Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 16482 rev
18 September 2026

Restructuring and streamlining the Rules of Procedure: modalities relating to the external and interparliamentary relations of the Assembly

Report[1]
Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities
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1. Reference to committee: Doc. 16217, Reference 4901 of 29 September 2025.

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly introduced the most recent general revision of its Rules of Procedure through its Resolution 2656 (2026) "Restructuring and streamlining of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure". In this text, the Assembly also resolved to "restructure and streamline its complementary texts", to "ensure the overall coherence of the entire body of its procedural texts". The aim of this effort is not to introduce significant amendments, but to make the Rules more user-friendly.

2. In addition to this technical drafting exercise, the Assembly also resolved to clarify how the Assembly's integrity framework applies to Guests of the Assembly, which include special guest delegations, observer delegations, partner for democracy delegations, and other guests. Specifically:

– The code of conduct applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Guests of the Assembly;

– Guests of the Assembly are required to make a declaration subscribing to the values of the Council of Europe when their names are submitted;

– Guests of the Assembly will not be required to make a written declaration of interests, unless a member of a partner for democracy delegation is appointed as rapporteur for an information report.

3. The Assembly decides to amend its Rules of Procedure, as adopted in Resolution 2656 (2026), by inserting, in the Code of Conduct for Members of the Parliamentary Assembly, a new Rule D.1.3, as follows

> "D.1.3. This Code applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Guests of the Assembly. The following qualifications apply to the application of the Code to Guests of the Assembly:
>
> The requirements of Rule D.4 (written declarations of interest) and D.6 (consequences of a failure to submit a written declaration of interests) shall not apply to Guests of the Assembly.
>
> However, a member of a partner for democracy delegation who has been appointed as rapporteur for an information report must submit, within 30 days of that appointment, a written declaration of interests in accordance with Rule D.4.
>
> For the avoidance of doubt, Rule D.5 on oral declarations of interest relevant to a debate applies to Guests of the Assembly, who are always required to make an oral declaration of interest if they have any such interests."

4. The Assembly adopts its restructured Modalities relating to the external and interparliamentary relations of the Assembly, contained in the appendix to this draft resolution. The appendix shall be accessible on the website of the Assembly.

5. The amendments made to the Rules of Procedure by this Resolution shall enter into force at the opening of the January 2027 part-session.

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 3 September 2026

Appendix to the Resolution – Modalities relating to the external and interparliamentary relations of the Assembly

Modalities relating to the external and interparliamentary relations of the Assembly

I. General goals pursued by external relations

1. The main objectives pursued by the external relations of the Assembly are to:

– promote fundamental values which the Assembly considers to be universal;

– make the work of the Assembly and its positions on key international issues better known, understood and accepted;

– promote Council of Europe instruments and tools available, or serving as inspiration, to external players;

– promote signature and ratification of Council of Europe conventions open to non-member states;

– seek co-operation, synergies and complementarity with external partners;

– strengthen parliamentarism, parliamentary institutions in non-member states and parliamentary dimension in international organisations.

2. The Assembly's external relations pursue one more goal, which is specific and limited in scope and has now nearly been achieved: accession to the Council of Europe.

3. The Assembly should only consider establishing relations with external partners when these relations can serve to develop and promote the three core values of the Council of Europe: human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

II. Scope

4. External relations of the Assembly comprise relations with:

– Guests of the Assembly;

– international parliamentary organisations/assemblies;

– inter-governmental international organisations.

5. The following should not be considered as part of "institutional" external relations as such:

– relations with national parliaments of Council of Europe member states;

– relations with Council of Europe bodies/entities (such as the Venice Commission, North-South Centre, etc.);

– relations with international non-governmental organisations.

III. Competencies

6. The President of the Parliamentary Assembly, in the context of his/her relations with non-member states, can take initiatives and give political impetus to prepare the establishment of potential new relations or the development of existing co-operation with external partners.

7. The Presidential Committee, as a consultative body, provides advice and guidelines to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly and to the Bureau in matters of external relations.

8. Rule B.18.3 of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly states that the Bureau "guides the external relations of the Assembly". The Bureau is also responsible for relations with the parliamentary and inter-parliamentary Assemblies of non-member States.

9. The Bureau's responsibility is complemented by the work of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy which, in line with its terms of reference, shall *inter alia*:

– consider requests for membership of the Council of Europe; requests for granting observer status with the Council of Europe and with the Parliamentary Assembly; requests for special guest status with the Parliamentary Assembly; requests for partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly, and its evaluation to review the progress achieved in fulfilling the undertakings made by the parliaments concerned when they requested this status;

– consider the situation in states which are not member states of the Council of Europe in the light of the fundamental values upheld by the Council of Europe, make proposals and, subject to the approval by the Bureau, take political action to promote these values.

10. As concerns relations between the Council of Europe and the United Nations:

– the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy monitors the work of the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly; establishes regular dialogue with the Director General of the United Nations Office in Geneva and holds a meeting of its relevant Sub-Committee in principle once every two years in New York on the occasion of the United Nations General Assembly;

– the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights establishes regular contacts with the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the related Special Procedures and Human Rights Treaty Bodies.

11. In addition, the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy may:

– propose to the Bureau the conclusion of co-operation agreements, or other ways of stepping up co-operation, with non-member parliaments and international interparliamentary institutions;

– set up sub-committees dealing with one or several aspects of the Assembly's external relations (for instance, the Sub-Committee on External Relations, the Sub-Committee on the Middle East and the Arab world).

12. In accordance with its terms of reference, the Committee on Migration, International Protection and Economic Co-operation prepares reports on the activities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). For the preparation of the reports and the debates in the Assembly, the committee maintains relations with the OECD and the EBRD, and with parliaments of non-member States participating in these debates.

13. Other Assembly committees, as appropriate, can also have a role to play in external relations, in line with their respective terms of reference.

14. The Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly has regular contacts with external institutions and other assemblies. In the framework of these contacts, he/she seeks to reinforce co-operation and to enhance co-ordination in areas falling within the field of competencies of the Assembly as well as to make its work better known, understood and accepted. The Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly is a member of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP). He/she regularly participates in joint meetings with the Secretaries General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE and of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly to ensure better co-ordination and exchange of information on the work of the three parliamentary assemblies.

IV. Relations with non-member parliaments

15. The Assembly has established three distinct categories of institutional relations with national parliaments of non-member states: special guests, partners for democracy and observers. There are also specific arrangements with other guests (who are those individuals or delegations covered by specific arrangements as set out in Rule B.11 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure and paragraphs 52-53 below). Together these four categories are referred to as "Guests of the Assembly".

16. Relevant general rules are Rule B.18 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure and these Modalities.

V. Special guest status

17. Special guest status:

– Aim of this status: to facilitate the process of accession of the European countries which are not yet members of the Council of Europe.

– Eligibility: national parliaments whose States have applied for membership to the Council of Europe. Membership of the Council of Europe is in principle open only to States whose national territory lies wholly or partly in Europe and whose culture is closely linked with the European culture.

– Relevant Rule and Procedure: Rule B.8 of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly and the below modalities.

18. Any formal request for special guest status shall be addressed to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly by the President (Speaker) of the national parliament of the European non-member State concerned.

19. If the Bureau, having consulted the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, approves such a request, and the Assembly then ratifies the Bureau's decision, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly shall invite the parliament concerned to assume special guest status.

20. A special guest delegation shall include both representatives and substitutes. The number of seats shall not exceed eighteen and shall be the same as the number of seats likely to be appropriate were the state to become a full member of the Council of Europe. When granting special guest status, the Assembly shall specify the number of members of a special guest delegation.

21. A parliament with special guest status shall appoint members of its delegation so as to ensure a fair representation of the political parties or groups in that parliament.

22. The delegation shall include both women and men among its representatives, and strive to ensure equal representation between women and men, whilst ensuring a minimum of 40% of each sex in its composition.

23. The credentials of members of special guest delegations shall be sent to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly not less than one week before the opening of the session, except in exceptional circumstances.

24. Credentials of members of special guest delegations shall be accompanied by a signed written statement by each individual member, as specified in Rule B.1.6 of the Rules of Procedure.

25. These credentials shall be submitted to the Parliamentary Assembly for ratification at the same time as those of representatives and substitutes.

26. The provisions of Rule B.6 of the Rules of Procedure concerning the duration of the term of office apply to members of special guest delegations.

27. The credentials of members of special guest delegations may be challenged on stated procedural or substantial grounds, as specified in Article B.2.1 of the Rules of Procedure and paragraphs 20, 21 or 22 above.

28. Challenged credentials shall be referred without debate to (i) the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy for report and the Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities for opinion, in the case of a substantive challenge of credentials (a challenge based on Article A.2.1 of the Rules of Procedure), and (ii) to the Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities, in case of a procedural challenge to credentials (a challenge based on Rule 20, 21 or 22 above). They may also be referred to other committees for opinion, if necessary.

29. Unless otherwise specified, the provisions of Rules B.2, B.3, B.4 and B.5 of the Rules of Procedure concerning a challenge to credentials apply to members of special guest delegations.

30. Members of special guest delegations may:

14.1. participate in plenary meetings as provided for in Rule B.8.2 of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly;

14.2. participate in committee meetings as provided for in Rules C.7.8 and 9 of the Rules on the Functioning of Committees;

14.3. submit to the committee chairperson proposals concerning the draft agenda of committee meetings and proposals for amendments to draft texts examined in these meetings. The committee chairperson shall decide on any further action;

14.4. sign motions for resolutions and recommendations (except those under Rules B.4. – reconsideration of previously ratified credentials and B.50. – revision of the Rules of Procedure) and written declarations. However, they shall not be taken into account for the number of signatures required;

14.5. participate in the work of political groups according to the conditions established by the groups.

31. The decision to suspend or withdraw special guest status shall be taken by a decision of the Bureau by a two-thirds majority, subject to ratification by the Assembly. The Bureau shall consult the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy before taking its decision.

VI. Partner for democracy

32. Partner for democracy status:

– Aim of this status: to develop co-operation with national parliaments of non-member States of neighbouring regions as a means of consolidating democratic transformations and promoting stability, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. This advanced co-operation status with the Assembly is accompanied by a number of rights in the Assembly as well as by political commitments undertaken by the Partners and followed-up by the Assembly.

– Eligibility: national parliaments of all southern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries participating in the Union for the Mediterranean-Barcelona Process (including the Palestinian Legislative Council) and of central Asian countries participating in the OSCE (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) are eligible to request partner for democracy status with the Assembly. This geographical scope of eligibility is defined in Resolution 1680 (2009), however “requests from parliaments of other States may also be considered if the Bureau of the Assembly so decides”.

– Relevant Rule: Rule B.10. of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly and the below modalities.

33. Any formal request for partner for democracy status shall be addressed to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly by the President (Speaker) of the national parliament of the non-member State concerned. This request shall contain the following elements:

– an explicit reference to the aspiration of the said parliament to embrace the values of the Council of Europe, which are pluralist and gender parity-based democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;

– a commitment to act to abolish the death penalty and to encourage the competent authorities to introduce a moratorium on executions;

– a statement on the intention of the parliament to make use of the Assembly’s experience, as well as the expertise of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), in its institutional and legislative work;

– a commitment to organise free and fair elections in compliance with relevant international standards;

– a commitment to encourage balanced participation of women and men in public and political life;

– a commitment to encourage the competent authorities to become party to the relevant Council of Europe conventions and partial agreements which are open for signature and ratification by non-member States, in particular those dealing with human rights, rule of law and democracy issues;

– an obligation to inform the Assembly regularly on the state of progress in implementing Council of Europe principles.

34. The Assembly shall specify the number of members of a partner for democracy delegation when granting the status. The Assembly’s partner for democracy delegations have the following number of members:

– Morocco: 6 representatives and 6 substitutes;

– Palestine: 3 representatives and 3 substitutes;

– Kyrgyzstan: 3 representatives and 3 substitutes;

– Jordan: 3 representatives and 3 substitutes.

35. A parliament with partner for democracy status is not required to submit credentials to the President of the Assembly, but shall transmit to the President not less than one week before the opening of the session the list of the delegation members appointed for the duration of the entire session.

36. The list shall be accompanied by a signed written statement by each individual member, as follows:

"I, the undersigned, …., hereby affirm and state that I will conduct my activities linked to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in a manner consistent with the values and ethical standards of the Council of Europe. I declare that I have read and understood the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly and I undertake to abide by its provisions"".

37. The delegation shall be composed to ensure a fair representation of the political parties or groups within their parliaments, and in the representation of both chambers, where applicable.

38. The delegation shall include both women and men among its representatives, and strive to ensure equal representation between women and men.

39. Members of delegations with partner for democracy status may:

8.1. participate in plenary meetings as provided for in Rule B.10.3 of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly.

8.2. participate in committee meetings as provided for in Rules C.7.8 and 9 of the Rules on the Functioning of Committees.

8.3. submit to the committee chairperson proposals concerning the draft agenda of committee meetings and proposals for amendments to draft texts examined in these meetings. The committee chairperson shall decide on any further action.

8.4. sign motions for resolutions and recommendations (except those under Rules B.4. (reconsideration of previously ratified credentials on substantive grounds) and Rule B.50. (revision of the Rules of Procedure)) and written declarations. However, they shall not be taken into account for the number of signatures required.

8.5. participate in the work of political groups according to the conditions established by the groups.

40. On a proposal by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, the Bureau may decide to grant some additional rights to partner for democracy delegations which have shown outstanding results in achieving the goals of the partnership and participate fully in the work of the Assembly. The decision of the Bureau shall be ratified by the Assembly at the beginning of a new session (in January) and shall be valid for the duration of the session (one year), with the possibility or not of extension at each following session depending on the results and according to the same procedure. Such additional rights for the delegations and their members may include:

9.1. the right to table motions for recommendations and resolutions (except those under Rules B.4. (reconsideration of previously ratified credentials on substantive grounds) and Rule B.50. (revision of the Rules of Procedure), subject to co-signature by a member of the Assembly, with both names appearing as authors of the motion;

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

9.3. the right to request current affairs debates and to be chosen to open such debates. If such a request is made by a member of a partner for democracy delegation, it should be subject to co-signature by a member of the Assembly, with both names appearing as authors of the request, and to having the support of 19 more members of the Assembly. If a request is made by a partner for democracy delegation, it should be supported by a political group, a national delegation or a committee, as provided by Rule B.42.2 (current affairs debates);

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

9.5. the right to be appointed as rapporteur for information reports which do not contain a draft resolution and/or recommendation. If appointed rapporteur, the member of the partner for democracy delegation must, within 30 days, complete a written declaration of interest, in accordance with Rule D.4 of the Code of Conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

41. The decision to grant, suspend or withdraw partner for democracy status shall be taken by a resolution of the Assembly following a report by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, with an opinion by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights and an opinion by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination and, where appropriate, an opinion by any other relevant Assembly committee. These committees, in the fields within their specific terms of reference, review the progress achieved in fulfilling the undertakings made by the parliaments concerned when they requested this status.

VII. Observer

42. Observer status:

– Aim of this status: to bring to the observers' attention the Assembly's work and to provide the Assembly with information on action taken in national parliaments on issues related to the Council of Europe.

– Eligibility: for national parliaments of non-member States which are considered to be established democracies which are willing to contribute (including financially) to democratic transformations in Europe.

– Relevant Rule: Rule B.9. of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly and the below modalities.

43. Any formal request for observer status shall be addressed to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly by the President (Speaker) of the national parliament of the non-member State concerned.

44. Any request for observer status shall be referred by the Bureau to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy for report and to other relevant committees for opinion.

45. When granting observer status, the Assembly shall specify the number of members of an observer delegation. The Assembly's observer delegations have the following number of members:

– Canada: 6 representatives and 6 substitutes;

– Israel: 3 representatives and 3 substitutes;

– Mexico: 6 representatives and 6 substitutes.

46. The national parliament concerned is not required to submit credentials to the President of the Assembly, but it shall submit to the President of the Assembly not less than one week before the opening of the ordinary session a list of members appointed for the whole duration of the session.

47. The list shall be accompanied by a signed written statement by each individual member, as follows:

"I, the undersigned, …., hereby affirm and state that I will conduct my activities linked to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in a manner consistent with the values and ethical standards of the Council of Europe. I declare that I have read and understood the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly and I undertake to abide by its provisions"'.

48. The delegation shall be composed to ensure a fair representation of the political parties or groups within their parliament, and in the representation of both chambers, where applicable.

49. The delegation shall include both women and men among its representatives, and strive to ensure equal representation between men and women.

50. Members of observer delegations may:

9.1. participate in plenary meetings as provided for in Rule B.9.2 of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly.

9.2. participate in committee meetings as provided in Rules C.7.8 and 9 of the Rules on the Functioning of Committees.

9.3. submit to the committee chairperson proposals concerning the draft agenda of committee meetings and proposals for amendments to draft texts examined in these meetings. The committee chairperson shall decide on any further action.

9.4. sign motions for resolutions and recommendations (except those under Rules B.4. (reconsideration of previously ratified credentials on substantive grounds) and Rule B.50. (revision of the Rules of Procedure)) and written declarations. However, they shall not be taken into account for the number of signatures required.

9.5. participate in the work of political groups according to the conditions established by the groups.

51. The decision to grant, suspend or withdraw observer status shall be taken by a resolution of the Assembly, following a report by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, and, where appropriate, an opinion by any other relevant Assembly committee.

VIII. Other guests

52. The participation, in the work of the Assembly and its committees, of other elected representatives without special guest, observer or partner for democracy status, is set out in specific arrangements, ratified by the Assembly in accordance with Rule B.11.2, pursuant to an Assembly resolution adopted on the basis of a report prepared by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. These provisions currently apply to:

– members of the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo*[3] (three representatives and three substitutes) (pursuant to Resolution 2094 (2016));

– two elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community (pursuant to Resolutions 1113 (1997) and 1376 (2004));

– members of the representative delegation of Belarusian democratic forces (pursuant to Resolution 2530 (2024) (three members and three substitutes));

53. The names of the above guests shall be transmitted to the President not less than one week before the opening of the session. The list of names shall be accompanied by a signed written statement by each individual, as follows:

> *"I, the undersigned, …., hereby affirm and state that I will conduct my activities linked to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in a manner consistent with the values and ethical standards of the Council of Europe. I declare that I have read and understood the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly and I undertake to abide by its provisions'".*

IX. Co-operation agreements

54. Co-operation agreements with parliaments other than those of the member States:

– Aim: exceptionally, the Assembly may, upon the proposal of the Bureau, decide to enter into co-operation agreements with non-member parliaments to establish a political dialogue with a view to promoting, in the country concerned, the principles of parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights as well as fundamental freedoms.

– Eligibility: such agreements should only be formalised if they have a measurable added value for the work of the Assembly.

– Relevant Rules: Rule B.11 and B.18 of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly; terms of reference of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

X. Relations with parliamentary organisations/assemblies

55. With regard to co-operation with international parliamentary organisations/assemblies:

– Aim: to develop parliamentary diplomacy and to promote the parliamentary dimension of international organisations.

– Relevant Rules: Rule B.18 of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly; terms of reference of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy; Rule B.11 of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly which states that the arrangements for co-operation with the European Parliament are decided by the Bureau.

– Eligibility: in the exercise of its competencies, the Bureau should limit the conclusion of written co-operation agreements to cases where such an agreement presents a measurable added value for the work of the Assembly.

– The absence of a written co-operation agreement between the Assembly and another parliamentary organisation/assembly should not per se impede their potential co-operation, to be decided by the Bureau.

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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.

56. The Bureau of the Assembly shall be responsible for relations with the parliamentary and inter-parliamentary assemblies:

– Without encroaching upon the competence and prerogatives assigned to the Assembly and the Standing Committee in the Rules of Procedure, the Bureau shall organise any meetings with the above-mentioned assemblies, in particular by fixing dates, procedure and subjects for discussion.

– When the Assembly receives an invitation from a parliamentary or inter-parliamentary assembly, the Bureau shall be required, on the basis of the appropriations available, to advise whether or not to accept the invitation and appoint, whenever necessary, the members, leader and spokesmen of the Assembly delegation. The Bureau shall also decide what travel arrangements are appropriate.

– The Bureau may co-opt other members of the Assembly in the light of their special qualifications, to assist it in carrying out the tasks described above. It may also instruct a general or an ad hoc committee to undertake any necessary preparatory work.

– The Bureau shall inform the Assembly of every development in the field of relations with the parliamentary or inter-parliamentary assemblies when presenting the progress report on the activities of the Bureau. It may refer all or part of the report of a meeting arranged between the Assembly, or one of its delegations, and any other parliamentary or inter-parliamentary assembly or delegation, to one or more of the committees of the Council of Europe Assembly with instructions that these committees report to the Assembly.

XI. Relations with international organisations

57. The Assembly establishes relations with several international organisations who “are actively involved in promoting their values through outside activities, especially in areas bordering the territories of Council of Europe member states” (Resolution 1506 (2006)).

– Aim: to reinforce co-ordination and to avoid duplications of efforts with the Council of Europe’s main institutional partners, in particular the European Union, the OSCE and the UN and its specialised agencies, whose activities are often amongst the field of expertise of the Council of Europe.

– The Assembly may, on the proposal of the Bureau, invite national or international organisations to present reports or communications.

XII. The European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments

58. The European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments is organised under the auspices of the Parliamentary Assembly. The Conference normally meets every two years. The Conference takes place in principle alternately between Strasbourg and a capital of a Council of Europe member state.

59. The Conference is composed of the Speakers and Presidents of parliaments of the member states of the Council of Europe as well as of the Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. The Speakers and Presidents of parliaments having special guests, observer or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly are invited as observers. Other parliamentary assemblies may be invited by the host country or Assembly to attend as observers. The Parliamentary Assembly systematically invites Presidents of international parliamentary bodies with whom the Assembly has signed co-operation agreements to attend the Conference as observers.

Relevant Rules: Rules of the Conference.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Rian Vogels, rapporteur[4]

1. Introduction

1.1. The initial reference to apply ethical standards to the members of all delegations and other guests participating in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly

1. On 25 June 2025 the Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities tabled a motion for a resolution "Applying ethical standards to the members of all delegations participating in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly".

2. The purpose of this motion was to enable the Assembly to review its rules of procedure, and amend them, where necessary, to apply the Code of Conduct for members of the Assembly (hereafter "Code of Conduct") to all those participating in the work of the Assembly. This includes all Guests of the Assembly – members of special guest delegations, members of observer delegations, members of partner for democracy delegations and other guests, such as members of the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo*[5], elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community, as well as members of the representative delegation of the Belarusian democratic forces.

3. In undertaking this work, consideration should be given to aligning, where appropriate, the rules of procedure, standards and protections applicable to guests with those applicable to members of the Assembly. The most recent general revision of the Parliamentary Assembly's Rules of Procedure led to Resolution 2656 (2026) "Restructuring and streamlining of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure". As any amendments to the Rules of Procedure will apply to the revised version of the Rules, any subsequent reference to the Rules of Procedure shall be understood as references to the revised rules, which will enter into force in January 2027.

1.2. The subsequent reference on restructuring and streamlining of the Rules of Procedure: Guests of the Assembly

4. In the most recent general revision of the Parliamentary Assembly's Rules of Procedure, Resolution 2656 (2026) "Restructuring and streamlining of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure", the Assembly resolved to "restructure and streamline its complementary texts", to "ensure the overall coherence of the entire body of its procedural texts". The aim of this effort is not to introduce significant amendments, but to make the Rules more user-friendly. Information Note AS/Rul (2026) 14 sets out the methodology and structure for the restructuring and streamlining exercise, as well as transposition tables to assist in understanding the intention and relationship between the "old rules" and the "new rules".

5. On 22 June 2026, as follow-up to Resolution 2656 (2026), the Bureau instructed the Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities, to take into account the issue of "Restructuring and streamlining the Rules of Procedure: Modalities concerning guests of the Assembly" in the report "Applying ethical standards to the members of all delegations participating in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly".

6. As for Resolution 2656 (2026), any significant "material" changes are outside the scope of this project, which is a streamlining exercise. Updates to ensure readability, to ensure coherence and consistency in procedures in otherwise similar or identical processes, to reflect procedural practices, such as to better incorporate consistent interpretations of how the rules are applied in practice, are within scope, as these better convey the meaning and intention of these provisions.

7. The approach taken has been to incorporate not only the specific provisions on Guests of the Assembly but also the provisions on the external relations given the extent of overlap between these themes and relevant complementary texts. This would combine the helpful and recently revised Guidelines on the external relations of the Assembly, together with relevant rules on Guests of the Assembly (special guests, observers, partners for democracy and other guests).

8. For the sake of consistency, I have produced an information note in the same style as those that accompanied Resolution 2656 (2026) to ensure transparency and to assist in understanding the intention and relationship between the "old rules" and the "new rules" concerning the Assembly's external relations. As for other information notes as part of this wider restructuring project, this information note sets out transposition

4. This explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.
5. *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.

tables – one table shows the new rules, setting out for each rule, the former rule(s) from which they flow; the other table shows the old rules and sets out where each old rule can now be found. This note will be declassified and made publicly available on the Rules Committee webpage.

9. Given the age of some of the texts in this part of the Rules of Procedure, it has been necessary to make certain updates to reflect current practice, to streamline and harmonise provisions as between the rules and the complementary texts, and to elucidate on interpretations previously given as to how these rules should apply in practice. Notably:

– definitions have been provided for four categories of guests participating in the work of the Assembly and/or of its committees, namely: special guest delegations, observer delegations, partners for democracy delegations and other guests participating in the work of the Assembly and/or its committees on the basis of specific arrangements (pursuant to an Assembly resolution based on a report by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy);

– this fourth category of "other guests" currently includes the members of the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo (pursuant to Resolution 2094 (2016)), the elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot Community (pursuant to Resolutions 1113 (1997) and 1376 (2004)) and the representative delegation of the Belarusian democratic forces (pursuant to Resolution 2530 (2024));

– the procedures for granting, suspending and withdrawing observer and partner for democracy delegations have been clarified in line with the current practice that such decisions should be taken by a resolution of the Assembly following a report prepared by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, with an opinion by other relevant Assembly committees either systematically (in the case of partner for democracy status) or optionally, on a case by case basis (in the case of observer status). For the granting of special guest status, as this procedure goes hand in hand with a procedure on an accession request (involving a report by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, with an opinion prepared by two other committees), the current process of a simple Bureau decision ratified by the Assembly can be maintained;

– the cross-references and process concerning credentials for special guest delegations have been updated to correspond to the credentials process for member State delegations (the existing text referred to an outdated process).

10. For the sake of coherence, it is important that this work is adopted in time to enter into force at the beginning of the January part-session – at the same time as the revised rules of procedure.

2. Background on the ethical framework

11. The Assembly has put in place, and over the years continually refined and updated, the Code of Conduct applicable to its members. The Assembly has thus repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to upholding the highest standards of ethics and professional conduct in all its activities. These standards, as outlined in the Code of Conduct, are essential for fostering transparency, accountability, and trust in democratic institutions, and in particular in the work of the Assembly.

12. Guests participating in the work of the Assembly play an important role, contributing valuable insights and perspectives to its debates and reports. Their participation enhances the Assembly's impact, scope and its standing as a value-based institution in their respective countries. Ensuring the Code of Conduct applies – as appropriate – to all actively participating in the work of the Assembly is essential for maintaining the Assembly's integrity and ensuring a shared set of ethical standards that is applied to all those participating in the Assembly's deliberations. By encouraging solid ethical standards, the Assembly reinforces the central importance of robust ethical standards and values in respect of all who contribute to its work, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and public confidence in the institution.

3. Process by which members of the Assembly are made aware of and are bound by the Code of Conduct for members of the Assembly

13. The Code of Conduct currently applies "to members in all aspects of their public life relevant to their duties as members of the Parliamentary Assembly" (rule D.1.2 of the revised Code of Conduct). Article A.5.1 of the Basic Principles specifies that:

> *"In the exercise of their duties, the members of the Assembly shall undertake to comply with the principles and rules set out in the Code of Conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly and other ethical regulations".*

14. The credentials of members of a national delegation must be accompanied by a signed written statement by the individual member (Rule B.1.2.c. of the Rules on the Functioning of the Assembly). The wording of the statement is as follows:

> *"I, the undersigned, …, hereby affirm and state that I will subscribe to the aims and basic principles of the Council of Europe, mentioned in the preamble, in Article 1.a and in Article 3 of the Statute of the Council of Europe, and Article A.2 of the Basic Principles of the Assembly. I declare that I have read and understood the Code of Conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly and I undertake to abide by its provisions".*

15. Other specific rules relating to conduct and order include Rule B.14.1 (which provides that the President ensures the observance of the Rules and maintains order), Rule B.33 (maintenance of order), as well as specific provisions in the complementary texts.

16. Rule B.33.6 specifically prohibits the use of "words or expressions which affront human dignity, undermine the right to respect for private life, or which may prejudice orderly debate". The rest of Rule B.33 sets out options for the President to maintain order during proceedings and the steps are sequential:

– for a first disturbance, the President may call to order a member of the Assembly (Rule B.33.1);

– if the disturbance is repeated, the President shall call the member to order for a second time and record this in the report of the debates (Rule B.33.2);

– if the disturbance continues or is repeated, the President shall direct the individual to resume his or her seat or exclude that member from the Chamber for the remainder of the sitting (Rule B.33.3);

– in serious cases the President may propose to the Assembly a motion of censure which would involve immediate expulsion from the Chamber for two to five sitting days. (Rule B.33.4 and B.33.5).

17. In conclusion, none of the general provisions of the Rules of Procedure or the Code of Conduct explicitly specify that they apply to Guests of the Assembly. It is highly likely that the provisions would be interpreted as applying (*mutatis mutandis*, if necessary).

4. Applying ethical standards to the members of all guest delegations and other guests participating in the work of the Assembly

18. Following discussions in the Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities, I invited all special guest, observer and partner for democracy delegations, as well as, from among the other guests, the members of the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo and the elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community to an exchange of views within the committee. Members of the observer delegation of Canada and elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community took part in this exchange of views.

19. The preliminary conclusion following these exchanges is that provisions relating to the maintenance of order and the Code of conduct should apply (*mutatis mutandis*) to Guests of the Assembly, with the exception of the detailed provisions on declarations of interest and those with specific roles within the Assembly, which are arguably disproportionate for Guests of the Assembly. It was agreed that the Rules of Procedure would be improved by greater clarity as to the application of conduct provisions to Guests of the Assembly.

4.1. Extent of engagement of Guests of the Assembly in its work

20. In part, the proportionality, necessity and relevance of different requirements of the Assembly's ethical framework depends on the extent to which Guests of the Assembly participate in the work of the Assembly. In brief:

– None of the Guests of the Assembly can vote in either committees or in plenary.

– Members of special guest delegations, observer delegations and partner for democracy delegations can speak in plenary. Among the other guests, the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo and the elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community can also speak in plenary, while the members of the representative delegation of the Belarusian democratic forces cannot.

– Members of special guest delegations, observer delegations, partner for democracy delegations and all other guests can attend and speak in meetings of the thematic committees. They may not attend meetings of the institutional committees, the Bureau and the Joint Committee.

– None of the Guests of the Assembly can be appointed to specific roles within the Assembly, with the exception of certain Partner for democracy delegations with additional rights who can be appointed as rapporteur for information only – this is currently the case only for Morocco.

4.2. Declaration to respect the values by Guests of the Assembly: should Guests of the Assembly have to sign a declaration to respect the Council of Europe's values?

21. When members of the Assembly submit their credentials, they must complete a declaration stating that they subscribe to the aims and principles of the Council of Europe, and that they have read and will abide by the Code of Conduct. The same rules apply to special guest delegations. The relevant wording is:

> *"I, the undersigned, …., hereby affirm and state that I subscribe to the aims and basic principles of the Council of Europe and its Assembly, mentioned in the preamble, in Article 1.a and in Article 3 of the Statute of the Council of Europe, and Article A.2 of the Basic Principles of the Assembly. I declare that I have read and understood the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly and I undertake to abide by its provisions"'.*

22. Other than special guest delegations (of which there are currently no active delegations), Guests of the Assembly do not submit their credentials for ratification. Instead:

– Observer and partner for democracy delegations submit a list of names which is transmitted to the Table Office and then added to the webpage without any consideration by the Bureau or the Assembly.

– The names of the other guests are considered by the Bureau and then ratified by the Assembly through the Progress Report.

23. Most of these delegations are subject to similar procedural requirements as for member delegations (gender, fair representation of the political parties or groups), but as the process for considering the list of names varies, the practical application of these criteria is not always as exigent for Guests of the Assembly. The procedural requirement to sign a declaration to respect the values of the Council of Europe or abide by its ethical standards is, however, absent for Guests of the Assembly (other than special guest delegations).

24. In light of the active engagement of all Guests of the Assembly in its work and in line with the conclusion of the hearing and discussions we held in the committee, I propose that when the composition of their delegation is submitted at the beginning of the session, members from observer delegations, partner for democracy delegations and all other guests (namely the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo, the elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community and the members of the representative delegation of the Belarusian democratic forces) should also be required to make a bespoke declaration to respect the values of the Council of Europe and to abide by its ethical standards. Possible language could be:

> *"I, the undersigned, …., hereby affirm and state that I will conduct my activities linked to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in a manner consistent with the values and ethical standards of the Council of Europe. I declare that I have read and understood the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly and I undertake to abide by its provisions"'.*

4.3. Declarations of interests by Guests of the Assembly: should the Assembly require Guests of the Assembly to make a declaration of interests?

25. At present, a written declaration of interests is only required from member State delegations. It is important to consider whether this is correct or whether one should be required from Guests of the Assembly with enhanced participation rights.

26. A declaration of interest is required from all members of the Assembly (irrespective of whether they have a special role). Indeed, a member cannot take the floor without making an oral or written declaration of interests. However, members of the Assembly can speak and vote in all proceedings, whereas Guests of the Assembly can never vote in proceedings, and have somewhat more limited speaking rights.

27. I consider that a declaration of interests should not be required from Guests of the Assembly as they do not have decision-making powers such as the right to vote or a right to take on specific roles within the Assembly. However, in light of this, there should be a clear obligation on Guests of the Assembly to make an oral declaration in a debate if they have any interests relevant to a debate.

28. Members of partner for democracy delegations with enhanced rights (for example to be rapporteur for an information report) should be required to make a declaration of interests within 30 days if appointed rapporteur.

5. Conclusion

29. Whilst this report benefits from a substantive reference in relation to applying the ethical framework to Guests of the Assembly, the reference that is part of the restructuring and simplification project excludes scope for significant substantive amendments. For that element of this work I have therefore sought to retain the drafting style as for the restructuring of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, whilst ensuring that any interpretations as to how procedures would be implied are set out more clearly in the modalities for the external relations of the Assembly.

30. As concerns the Assembly's ethical framework, it is important that ethical standards applicable are proportionate and realistic to the level of active engagement in the work of the Assembly and that all active participants in the work of the Assembly have clarity as to the ethical standards that apply to their conduct within the Assembly. Specifically, I conclude that:

– the Code of conduct should also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to Guests of the Assembly;

– guests of the Assembly should be required to make a written statement subscribing to the values of the Council of Europe when their names are submitted;

– guests of the Assembly should not be required to make a written declaration of interests, unless a member of a partner for democracy delegation is appointed as a rapporteur for an information report.