the PACE Presidential Committee to be attentive to the PACE Guidelines for election observers, which asks to ensure an overall political balance over a calendar year when designating chairpersons of electoral missions.

14. On 23 June 2025, the Assembly ratified its revised guidelines for election observation missions, aimed at strengthening integrity and transparency. The revised guidelines:

- established a new role of vice-chairperson (“Deputy Head of Delegation”) within ad hoc committees to ensure leadership continuity if the chairperson is unable to perform his/her duties;
- called on political groups to exercise due diligence when nominating members, ensuring that delegations include impartial, competent and suitably experienced observers, and strictly prohibiting the appointment of “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 with the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation”;
- confirmed that any observation of out-of-country voting requires a prior Bureau decision and must comply with the conditions it sets;
- if the OSCE/ODIHR does not deploy a long-term observation mission, PACE will now assess whether conditions are conducive to meaningful observation before deciding to send its own delegation.

15. Finally, I would like to recall the safeguards and rules governing EOMs – as established by our Assembly in its Guidelines – to protect the integrity and credibility of our observation missions, which must be respected by our observers: members of ad hoc committees can only observe if they have signed both the annual PACE declaration of interest and the declaration of non-conflict of interests related to the country observed. They must also abide by the provisions of the Code of Conduct for PACE members as well as the Code of Conduct for International Election Observation Missions (IEOM). In line with [Resolution 2596 \(2025\)](#), the Assembly is currently working on new improved online declarations required to be filled out by members participating in observation missions. This measure is designed to improve the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest.

3. Strengthening of the Assembly's role in electoral matters

16. In the wake of the Reykjavik Summit and the Bern Conference in 2023, the Assembly has continued to strengthen its leading role in electoral matters. This has involved both the Assembly's positioning within the Council of Europe as regards expertise in electoral matters as well as – to some extent – our role and visibility within international fora.

3.1. Launch and activities of the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections

17. In early 2024, colleagues active in election observation proposed a Network of Election Observers to respond to rising threats to electoral integrity, including political instability, foreign malign interference and digital vulnerabilities. Following Bureau approval of the Terms of Reference in June 2024, ratification by the

Assembly, and approval of the membership list in October 2024, we held the inaugural meeting on 29 January 2025. At my proposal, and to reflect our value-based purpose, the Network was renamed the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFE); the Bureau confirmed this on 27 June.

18. The inaugural meeting defined clear follow-up actions, to:

- broaden observation to any member State facing instability;
- start observation earlier to cover the pre-election period;
- develop guidance for out-of-country voting (OCV);
- strengthen post-election follow-up with electoral authorities and civil society;
- build expertise on observing digital elections as well as cybersecurity, AI and social media threats in the context of elections; and
- promote gender balance and leadership in election observation.

19. To implement these aims, members underlined the need for adequate resources and specialised expertise (notably e-voting and cybersecurity), while exploring cost-efficient approaches such as joint activities with PACE committees and selective use of online methods. On 29 January, I transmitted these priorities to the Bureau, which asked the Secretary General of the Assembly to prepare a follow-up memorandum.

20. On 22 May I was invited to present the priorities and future activities at the Presidential Committee meeting in Valetta, where I underlined the Assembly's lead role in electoral matters and the wish for the Alliance to observe out-of-country voting, with the aim of ensuring that external ballots meet the same standards as domestic ones. I proposed piloting a PACE OCV methodology through a feasibility study. The 28 September parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova, featuring a large diaspora and 297 planned OCV polling stations, were identified as an ideal test, with methodological support from an experienced domestic observer organisation Promo-LEX. On 5 September, the Bureau authorised this feasibility study with a pilot deployment, welcomed by both majority and opposition in the Moldovan parliament. Ultimately, the short notice, tight accreditation windows and overlap with the opening of our autumn part-session made wider deployment impossible. However, our objective remains unchanged: together with election experts and partners, we intend to finalise a lean, evidence-based OCV methodology and mount the pilot at the next suitable elections.

21. Be it noted that OCV existed already in earlier PACE election observation guidelines; however, it was never put into practice because of the lack of agreed methodology, even though the Venice Commission had issued a landmark study back in 2011. On 8 October, at the Council for Democratic Elections, I welcomed the Venice Commission's decision to compile its *acquis* on OCV⁴ and to prepare an updated report. The compilation will offer a clear reference for legislators and observers, while the new report building on the 2011 study will help align legal standards and observation practice on matters such as franchise delimitation, registration, cross-border campaigning and finance, criteria for polling sites abroad, proportional anti-fraud measures (including postal voting), jurisdiction and remedies, and verifiability of any electronic tools.

22. Digital transformation is another strategic focus. On 1 October 2025 the Alliance held its second meeting focusing on "Conducting and Observing Elections in the Digital Era," with contributions from the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR. We examined how technology reshapes electoral processes and identified practical steps for PACE to safeguard integrity in an increasingly digital environment.

23. At the World Forum for Democracy in Strasbourg (6–9 November), members of the Alliance contributed to the session "AI at the ballot box: threat or opportunity for democratic elections?", co-organised by PACE and the Council of Europe's Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI). Speaking for the Alliance, Laura Castel (Spain, UEL) underlined that elections – the bedrock of democracy – face emerging risks from polarisation, disinformation and foreign interference, now amplified by AI's ability to target and shape voter behaviour. She stressed that technology must support – not distort – democratic processes and that voters must be able to participate free from fear and manipulation. She outlined PACE's practical support to election systems, including cybersecurity assistance to Ukraine's Central Election Commission and measures in the Republic of Moldova on crisis communication and monitoring to counter online hate. Her conclusion was clear: safeguarding elections in the AI era requires planning, anticipation and standards that cover every stage of the electoral process.

4. Draft Compilation of Venice Commission Opinions and Reports concerning Out-of-Country Voting (CDL(2025)055)

24. As regards strengthening post-election follow-up, Pablo Hispán (Spain, EPP/CD) participated at the Conference on “30 years of partnership and progress: Albania, the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission” (Tirana, 20-21 October 2025) in a panel on electoral reform. Building on the findings of the EOM and monitoring procedure, Mr Hispán called the authorities to address the objective shortcomings noted by international and domestic observers and to ensure that electoral legislation is implemented in accordance with both the letter and the spirit of the law.

25. In a similar context, Jone Blikra (Norway, SOC) represented the PACE EOM that observed the presidential election of 20 October and 3 November 2024 at a post-election analysis conference on 17-18 March in Chisinau co-organised by PACE electoral cooperation project and the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova. Likewise, Chris Said (Malta, EPP/CD), Head of the PACE delegation to observe the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova, will participate at the forthcoming post-election analysis conference on “Parliamentary Election in the Republic of Moldova, 28 September 2025: Electoral Integrity and Perspectives for Democratic Consolidation” on 19-20 February 2026, also co-organised by PACE electoral cooperation project and the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova. The main purpose of the conference is an objective and thorough evaluation of the electoral process, as well as the formulation of concrete and applicable recommendations for strengthening electoral integrity, public trust, and the democratic resilience of the Republic of Moldova.

26. Overall, the Alliance’s start-up phase proved slower than anticipated. Notwithstanding, two substantive meetings were held and dedicated websites for election observation and for the Alliance were launched. However, the Bureau of the Alliance was unable to meet during the period under review due to scheduling constraints. One-hour lunchtime slots during part-sessions are insufficient for strategic discussion and coincide with other PACE network meetings – notably *women@pace* – thereby hindering the participation of several members, in particular women whose increased participation in election observation missions is one of our priorities. To ensure effective governance and follow-through on priorities, the Alliance should be authorised by the Bureau of the Assembly to hold at least one external meeting per year, either independently or on the margins of an Alliance event.

3.2. Promotion of transversal activities within the Parliamentary Assembly

27. Throughout 2025, the Assembly advanced a cross-cutting agenda to protect democratic security, electoral integrity and participation. In April, it adopted [Resolution 2593 \(2025\)](#) and [Recommendation 2292 \(2025\)](#) on *Foreign interference: a threat to democratic security in Europe* (8 April), followed the next day by [Resolution 2596 \(2025\)](#) on *Respect for the rule of law and the fight against corruption within the Council of Europe* (9 April), which includes relevant provisions for election integrity (paras. 6.4, 7.3, 13, 14.3). This work was complemented by a policy exchange with ODIHR Director Maria Telalian in Chania on 26 May, strengthening co-operation on standards and practice.

28. The Assembly also reinforced inclusion and resilience in parliamentary life. On 26 June, it adopted [Resolution 2615 \(2025\)](#) on *Promoting inclusive participation in parliamentary life: gender equality, accessibility and inclusive policies* (Rapporteur: Maryna Bardina, Equality and Non-Discrimination Committee). In the autumn session it addressed key country situations linked to democratic backsliding and electoral contexts: [Resolution 2617 \(2025\)](#) on Hungary (30 September, co-rapporteurs: Eerik-Niiles Kross, Estonia, ALDE, and George Papandreu, Greece, SOC) ([Doc. 16249](#) of the Monitoring Committee); [Resolution 2620 \(2025\)](#) on post-monitoring dialogue with Bulgaria (1 October, Co-rapporteurs: Deborah Bergamini, Italy, EPP/CD and Yves Cruchten, Luxembourg, SOC) ([Doc. 16246](#) of Monitoring Committee); [Resolution 2622 \(2025\)](#) on *Russia: new threats to European democracies* (2 October, Rapporteur: Iulian Bulai, Romania, ALDE; [Doc. 16272](#) of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy); [Resolution 2624 \(2025\)](#) on *Uphold democracy and the rule of law in Georgia* (2 October, Co-rapporteurs: Edite Estrela, Portugal, SOC and Sabina Čudić, Bosnia and Herzegovina, ALDE) ([Doc. 16271](#) of the Monitoring Committee); and [Resolution 2625 \(2025\)](#) on *Political parties and democracy* (2 October, Rapporteur: Ingjerd Schie Schou, Norway, EPP/CD) ([Doc. 16248](#) of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy). In parallel, on 30 September the Political Affairs and Democracy Committee unanimously adopted the report *Elections in times of crisis* (Rapporteur: Damien Cottier, Switzerland, ALDE⁵), with a draft resolution and recommendation to guide member States on safeguarding elections under stress. Together, these initiatives underline the Assembly’s transversal approach: defending the rule of law, countering interference, supporting inclusive participation and strengthening the frameworks within which free and fair elections can take place.

5. See [doc 15866](#)

3.3. Contribution to the New Democratic Pact

29. Anchored in the Council of Europe's New Democratic Pact for Europe, the Alliance contributes to a process that aims to rebuild trust in democracy and strengthen democratic security by 2026. The Pact frames action around three pillars: learning and practising democracy, protecting democracy from internal and external threats (including corruption, electoral interference, disinformation and the misuse of AI), and innovating for democracy through deliberation and technology, under the guidance of the ECHR and the Reykjavík Principles. The Council of Europe is leading broad consultations and translating outcomes into concrete policies ahead of the 2026 Summit of Heads of State and Government.

30. Relying on the Pact's second pillar "Protecting Democracy", the Assembly's ad hoc Committee on the New Democratic Pact held a hearing in Chisinau on 20 November 2025 on "Safeguarding Democracy: Elections and Foreign Interference," with Martin Kuijer, Vice-President of the Venice Commission; Angelica Caraman, President of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of the Republic of Moldova; and Chris Said (Malta, EPP/CD), Head of the PACE mission to the Republic of Moldova and member of the Alliance. The hearing explored practical tools to counter interference while remaining anchored in Council of Europe standards.

31. Opening the Assembly's input, Chris Said mapped Russia's interference "playbook" in Moldova – illicit financing and proxy parties linked to Ilan Shor, layered disinformation across TikTok and Telegram, cyber-attacks on election infrastructure, and intimidation including bomb threats abroad – and explained why these tactics fell short: Moldova shifted from improvisation to preparation (tighter party-finance rules, stronger CEC cyber-defences and crisis communications), security services acted early, civil society and a highly mobilised diaspora pushed back, and Moscow misread public sentiment. He also flagged democratic dilemmas (late disqualifications; reduced polling in Russia/Transnistria) and drew three lessons for Europe: resilience is built between elections; responses must be whole-of-society; and countermeasures must remain rooted in ECHR and Venice Commission standards.

32. Building on these findings, the Assembly is steering (with the Congress and the Venice Commission) the Pact's strand on Democratic Resilience & Election Integrity (March–May 2026). Our priorities are to strengthen democracies against disinformation, polarisation and foreign interference; ensure equal and genuine competition, including for voters abroad; and align legal standards with observation practice and rights of election observers. Evidence from recent observation work, including in Moldova, will feed directly into the Pact's proposals so that European democracies remain legitimate, responsive and agile in the face of evolving hybrid threats.

3.4. Participation in the Council for Democratic Elections and co-operation with the Venice Commission

33. The Council for Democratic Elections experienced a particularly dynamic and fruitful year, convening three meetings in Venice and one online. In 2025, the Assembly was ably represented on the Council by Pablo Hispán (Spain, EPP/CD) and Octavie Modert (Luxembourg, EPP/CD) for the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights; Titus Corlăţean (Romania, SOC) and Rian Vogels (Netherlands, ALDE) for the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy; as well as Lord David Blencathra (United Kingdom, ECPA) and Liliana Tanguy (France, ALDE) for the Monitoring Committee.

34. On 8 October, Pablo Hispán was elected Chair of the Council, bringing renewed energy and direction to the Assembly's engagement with the Council. He emphasised that as election integrity faced pressure in many countries, the Council for Democratic Elections can combine the Venice Commission's expertise and the Assembly and Congress's experience to address electoral opportunities and vulnerabilities from multiple angles – from standard-setting to monitoring and cooperation – thereby strengthening the fairness and resilience of our electoral systems.

35. A core area of work for the Council involved scrutinising draft reports and opinions prepared by the Venice Commission on a range of electoral issues. These included opinions on electoral amendments with respect to [Georgia](#) and [Hungary](#) and an Amicus curiae brief concerning the [Republic of Moldova](#) as well as an [urgent report](#) on the cancellation of election results by Constitutional Courts following the annulment of the first round of the presidential election in Romania held on 24 November 2024. Additionally, the Council initiated discussion on a forthcoming report examining freedom of expression, prohibition of hate speech, and the promotion of pluralism in electoral campaigns. This followed a request from the Assembly in its [Resolution 2525 \(2024\)](#) on "The theme of migration and asylum in election campaigns and its consequences on the reception of migrants and their rights". Of particular importance is the dual objective of safeguarding freedom

of speech during election campaigns while protecting the rights of individuals who might be adversely affected by manipulative policy narratives or decisions rooted in hate speech or incitement to discrimination. The Venice Commission is expected to adopt this report in 2026.

36. The Council's activities extend beyond Council of Europe member states. In 2025, its work included reviewing [Peru's](#) draft constitutional amendments, addressing the accountability of members of election management bodies, as well as [Haiti's](#) draft referendum decree.

37. The Council's unique structure, which combines the legal expertise of the Venice Commission with the political experience of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, continually fosters enriching and constructive discussions. Notably, the Council addressed the topic of out-of-country voting after the Assembly's decision to launch a pilot project to explore effective observation methods for such voting, thus helping to ensure electoral integrity for all voters, regardless of their location. The Venice Commission has compiled and updated its opinions and reports on this subject and will revise its landmark 2011 report to reflect recent developments.

38. Other important topics discussed included the status of international observers in local and regional elections, and the right to free elections at all levels of governance in Europe, with particular attention given to Article 3 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

39. The Council also serves as a valuable platform for sharing insights and informing both the Congress and the Venice Commission about the Assembly's country-specific resolutions and reports related to elections, the activities of the [Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections](#), and the Assembly's [electoral cooperation programmes](#). These exchanges facilitate a review of ongoing progress, key achievements, and opportunities for future collaboration. The Council has also initiated the exchange of information on the latest developments in electoral legislation among member States, thereby enhancing understanding of the evolving electoral context across Europe.

40. A notable innovation this year was the Council's responsibility for organising the 20th European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), held in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 15–16 April 2025 dedicated to the stability of electoral law. This event underscored the Council's commitment to resilience and adaptability in democratic institutions. Damien Cottier, PACE Rapporteur on "Elections in Times of Crisis" recalled that legislators are now expected to make democratic institutions – including electoral administrations – more resilient and robust to anticipate and adapt to unforeseen events and crises, whether pandemics, natural disasters, cyber-attacks, or wars, and to address threats to the integrity of elections.

41. This collaborative, tripartite format will also serve as a blueprint for a seminar in Paris scheduled for 28-29 April 2026, dedicated to securing the rights of observers for trusted and inclusive electoral processes. Organised under the auspices of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe's New Democratic Pact, this initiative will confront the challenge of democratic backsliding, including threats to integrity at the ballot box. The seminar will consider a range of proposals, including the strengthening of legal frameworks for election observation, overcoming operational and logistical challenges, building trust in observation missions, and fostering a more enabling environment for election observation throughout Europe. The findings will contribute to the forthcoming report being prepared by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy entitled "The Need to Protect Election Observers."

3.5. Consolidation and expansion of PACE electoral cooperation activities

42. Since 2024, the Assembly has formally integrated electoral co-operation into its work, enabling larger, longer-term projects funded through Council of Europe Action Plans, voluntary contributions and CoE–EU joint programmes. These activities link observation, monitoring and follow-up, and are implemented with national stakeholders to translate Council of Europe standards into concrete reforms across the electoral cycle.

43. In 2025, projects were implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, with additional initiatives under preparation. Delivery focused on professional, transparent election administration; party and campaign-finance oversight; media integrity; inclusion of under-represented groups; prevention of misuse of administrative resources; and responses to disinformation and digital risks.

- Albania: Ahead of the May elections, support helped the CEC to launch a live monitoring platform for public activities to deter misuse of state resources; establish an online complaints-tracking platform to increase transparency and efficiency of Electoral Dispute Resolution (EDR); start building a continuous training centre for election officials; strengthen the electoral college’s EDR capacity; and roll out nationwide civic-education programmes to over 20,000 pupils.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina: A new project prioritises a permanent CEC Education and Training Centre to provide ongoing staff training, voter education and outreach to specific groups, capacity-building across legal/audit/training/election departments, inclusion measures for first-time voters, minorities and women, and reinforced media capacities for accurate electoral reporting.
- Georgia: After the October 2024 elections, the project was refocused to strengthen civil-society cooperation and citizen engagement; due to the situation in 2025, however, it was paused from 31 December, with a follow-up project prepared for rapid launch when conditions allow.
- Republic of Moldova: Over 40 cooperation activities were implemented in 2025, reflecting the project’s strategic role during an intensive electoral period. Our support focused on strengthened CEC professionalism and finance oversight; enhanced capacities of judges, prosecutors and investigators; addressed misuse of administrative resources, electoral corruption, disinformation and hate speech; and promoted inclusive participation. Additional actions included crisis-communication support, an electoral school for journalists, awareness campaigns on zero tolerance for hate speech/sexism (with UN Women and five CoE projects), and URSO-based mid-term evaluations of CEC and training-centre strategies showing very high implementation.
- Ukraine: Following the launch by the Russian Federation of the full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, electoral cooperation has been designed and implemented in response to the unprecedented challenges in the electoral domain as consequences of the war⁶. Assistance centred on the High-Level Dialogue (HLD) – a platform dialogue among national stakeholders⁷, facilitated by PACE and the Congress, with the participation of the Venice Commission, to discuss legal and institutional pre-conditions for future post-war elections. Support also covered legal/policy guidance to the CEC, OCV capacity-building, cybersecurity and media integrity, and inclusion initiatives for displaced persons, youth, women, persons with disabilities and ex-combatants.

44. These targeted programmes consolidate the Assembly’s electoral work, complement PAFFE priorities (pre-election assessment, digital resilience, inclusion and OCV), and improve the consistency and impact of observation findings and subsequent reforms in member States.

3.6. Co-operation with other Council of Europe institutions

45. The Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM) was created after the Reykjavík Summit to translate the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy into practice. In 2025 it produced the “Parameters for the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles” (adopted at its 4th plenary meeting on 26-28 November 2025), a practical framework that turns the Council of Europe’s democratic acquis into concrete checklists and indicators for institutions and practitioners. The Parameters sit within the New Democratic Pact for Europe and are designed to diagnose gaps, guide reforms and support peer learning across member States.

46. Our co-operation with CDDEM has been close from the outset: the Elections Division secretariat provided drafting input and coordination on the electoral chapters throughout the process.

6. See the Needs Assessment Report “Organisation and holding of elections in post-war Ukraine. Prerequisites for and challenges” (ENG; UKR)

7. Leadership of the parliament of Ukraine, Parliament members representing different political parties and factions/groups, including members of the Parliamentary Committee on State Building, Local Governance, Regional and Urban Development; senior officials from the Ministry for Communities and Territorial Development; the Central Election Commission; representatives of the four associations of local authorities

47. For our EOMs, the most immediately relevant part is Pillar I, “Democratic participation,” and its chapter on “Free, fair and resilient elections,” which consolidates Council of Europe standards on electoral law, universal and equal suffrage, secrecy and transparency of the vote, election management and oversight, and media and online campaigning. This chapter gives observers and lawmakers a coherent reference to assess the whole electoral cycle, on- and offline.

48. The Parameters are not a theoretical list. They are a tool to benchmark practice, align terminology across institutions and strengthen resilience against today’s risks—foreign interference, disinformation, hate speech, shrinking civic space and tech-driven vulnerabilities—while keeping the ECHR and Venice Commission *acquis* as the interpretive compass. Their added value is twofold: (i) a comprehensive map of democracy requirements gathered from Council of Europe standards; and (ii) a framework for consistent use across countries, with room for context-specific application.

49. The working group on parameters for the application and implementation of the Reykjavik principles of democracy (GT-P2) will now begin work on: (i) a draft framework on how the Parameters should be used; and (ii) draft Guidelines on enhancing participation in elections of women, girls, young persons and vulnerable groups. The Alliance will stay engaged in this next phase and continue contributing Secretariat expertise, where useful.

50. Once introduced to the Alliance, the Parameters could serve as a checklist for our observation work, helping us state more clearly *how free and how fair* an election was, and ensuring our conclusions map directly to Council of Europe standards. In particular, they would help us focus earlier and more systematically on the electoral environment created by the authorities before the elections.

51. As next steps in co-operation with CDDEM, I propose to:

- invite the CDDEM Chair to brief the Alliance on the Parameters and GT-P2’s work programme during the April 2026 part-session;
- pilot the Parameters-as-checklist in a small number of upcoming observations (including pre-election assessments) and share feedback with CDDEM;
- co-host a technical seminar (PAFFE–CDDEM–Venice Commission) for national parliaments on using the Parameters to scrutinise electoral legislation and oversight.

52. These steps would deepen our partnership with CDDEM, make our observation more consistent and actionable, and help parliaments translate the Reykjavik Principles into everyday democratic practice.

4. The role and added value of the Parliamentary Assembly within International Election Observation Missions (IEOM) and fostering international co-operation

53. The Assembly observes elections within International Election Observation Missions (IEOMs) alongside ODIHR, the OSCE PA, the European Parliament and the NATO PA. All partners strive to speak with one voice under a common code of conduct, yet they work under different mandates and in different political contexts. This can produce divergences in emphasis and terminology, for example when assessing how Russia’s full-scale aggression against Ukraine affects elections in neighbouring states.

54. Recent cycles have exposed a gap in how IEOMs capture the full picture. ODIHR’s fact-based, technical methodology remains indispensable, but partly because it must accommodate the sensitivities of a broad OSCE membership, it can be constrained when addressing geopolitical pressures and hybrid threats that shape electoral environments today. Parliamentary observers are well placed to complement this with contextual, rights-based analysis of political competition, media capture, misuse of state resources and intimidation. Modernising IEOM practice therefore means combining ODIHR’s technical strengths with parliamentarians’ political assessment to deliver a clearer, more comprehensive evaluation.

55. Clarity of messaging is essential. Assessments should state plainly when universal, equal, free or secret suffrage is compromised, or when observers face restrictions. Impeccable procedures on election day cannot offset pre-election manipulation, unequal access to media and resources, or the absence of genuine competition. The mere presence of many parties on the ballot does not make an election competitive; our conclusions must reflect the overall environment, not only technical compliance.

56. Observation must also keep pace with technology. AI-driven targeting, platform dynamics and electronic or hybrid voting require specialised expertise. Pre-election missions as well as the briefings for short-term observers should include independent computer-security and digital-media experts reviewing e-processes, and observers should receive focused training to spot vulnerabilities. Pairing expert analysis with targeted training will strengthen our scrutiny of all voting methods – paper and electronic alike.

57. Given rapidly shifting geopolitics, the Assembly must retain the flexibility to judge for itself when meaningful observation is possible and, where necessary, deploy even without other IEOM partners, while maintaining dialogue with authorities and Council of Europe standards. We have already done so (for example in Kosovo* and on several occasions in Bulgaria in 2024). This approach may require additional resources to ensure full coverage of both election day and the broader context.

58. The Parliamentary Alliance was also created to raise the Assembly's profile in global debates on elections. In 2025, Laura Castel (Spain, UEL) represented us at the 20th-Anniversary Implementation Meeting of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation in Geneva (10–12 December), where partners reviewed two decades of practice amid growing geopolitical polarisation, democratic backsliding, tighter funding and accelerating digital threats and disinformation. With improved budget prospects in 2026, members should take a more active role in such fora, so that the Assembly's perspective – combining technical rigor with political context – continues to shape international standards.

5. Key challenges and future focus

59. Across the 2025 cycle, several cross-cutting challenges recurred in the election procedures observed: highly polarised environments; systemic disinformation amplified by coordinated malign foreign interference; uneven access to media and resources; opaque or illicit campaign finance; late legal or administrative changes undermining legal certainty; misuse of state resources and pressure on public employees; gaps in the protection of observers; and growing vulnerabilities linked to digital tools (cyber-attacks, platform manipulation, and emerging electronic processes). In a number of contexts, technically orderly election-day procedures coexisted with pre-election conditions that limited genuine competition through bias in media ecosystems, intimidation, vote-buying schemes, or restrictive decisions taken too close to polling. These patterns affected trust in results at home and among diaspora voters abroad.

60. In 2026, the Assembly's electoral activities should pivot to earlier, deeper, and more resilient observation. First, we should systematically extend the pre-election footprint: extended pre-election missions or short targeted visits 2–3 months out, so election-day findings can rest on a fuller assessment of the environment.

61. Second, we should translate the CDDEM-adopted Parameters into a practical observer checklist (a concise “blueprint” for assessing how free, how fair and how resilient an election is), with clear indicators covering the whole cycle – legal certainty, inclusiveness and accessibility, EMB independence and transparency, media/online environment, political finance and misuse of state resources, OCV arrangements, and effective remedies. This will help align our conclusions with Council of Europe standards and centre our analysis on the electoral environment created by the authorities

62. Third, we should operationalise a light, comparable methodology for out-of-country voting (OCV), ensuring that ballots cast abroad are assessed to the same standards as domestic ones, in close coordination with experts and partners. Extending observation to out-of-country voting is a logical and necessary step which closes a genuine gap, strengthens confidence among voters at home and abroad, and supports authorities with practical, workable recommendations. We therefore also support the endorsement of the draft Venice Commission compilation, and updating the 2011 report, which would help aligning legal standards and observation practices in a way that benefits every member State.

63. Forth, we should institutionalise protection for observers: clear incident-reporting protocols, liaison points in security services, rapid accreditation troubleshooting, and a public “non-interference pledge” for authorities and contestants paired with consequences if access is impeded. The Alliance stands ready to contribute to the preparation of the PACE report on “The Need to Protect Election Observers”, and the joint hearing on “securing the rights of observers for trusted and inclusive electoral processes” (see above) should also contribute to this collective endeavour.

64. Follow-up to PACE recommendations must be stronger and more visible. Building on the Assembly's report on Elections in times of crisis, we should pilot post-election “implementation dialogues” (90-day, 6-month, 12-month) with parliaments, EMBs and regulators to track progress on the most actionable

recommendations. Where appropriate, we should convene multi-stakeholder workshops that include platforms, fact-checkers and telecom regulators to address information integrity and targeted online abuse of candidates and observers.

65. Given accelerating digital risks, I propose embedding a lean digital and AI threats group of experts in PACE election teams (similar to the assistance delivered by the Venice Commission): a small roster of external experts who (i) brief observers before deployment; (ii) run basic threat scans (bot activity spikes, coordinated inauthentic behaviour, platform takedown logs); and (iii) provide a templated annex to IEOM statements on the digital environment. Short-term observers should receive a “digital red flags” brief and carry a simple checklist covering cyber incidents, deepfake misuse, and online voter suppression tactics. Where e-counting or transmission is used, this expert group should obtain and review independent certification and audit trails.

66. Looking ahead, the Alliance is becoming a practical hub for parliaments that want to anticipate new risks and safeguard electoral integrity across the Council of Europe area. Beyond observing elections, we aim to work with national parliaments – through hearings, peer-to-peer exchanges, rapid-response briefings and staff training – to address fast-developing challenges such as foreign interference, illicit financing, AI-driven manipulation, vulnerabilities in external and digital voting, and the role and security of election observers. We will coordinate closely with our internal and external partners to translate standards into workable parliamentary oversight, legislation and follow-up to observation recommendations.

67. The Assembly should also be ready – once conditions allow – to support a comprehensive international effort to help ensure democratic elections in Ukraine, focusing on legal certainty in a wartime-to-peace-time transition, voter registration and inclusion of displaced citizens, information integrity, protection of infrastructure, and OCV arrangements. More generally, it should promote dialogue on minimum standards for post-emergency, post-conflict elections, including setting minimum conditions for timing, security and inclusivity, and benchmarks for media freedom, inclusive participation, legal remedies and voter access for displaced people.

68. Together, these steps would move PACE from episodic observation and piecemeal reports to continuous democratic resilience – exactly what our member States now require. To deliver this agenda, we seek voluntary contributions from member States and national parliaments. Priority funding lines should include:

- developing an OCV observation methodology;
- strengthening capacities on digital threats and cybersecurity;
- structured post-election follow-up;
- and promoting gender balance and youth participation in observation.

69. Finally, we also recognise the need to update the Alliance’s Terms of Reference so that the election of the Chairperson and Bureau is fully democratic, with open nominations, clear eligibility rules, gender balance safeguards, and fair political/geographical rotation. These reforms, coupled with predictable resourcing, will allow the Alliance to scale its impact and uphold free and fair elections across all member States.

6. Conclusions and recommendations.

70. Around the world, 2025 saw the rapid expansion of mis- and disinformation aimed at corroding information integrity, democratic institutions and electoral processes. Elections are a prime target for such actors, who seek to erode trust, depress participation and sow division. Technological developments, including generative AI, have lowered the cost and raised the scale of these operations. Electoral authorities and observers risk being outpaced, while major platforms have not provided predictable, consistent enforcement or the data access needed by observers and other election actors.

71. Elections observed by the Parliamentary Assembly in 2025 unfolded amid acute polarisation, coordinated foreign interference, industrial-scale (often AI-enabled) disinformation, cyber incidents, opaque financing and late legal changes that weakened legal certainty. In several cases, technically orderly polling-day procedures coexisted with pre-election conditions that curtailed genuine competition – unequal media access, misuse of state resources, intimidation and vote-buying – undermining public trust at home and among voters abroad. International observers also faced pressure, access constraints and digital smear campaigns, confirming the need to protect the observing function itself. These challenges require renewed strategic attention, both political and operational.

72. The Assembly maintained a strong field presence and updated its Guidelines to bolster integrity (conflict-of-interest rules, deputy heads of delegation, and flexibility to deploy when IEOM partners are absent). The Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFE) was launched; it held two substantive meetings and advanced work on out-of-country voting (OCV), although a pilot deployment proved impossible for logistical reasons. Co-operation intensified with EMBs, the Venice Commission (including its decision to update OCV guidance) and with CDDEM on the newly adopted Parameters for the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles, which provide a practical reference and blueprint for assessing election integrity in the digital age.

73. Europe faces serious risks that could threaten electoral integrity and fuel mistrust in democratic processes. Our Assembly should remain committed to strengthening participatory democracy through free and fair elections in line with the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy and the priorities of the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

74. I invite the Bureau to consider ways of further strengthening the Assembly's electoral activities, in particular:

- encourage PACE members to participate actively in election observation and political groups to enforce targets for women's participation as members and heads of delegation; ensure fair political rotation of heads of delegation in line with the revised Guidelines;
- encourage and respond positively to the member States – also those not under any form of monitoring – to/who invite the Assembly to observe their national elections and referendums; this is essential to safeguard free, fair and transparent processes across Europe;
- implement a feasibility study and develop a solid, comparable methodology for observing out-of-country voting, so that external voting is checked against the same standards as domestic voting;
- enable longer pre-electoral scrutiny of the campaign environment and election administration by appointing ad hoc committees as soon as elections are scheduled, potentially even before an official date is announced;
- pay special attention to post-election periods, where instability may trigger violence or political deadlock; encourage continued engagement of PACE observers by presenting and discussing our recommendations with election management bodies and civil society, thereby fostering reforms;
- as regards observer protection, endorse a PACE Observer Safety Toolkit (incident-reporting protocol, rapid accreditation troubleshooting, security liaison points, access to counsel) and a public non-interference pledge for authorities/contestants;
- as regards digital and generative-AI risks, create a digital and AI threats group of experts to brief and advise observer delegations, scan for coordinated inauthentic behaviour and provide a templated annex on the digital environment for preliminary statements (similar to the legal assistance by the Venice Commission);
- encourage post-election implementation dialogues (at 90 days/ 6 months/ 12 months) with parliaments, EMBs and other election stakeholders;
- earmark dedicated funds (including voluntary contributions) for OCV methodology, digital-risk capacity and structured follow-up activities. Introduce an annual external meeting of the Alliance (stand-alone or alongside Alliance events) to enable strategic discussions on its priorities and to enable better involvement of national parliaments in the PACE elections-related work.

75. Furthermore, I encourage the next Bureau of the Alliance (PAFFE) to:

- translate the new Parameters into a concise observer checklist – a comparable “blueprint” to state how free, fair and resilient an election is, with indicators across the entire cycle and a strong focus on the electoral environment created by authorities; pilot the checklist in upcoming missions and share feedback with CDDEM;
- finalise a solid OCV observation method so out-of-country voting is held to the same standards as domestic voting, aligned with Venice Commission updates and IEOM partners;
- request authorisation for one external Alliance meeting per year (stand-alone or alongside Alliance events) to enable strategic discussions;
- propose a revision of PAFFE Terms of Reference to institute genuinely democratic elections for the Chair and Bureau, aligning governance with the standards we promote.

76. As regards co-operation with Council of Europe partners, to:
- coordinate on the preparation of the future framework for the use of the Parameters and on draft Guidelines for participation of vulnerable groups; co-host a PAFPE–CDDEM–Venice Commission seminar for national parliaments on applying the Parameters in oversight and reform;
 - ensure synergies and actively support electoral co-operation activities led by the PACE Parliamentary and Electoral Co-operation Division, providing the necessary political backing to amplify their impact.
77. As regards co-operation with IEOM partners and methodological improvements, to:
- work closely with IEOM partners to ensure that observation methodologies keep pace with evolving voting systems and campaign practices, particularly concerning electronic/remote voting and digital campaigning;
 - revisit how preliminary findings are presented and communicated to the public, ensuring they remain clear, neutral and conducive to confidence in international observation;
 - establish structured engagement with platforms and regulators on data access during election periods (archives, takedown logs, ad libraries) to contextualise online harms in real time;
 - develop shared guidance on assessing foreign interference where evidence sits with security services, clarifying what observers can credibly judge and how to reference official briefings without overstepping.
78. Furthermore, in terms of strategic engagement for 2026:
- contribute to the New Democratic Pact for Europe by strengthening democracies against disinformation, polarisation and foreign interference; ensuring equal and genuine competition, including for voters abroad; and aligning legal standards with observation practice and the rights of election observers, with concrete deliverables such as the hearing on “Securing the rights of observers for trusted and inclusive electoral processes” (Paris, 28–29 April 2026) and a dedicated conference on foreign interference to translate field evidence into actionable guidance for member States;
 - contribute actively to support a comprehensive transversal Council of Europe effort for democratic elections in Ukraine once conditions allow (legal certainty in transition, inclusive voter registration for displaced citizens, information integrity, infrastructure protection and OCV);
 - use PAFPE as a hub for timely hearings, peer exchanges and targeted mentoring (including for women and young MPs) to convert observation findings into policy and legislation and enable better oversight.
79. These steps shift the Assembly’s electoral focus from episodic missions to continuous democratic resilience, protecting observers, modernising methods (including OCV and digital) and tightening follow-up so that elections across our member States remain free, fair and trusted.

Appendix – Elections observed by PACE in 2025

Country	Date	Report
Kosovo*		
Elections to the Assembly of Kosovo Pre-electoral mission PACE main mission	16-17 January 2025 9 February 2025	Head of Delegation: Ms Petra Bayr (Austria, SOC) PACE pre-electoral statement Report-Doc 16146 rev
Early elections to the Assembly of Kosovo PACE main mission	28 December 2025	Head of Delegation: Mr Yunus Emre (Türkiye, SOC) Deputy Head of delegation: Mr Georgios Stamatis (Greece, EPP/CD) PACE statement <i>Report in preparation</i>
Albania		
Parliamentary elections Pre electoral mission IEOM with PACE, ODIHR, OSCE PA and EP	3-4 April 2025 11 May 2025	Head of Delegation: Mr Simone Billi (Italy, ECPA) PACE pre-electoral statement IEOM Press release and preliminary conclusions Report-Doc. 16201
Poland		
Presidential election Pre electoral mission IEOM with PACE, ODIHR and OSCE PA	14-15 April 2025 18 May 2025 1 June 2025	Head of Delegation: Mr Iulian Bulai (Romania, ALDE) PACE pre-electoral statement IEOM Press release and preliminary conclusions (first round of the presidential election – acting Head of delegation: Liliana Tanguy, France, ALDEea) IEOM Press release and preliminary conclusions (2d round of the presidential elections) Report-Doc. 16258
Republic of Moldova		
Parliamentary elections Pre-electoral mission IEOM with PACE, ODHIR, OSCE PA and EP	3-4 Sept 2025 28 Sept 2025	Head of Delegation: Mr Chris Said (Malta, EPP/CD) Deputy Head of delegation: Ms Lucia Plaváková, (Slovak Republic, ALDE) PACE pre-electoral statement IEOM Press release and preliminary conclusions Report-Doc. 16296
Kyrgyz Republic		
Early parliamentary elections IEOM with PACE, ODHIR and OSCE PA	30 November 2025	Head of Delegation: Mr Georgios Stamatis (Greece, EPP/CD) Deputy Head of delegation: Mr Mehmet Akalin (Türkiye, ALDE) IEOM Press and preliminary conclusions Report- Doc. 16319