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Establishment of a “Partner for democracy” status with the Parliamentary Assembly

Report¹

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

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Summary

The report responds to a number of formal or informal requests from parliaments of non-member states to upgrade their relations with the Parliamentary Assembly and put them on an institutional basis.

It recalls that co-operation at parliamentary level was of key importance in the process of *rapprochement* of the central and eastern European states with the Council of Europe, and refers to the special guest status which was created in order to provide an institutional framework for parliaments of acceding countries to participate in the work of the Assembly.

While stating that stepping up existing relations with parliaments of neighbouring states would contribute to further promoting Council of Europe values in these countries, the report concludes that the existing Rules of Procedure do not provide an appropriate framework for it.

Accordingly, the report suggests the establishment of a new “Partner for democracy” status with the Assembly, and sets forth specific parameters for it.

1. Reference to committee: Reference 3378 of 5 October 2007.



A. Draft resolution

1. The Parliamentary Assembly reaffirms its strong commitment to developing co-operation with neighbouring regions as a means of consolidating democratic transformations and promoting stability, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law, as expressed, *inter alia*, in its [Recommendation 1724 \(2005\)](#) on the Council of Europe and the European Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union, its [Resolution 1506 \(2006\)](#) on external relations of the Council of Europe, its [Resolution 1598 \(2008\)](#) on strengthening co-operation with the Maghreb countries, and its [Resolution 1599 \(2008\)](#) on the situation in the republics of central Asia.
2. It also recalls that the Council of Europe Heads of State and Government, meeting for the Warsaw Summit in May 2005, expressed their commitment to new intercultural and inter-religious dialogue with neighbouring regions – the southern Mediterranean, the Middle East and central Asia – based on respect for universal human rights.
3. In this context, the Assembly takes positive note of the progress made recently by the various bodies, institutions and mechanisms in developing Council of Europe co-operation with non-member states in neighbouring regions. It particularly welcomes the accession of a number of non-member states to several Council of Europe conventions and partial agreements.
4. The Assembly further notes that both the European Union, in the framework of its European Neighbourhood Policy, and the OSCE, under its relations with the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, are contributing to the promotion of democratic principles in Europe's neighbourhood.
5. The Assembly also refers to its own efforts to establish working contacts with parliaments of neighbouring countries, and welcomes ongoing co-operation with the parliaments of Algeria, Kazakhstan, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as with the Palestinian Legislative Council.
6. It notes that several of these parliaments have expressed interest in upgrading the status of the existing co-operation, and in establishing a relationship on a permanent basis.
7. The Assembly recalls that political dialogue and co-operation at parliamentary level was of key importance in the process of *rapprochement* between central and eastern European states and the Council of Europe in the early 1990s.
8. It is convinced that strengthening the existing working relations with parliaments of neighbouring countries would be similarly decisive for establishing a new partnership as well as for promoting parliamentary democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the principles of the rule of law in these countries. It stands ready to play fully its role as the political engine of the Council of Europe, and to take the lead in building institutionalised relations with the neighbourhood.
9. The Assembly believes that its ongoing co-operation with parliaments of neighbouring countries would gain in coherence, efficiency and visibility if it were to be put on an institutional basis. However, it is aware that its existing Rules of Procedure do not provide an appropriate framework for such co-operation.
10. Special Guest status with the Assembly (Rule 59 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly) was established as a provisional status for parliaments of European non-member states which applied for membership in the Council of Europe. Observer status with the Assembly (Rule 60), for its part, was designed for parliaments of non-European democracies willing to contribute to democratic transitions in Europe.
11. Therefore the Assembly resolves to establish a new status for institutional co-operation with parliaments of non-member states in neighbouring regions wishing to benefit from the Assembly's experience in democracy-building and to participate in the political debate on common challenges which transcend European boundaries.
12. The Assembly decides that the new status shall be called "Partner for democracy". It shall be defined in terms similar to those of Special Guest status (Rule 59 of the Rules of Procedure), with the necessary modifications, and in particular:
 - 12.1. the decision on granting, on suspending and/or withdrawing "Partner for democracy" status shall be taken by the Assembly following a debate in plenary on a report by the Political Affairs Committee with an opinion by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights;

12.2. the formal request for “Partner for democracy” status, to be addressed to the President of the Assembly by the President of the parliament concerned, shall contain the following elements:

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

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

12.2.3. 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;

12.2.4. a commitment to organise free and fair elections conforming to international standards in the matter;

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

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

12.3. the number of members of a “Partner for democracy” delegation shall be fixed by the Assembly; its composition shall respect, *inter alia*, the principle of gender equality;

12.4. the Assembly shall periodically review the progress made by the parliaments concerned in the framework of the “Partner for democracy” status.

13. Furthermore, when examining a request for “Partner for democracy” status, particular consideration shall be given to the existence of a multi-party composition of the parliament and to the respect of the rights of the opposition.

14. Having regard to the particular situation of each country whose parliament wishes to obtain “Partner for democracy” status, the Assembly could, on the proposal of the committees concerned, set out specific conditions to be met before or after the status has been granted.

15. The 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), should be eligible to request “Partner for democracy” status with the Assembly. However, requests from parliaments of other states may also be considered if the Bureau of the Assembly so decides.

16. The Assembly asks its relevant committee to prepare amendments to its Rules of Procedure in accordance with the present resolution.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Van den Brande

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1. Introduction

1. The motion for a resolution entitled "Need for a Council of Europe neighbourhood policy" on which this report is based, was presented by the former chair of the Political Affairs Committee, Mr Ateş. It concerns the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) launched by the European Union (EU) in 2004 with the aim of increasing prosperity, stability and security in regions with land or sea borders with the EU.

2. The motion also notes that certain elements of the ENP, such as the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, are areas in which the Council of Europe is a reference point. It also points out that, from the geographical point of view, some countries involved in the ENP are also neighbours of the Council of Europe. However, our Organisation has a larger neighbourhood.

3. In conclusion, the motion states that the Council of Europe also needs a coherent policy for relations with neighbouring countries and advocates the drawing up of such a policy, which should be co-ordinated with the EU so as to avoid unnecessary duplications and promote the same set of standards.

4. On the basis of this motion, I presented a preliminary outline report to the committee in June 2008 and an introductory memorandum in December 2008. In this latter document, I set out a number of ideas and questions concerning the relevance, benefits and feasibility of a Council of Europe neighbourhood policy. During the discussion in the committee, several of my colleagues expressed the same doubts.

5. After this discussion and two fact-finding visits that I made to Brussels (European Commission) and Vienna (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – OSCE), I reached the conclusion that this was not the right time to consider a new and ambitious Council of Europe policy concerning the neighbourhood of our Organisation. The activities carried out in the context of the various existing co-operation mechanisms – which can naturally be stepped up subject to the availability of the necessary resources – are already making a useful contribution to the promotion of the Council of Europe's fundamental values beyond its borders.

6. However, in view of the interest expressed by several of the neighbouring countries' parliaments in strengthening ties with the Parliamentary Assembly, I propose the creation of a new status with the Assembly that will enable interparliamentary co-operation with these partners to be developed within an appropriate institutional framework.

7. I therefore propose modifying the title of the report so as to properly reflect the content of the initiative.

2. Is a new Council of Europe neighbourhood policy necessary?

8. It needs to be pointed out that the Assembly has stated on several occasions in the past that it supports the more active opening-up of the Council of Europe to non-member states. In particular, [Resolution 1506 \(2006\)](#) on external relations of the Council of Europe called for the development of co-operation with neighbouring regions as a means of consolidating their democratic transformation and promoting stability, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

9. [Resolution 1598 \(2008\)](#) on strengthening co-operation with the Maghreb countries and [Resolution 1599 \(2008\)](#) on the situation in the republics of central Asia also contain concrete proposals for intensifying relations with these two regions of the world that are close neighbours of Europe.

10. This desire to open up the Council has also been confirmed by the Organisation's heads of state and government of the Council of Europe: the action plan adopted at the Warsaw Summit in May 2005 contains a commitment to encouraging a new intercultural and interreligious dialogue with the neighbouring regions – the southern shore of the Mediterranean, the Middle East and central Asia – based on respect for universal human rights.

11. However, the Committee of Ministers has expressed a more reserved view. In its response to [Recommendation 1753 \(2006\)](#) on external relations of the Council of Europe it stated that:

2. Whilst acknowledging the importance of external relations for the Council of Europe, and of the contribution from the Organisation to the enhancement of universal values outside of Europe, the Committee of Ministers is nevertheless convinced that the priority must be placed on the European dimension of the Organisation's mission.

12. I find this approach fully justified in the present circumstances. In fact, while being in favour of a global, coherent and more active initiative at the level of the Organisation, I am convinced that it is not the right time for an ambitious external relations initiative, especially given the serious problems that need to be addressed in Europe. I recall, however, that in the past, the Assembly has also often played the role of pioneer which has led to activities of the Council of Europe in new areas of current events.

13. At the same time, we should not underestimate the results already achieved and the potential for co-operation between the Council of Europe and non-member states that has been developing for some years now and can take various forms depending on the actual needs expressed by the partners and the Organisation's priorities.

14. The Council of Europe is an organisation based on the values and principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and on all related standards. Its main achievement is its conventions. It should be reiterated, that most of the conventions of the Council of Europe are open to non-member states. I welcome the interest they generate in the neighbouring regions.

15. It is also necessary to underline the important role played by the enlarged partial agreements in the promotion of the Council of Europe's principles, especially the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre) and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), as well as the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA). These activities are very much appreciated both by our partners in the participating non-member states and the Council's institutional partners, especially the European Union and the OSCE.

16. With regard to the North-South Centre, I note with satisfaction that it has recently considerably stepped up these activities and I welcome, in particular, Morocco's recent application to join this instrument of co-operation.

17. As far as the Venice Commission is concerned, it should be noted that among its full members are several non-member states of the Council of Europe, including those in neighbouring regions (for example Algeria, Morocco, Kirghizstan and Tunisia).

18. The Co-operation Group to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs (Pompidou Group) has also developed co-operation with the neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean region. Since 2006, the MedNET Mediterranean network for co-operation on drugs and addictions (including alcohol and tobacco) has been created to promote co-operation, exchange and two-way knowledge transfer between countries of the Mediterranean and European member countries of the Pompidou Group. Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia participate already in this network, and contacts have been established with Egypt.

19. In view of the foregoing, and while remaining a supporter of a global approach at the level of the Council of Europe, I consider the time is not right for the Assembly to propose launching a new Council of Europe neighbourhood policy at the intergovernmental level. This idea could perhaps be taken up later on if the potential partners demonstrate a clear interest and conditions allow. It has to be said that this is not the case at the moment, so in the meantime better use should be made to stimulate and promote all the potential provided by the existing co-operation mechanisms.

20. On the other hand, I think it is worthwhile and timely to propose the creation of an institutional framework for intensifying co-operation with the neighbouring countries' parliaments at the level of the Parliamentary Assembly in order to promote dialogue on the essential values and in this way encourage progress in the reforms in the countries concerned. If this experience shows itself to be useful at parliamentary level and if it arouses interest, we could envisage an extension to other levels.

3. The case for a new status aimed at strengthening the parliamentary dimension of co-operation

3.1. The importance of the parliamentary dimension

21. Parliamentary democracy is one of the fundamental aspects of European societies. Parliaments have made a key contribution to the democratic reform process throughout Europe and are continuing to promote and protect these universal values at the national level.

22. The European parliamentary experience generates considerable interest in many neighbouring countries, which are endeavouring to draw on it in order to make progress with reforms on the road to better governance based on these values and universal principles.

23. In this area, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, as a direct offshoot of European countries' parliaments, occupies a unique place in that it brings together the national parliamentary experience of the whole of Europe, and sharing that experience is a key aspect of the promotion of the common universal values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

3.2. The role of parliamentary co-operation in the changes of the 1990s

24. In this connection, it is necessary to reiterate that contacts, political dialogue and co-operation between the Assembly and the parliaments of the countries of central and eastern Europe played an important role in the democratic reform process in the early 1990s and, with activities of other bodies of the Organisation, have laid the foundations for bringing those countries' political systems and institutions closer to European standards, thus making it possible for them to join the Council of Europe.

25. In order to enable the parliamentarians of the countries of central and eastern Europe to participate in its work and to help them reach the level of democratic development necessary to become a member, the Assembly set up an institutional framework in the form of special guest status, which gave them an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the European parliamentary culture, traditions and practices, while at the same time taking part in the political debate.

26. This experience could be taken into account in order to respond appropriately to the desire to intensify and provide a better framework for co-operation with the Assembly, a desire expressed by some neighbouring countries' parliaments with which the Assembly already has ongoing contacts to varying degrees. However, it is worth remembering, as indicated in paragraph 39 below, that the special guest status in its existing form is not adapted to the actual situation, as it had been conceived in the sense of accession to the Council of Europe.

3.3. Existing co-operation and partners' expectations

27. As already indicated, for several years now, the Assembly has attached great importance to promoting working relations with the parliaments of certain neighbouring countries of the Council of Europe.

28. It should be reiterated that in its [Resolution 1598 \(2008\)](#) on strengthening co-operation with the Maghreb countries the Assembly said it was "determined to step up co-operation with the parliaments of the three Maghreb countries by inviting parliamentary delegations to attend plenary sessions of the Assembly and to be heard by the Political Affairs Committee".

29. In turn, the parliaments of the three Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) have shown interest in intensifying contacts already in existence and strengthening co-operation with the Assembly. They accepted the Assembly President's invitation to appoint representatives to attend the January and April 2009 part-sessions, which enabled Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian parliamentarians to familiarise themselves with the Assembly's work and engage in exchanges of views with the rapporteurs of the various committees responsible for dealing with issues relating to their countries.

30. The Political Affairs Committee also organised, through its Sub-Committee on External Relations, a more in-depth exchange of views on relations with the Maghreb countries' parliaments. The representatives of these parliaments indicated their desire to benefit from the European experience when establishing standards and safeguarding the values to which they are aspiring to subscribe and expressed their clear support for intensifying co-operation with the Assembly as a way of achieving these objectives.

31. The representatives of the three parliaments of the Maghreb countries clearly indicated their desire to obtain observer status with the Assembly, although to this day no formal application has yet been made.

32. In [Resolution 1599 \(2008\)](#) on the situation in the republics of central Asia, the Assembly declared “its readiness to contribute to establishing political dialogue with central Asia at the parliamentary level aimed at the strengthening of democratic principles and standards”. It decided to consider a series of measures to initiate this dialogue, including inviting representatives of these parliaments to participate in the plenary sessions, committee meetings and other activities dealing with matters of common interest.

33. Of the five central Asian countries, it is the Kazakhstan Parliament that has shown the most interest in co-operation with the Assembly. Since 2004, the Kazakhstan Parliament has been developing its relations with the Assembly on the basis of a co-operation agreement. Parliamentarians representing the two chambers regularly attend the Assembly’s plenary sessions and participate in the work of some of the committees. In November 2006, the Kazakhstan Parliament officially asked to be granted observer status with the Assembly.

34. The Assembly is also developing contacts with the Palestinian Legislative Council, most of which are in the context of the Assembly’s efforts to help contribute to the creation of suitable conditions to bring about a settlement of the Middle East conflict, since the Israeli Knesset has had observer status with the Assembly since 1957. Representatives of the Palestinian Legislative Council have been unofficially asking to be granted observer status for some time now in order to put them on a equal footing with their Knesset colleagues, even if no official demand has been submitted.

35. Accordingly, we note that there are a number of formal or informal requests for observer status with the Assembly to be granted to some parliaments that are already co-operating with it but think that the institutionalised recognition of that co-operation could make it more visible, more coherent and more effective.

36. I share the view that the Assembly’s co-operation with the parliaments of the neighbouring countries could become more coherent, more effective and more visible if it were provided with an institutional basis. However, that basis should be precisely determined and fully reflect the aims and conditions of the co-operation.

3.4. Existing regulatory framework

37. In [Recommendation 1247 \(1994\)](#) on the enlargement of the Council of Europe, the Assembly estimated that:

9. Countries bordering directly on Council of Europe member states should be able to enjoy privileged relations with the Parliamentary Assembly, if they so wish. This applies in particular to the states on the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean.

38. The Assembly’s Rules of Procedure provide for two forms of institutionalised co-operation and association with the parliaments of non-Council of Europe members: special guest status (Rule 59) and observer status with the Assembly (Article 60). However, I do not think that either of these two statuses are appropriate for the situation of the above-mentioned parliaments.

39. The aim of special guest status (which was introduced in 1989) is to foster closer relations with the national parliaments of the European non-member states. Although the description of this status makes no direct reference to joining the Council of Europe, granting it has always been considered an intermediate stage in the accession process, because it enables the parliament concerned to be represented in, and work with, the Assembly, especially in determining the accession conditions.

40. It is clear that the countries belonging to Europe’s neighbouring regions cannot be considered as potential applicants for membership. It is worth recalling, in this regard, [Recommendation 1247 \(1994\)](#) on the enlargement of the Council of Europe, as well as the document on external relations of the Assembly approved by the Bureau in 2003. As a consequence special guest status cannot be granted to the parliaments of these countries, especially as Rule 59 expressly refers to the parliaments of the European states.

41. As far as observer status with the Assembly is concerned, it must be seen in the historical context and in connection with observer status with the Council of Europe, introduced by the Committee of Ministers’ Statutory Resolution (93) 26, which sought to create an institutional framework to enable non-European democratic states, such as the United States, Canada and Japan, to participate in the Council’s activities, aimed at contributing to democratic change and institutional reforms in the countries in transition towards democracy.

42. Observer status with the Assembly serves to ensure the parliamentary dimension of this co-operation, and the initial condition for granting it was obtaining observer status with the Organisation.

43. It should be stressed that the Assembly, which has been asked for its opinion on applications by states and parliaments interested in being granted observer status, has been very much aware that those states have made a significant contribution, including financially, to the Council's activities in the transition countries. Moreover, several observer states continue to bring their financial contributions to projects and programmes of the Council of Europe.

44. It is to be assumed that the interest of the neighbouring countries' parliaments in obtaining observer status with the Assembly does not so much arise because of their intention to contribute to reforms in central and eastern Europe but rather because of their desire to benefit from the experience of implementing standards and democratic values and to participate in the political debate.

45. It should be reiterated that the granting of observer status is subject to compliance with the principles of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms – a compliance which is assessed by the Assembly when it considers the application. To this day, the United States of America, Canada, Japan, Mexico and the Holy See benefit from observer status to the Council of Europe. In addition the parliaments of Canada, Mexico and Israel have observer status with the Assembly. While it is to be hoped that compliance with these principles in the future constitute the main objective of applications for observer status, then the countries concerned are probably not yet able to provide a full guarantee that these principles are implemented.

46. I therefore conclude that observer status is not the appropriate option for the needs and expectations of the neighbouring countries' parliaments either.

47. The parliaments of the countries bordering the Council of Europe member states also have the possibility of concluding special co-operation agreements with the Assembly. This option is based on [Recommendation 1247 \(1994\)](#) on the enlargement of the Council of Europe. It is also mentioned in the para-regulatory document on the Assembly's external relations approved by the Bureau of the Assembly.

48. However, this form of co-operation has not generated much interest among the parliaments concerned, which suggests that it does not offer sufficient clarity and visibility. At the moment, only the Kazakhstan Parliament takes advantage of it.

49. I can therefore only observe that the present Rules of Procedure of the Assembly do not provide an appropriate framework for institutionalising parliamentary co-operation with the Assembly's partners in the Council of Europe's neighbourhood.

3.5. Proposal for a new status

50. In order to remedy this situation, I propose the creation of a new formal status with the Assembly. The aim of this status should be to gradually reinforce institutional relations with the parliaments of non-member countries situated in geographical regions close to Europe who wish to benefit from the Assembly's experience with regard to strengthening democracy and to participate in the political debate on common issues that extend beyond the European borders. These parliaments may already co-operate with the Assembly within the framework of a working agreement.

51. This new status could be called "Partner for democracy" in order to highlight its main objective, which is to contribute to the construction, consolidation and optimisation of democracy, as well as to safeguard the principles of respect for human rights and the rule of law, which must be an integral part of any genuine democracy.

52. Given this objective of fostering and assisting with transitions towards democracy, I think the new status could be broadly based on the special guest status, but without opening the prospect of membership to the Organisation. However, a number of important modifications would have to be made.

53. The procedure for granting special guest status is decided on by the Bureau after consulting the Political Affairs Committee. It would, in my opinion, be more appropriate for the decision to grant "Partner for democracy" status to be taken by the Assembly following a plenary debate based on a Political Affairs Committee report and an opinion by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. That would ensure greater visibility and transparency and make the procedure more solemn in nature – as in the case of a state's accession to the Council of Europe.

54. Similarly, if circumstances were to compel us to review the status granted to a parliament with a view to suspending or withdrawing it, it should also be for the Assembly to take such a decision, on the proposal of the Political Affairs Committee with an opinion from the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

55. Rule 59.2 of the Rules of Procedure states that “any formal request for Special Guest status shall be addressed to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly by the President of the parliament concerned” but does not specify the content of that request. In view of the main objective of the new status, I believe it is important that such a request should contain a number of general commitments as to the aims to be achieved. These commitments could consist of the following elements among others:

55.1. an explicit reference to the aspiration of the parliament concerned to take on board the universal values which the Council of Europe defends: those of pluralist democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;

55.2. a commitment to take action and encourage the competent authorities to introduce a moratorium on executions and to abolish capital punishment;

55.3. a declaration that the parliament concerned intends to draw on the Assembly’s experience and on the expertise of the Venice Commission in its institutional and legislative work;

55.4. a commitment to organise free and fair elections conforming to the international standards in the matter;

55.5. a commitment to encourage its country’s competent authorities to accede to the relevant Council of Europe conventions that can be signed and ratified by non-member states, especially those relating to human rights, the rule of law and democracy;

55.6. an obligation to inform the Assembly on a regular basis on the progress achieved in implementing the Council of Europe’s principles.

56. Having regard to the particular situation of each country whose parliament wishes to obtain the “Partner for democracy” status, the Assembly could, on the proposal of the committees concerned, set out specific conditions to be met before or after the status has been granted.

57. Amongst these conditions, taking into account the commitment of the Assembly to the principle of pluralist democracy, during the examination of a demand for “Partner for democracy” status, particular attention should be given to the existence of representation of different political parties in the parliament concerned and to the respect of the rights of the opposition.

58. As it is proposed that the decision to grant “Partner for democracy” status will be taken by the Assembly, it is logical that the number of members of a delegation benefiting from this status should also be laid down by the Assembly. Besides the criteria of fair representation of parties and political groups at the heart of the delegation (such as defined in paragraph 59.5 of the Rules of Procedure), the criteria of gender equality must be respected.

59. It is important that admission to “Partner for democracy” status should not be seen as a single act but as the beginning of a long-term process. The Assembly must therefore have the possibility of periodically reviewing the progress achieved by the parliaments concerned in connection with this status. The Political Affairs Committee could, for example, be asked to present periodical reports on this subject and discuss the implementation by the parliament concerned of the general commitments contained in the formal request, as well as, wherever necessary, any specific conditions laid down by the Assembly.

60. In my opinion, the national parliaments of all the states of the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East participating in the Barcelona Process – the Union for the Mediterranean, including the Palestinian Legislative Council, and the central Asian OSCE participants (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) should be able to apply for “Partner for democracy” status with the Assembly.

61. However, should there be applications for this status from parliaments of other states, the Bureau should be given the task of assessing, on a case-by-case basis, whether such applications could be accepted.

4. Conclusions

62. My main conclusions may be summarised as follows:

62.1. Although proposing a new and ambitious Council of Europe neighbourhood policy might be an interesting idea, subject to the availability of resources and the confirmed interest on the part of the potential partners, it has to be said that this is not the right time to pursue this.

62.2. The activities carried out at the intergovernmental level in the context of the various existing mechanisms for co-operating with partners that are not members of the Council of Europe – such activities can, of course, be intensified subject to the availability of resources – are already making a useful contribution to the promotion of the Organisation's fundamental values beyond its own borders.

62.3. However, at the parliamentary level the potential exists for intensifying co-operation with the parliaments of certain Council of Europe neighbours. In order to respond to the need for a better framework for this co-operation, I propose the creation of a new "Partner for democracy" status with the Assembly.

Reporting committee: Political Affairs Committee

Reference to committee: Reference 3378 of 5 October 2007

Draft resolution adopted by the committee on 28 April 2009

Members of the committee: Mr Göran **Lindblad** (Chairperson), Mr David **Wilshire** (Vice-Chairperson), Mr Björn **Von Sydow** (Vice-Chairperson), Mrs Kristiina **Ojuland** (Vice-Chairperson), Mrs Fátima Aburto Baselga, Mr François **Agius**, Mr Alexander Babakov (alternate: Mr Sergey **Markov**), Mr Viorel **Badea**, Mr Denis Badré (alternate: Mr Laurent **Béteille**), Mr Ryszard **Bender**, Mr Andris **Bērziņš**, Mrs Gudfinna Bjarnadóttir, Mr Pedrag Bošković, Mr Luc **Van den Brande**, Mr Mevlüt **Çavuşoğlu**, Mr Lorenzo Cesa, Mr Titus Corlăţean, Ms Anna **Čurdová**, Mr Rick Daems, Mr Dumitru Diacov, Ms Josette Durrieu, Mr Frank Fahey, Mr Joan Albert Farré Santuré, Mr Pietro **Fassino**, Mr Per-Kristian Foss, Mr György Frunda, Mr Jean-Charles Gardetto, Mr Marco Gatti, Mr Charles Goerens, Mr Andreas Gross, Mr Michael **Hancock**, Mr Davit Harutiunyan (alternate: Mr Avet **Adonts**), Mr Joachim **Hörster**, Mrs Sinikka **Hurskainen**, Mr Tadeusz Iwiński, Mr Bakir Izetbegović, Mr Michael Aastrup Jensen, Mr Miloš Jevtić (alternate: Mr Miloš **Aligrudić**), Mrs Birgen **Keleş**, Mr Victor Kolesnikov (alternate: Mrs Olha **Herasym'yuk**), Mr Konstantin Kosachev, Mr Jean-Pierre Kucheida, Ms Darja **Lavtižar-Bebler**, Mr René van der Linden (alternate: Mr Tuur **Elzinga**), Mr Dariusz Lipiński, Mr Juan Fernando López Aguilar, Mr Younal Loutfi, Mr Gennaro Malgieri, Mr Dick Marty, Mr Frano Matušić, Mr Dragoljub **Mićunović**, Mr Jean-Claude **Mignon**, Ms Nadezhda Mikhailova (alternate: Mr Ivan **Ivanov**), Mr Aydin Mirzazada (alternate: Mr Sabir **Hajiyev**), Mr João Bosco Mota Amaral, Mr Gebhard **Negele**, Mrs Miroslava Nemcova, Mr Zsolt Németh, Mr Fritz Neugebauer, Mr Hryhoriy **Omelchenko**, Mr Theodoros Pangalos, Mr Aristotelis Pavlidis, Mr Ivan **Popescu**, Mr Christos Pourgourides, Mr John **Prescott**, Mr Gabino Puche, Mr Ilir Rusmali, Mr Oliver Sambevski, Mr Ingo **Schmitt**, Mr Samad Seyidov, Mr Leonid Slutsky, Mr Rainer Steenblock, Mr Zoltán **Szabó**, Mr Mehmet Tekelioğlu, Mr Han Ten Broeke, Lord Tomlinson (alternate: Mr Denis **MacShane**), Mr Petré Tsiskarishvili, Mr Mihai Tudose, Mr Ilyas Umakhanov, Mr José Vera Jardim, Mr Luigi **Vitali**, Mr Wolfgang Wodarg (alternate: Mr Johannes **Pflug**), Ms Gisela Wurm, Mr Boris Zala, Mr Emanuelis **Zingueris**

Ex officio: Mr Mátyás Eörsi, Mr Tiny **Kox**

NB: The names of the members who took part in the meeting are printed in **bold**

Secretariat of the committee: Mr Perin, Mrs Nachilo, Mr Chevtchenko, Mrs Sirtori-Milner, Ms Alléon