



Resolution 2579 (2024)¹

Civil society and the Parliamentary Assembly: towards greater transparency and engagement

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In the Reykjavik Declaration adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (16-17 May 2023), the heads of State and government reaffirmed that “civil society is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy”. The Parliamentary Assembly welcomes this recognition. The role that civil society plays in the work of the Assembly and in the democratic life of Council of Europe member States is to be celebrated and protected.
2. While the exchange of information and ideas with public decision makers is a vital part of democracy, it is also crucial that this exchange is sufficiently transparent. The Assembly has led calls for greater transparency of lobbying, through [Recommendation 1908 \(2010\)](#) “Lobbying in a democratic society (European code of good conduct on lobbying)”, [Resolution 1744 \(2010\)](#) “Extra-institutional actors in the democratic system” and [Resolution 1943 \(2013\)](#) “Corruption as a threat to the rule of law”. Since the adoption of these texts, lobbying regulations have proliferated in different member States. Such regulations usually cover the activity of a wide range of actors, including lobbyists working for commercial interests (either in-house or as consultants), non-governmental organisations, think tanks, trade unions and trade associations.
3. The Assembly recognises the need to prepare its own regulations on the work of these actors to ensure transparency and good practice. When doing so, it will use the term “interest representative” to refer to any individual or organisation that carries out activities with the objective of influencing the policy, guidelines or decision making of Council of Europe bodies.
4. Meanwhile, the Assembly is concerned by reports suggesting that it has become less accessible to civil society. In the Reykjavik Declaration, the heads of State and government called for a review and for the further reinforcement of the Organisation’s outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, civil society organisations and national human rights institutions. The Assembly intends to play a leading role in this context, by reviewing and further reinforcing its own outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, these groups.
5. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the “Secretary General’s Roadmap on the Council of Europe’s Engagement with Civil Society 2024-2027” as a positive step in the follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration. The Assembly calls on the Secretary General to proceed with the implementation of the road map as soon as possible and takes note of the proposals for practical measures which the Assembly could put into action.
6. The Assembly therefore resolves to increase its exchanges with civil society, while simultaneously increasing the transparency of its exchanges with interest representatives as a whole.
7. Noting the need to increase the transparency of the work of interest representatives, the Assembly resolves to ensure that their co-operation with the Assembly is governed by a code of conduct, taking into account the possible development of a framework code of conduct applicable to the Organisation as a whole.

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee*, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 29 November 2024 (see [Doc. 16067](#), report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Ms Azadeh Rojhan).
See also [Recommendation 2287 \(2024\)](#).



8. The code of conduct applicable to interest representatives who engage with the Assembly should ensure the protection of freedom of expression and of association, and comply with relevant international standards (including Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal regulation of lobbying activities in the context of public decision making). At a minimum, the future code should:

- 8.1. require interest representatives to declare their name and who they work for, the interests and objectives they promote, and the legal or natural persons that they represent, when interacting with parliamentarians, their staff or members of the secretariats of the Assembly and its political groups;
- 8.2. require interest representatives to act honestly and in good faith;
- 8.3. prohibit interest representatives from having conflicts of interest;
- 8.4. prohibit interest representatives from using undue pressure, offensive language or other improper behaviour;
- 8.5. prohibit interest representatives from inducing parliamentarians, their staff or members of the secretariats of the Assembly and its political groups from contravening the rules and standards applicable to them.

9. The Assembly further resolves to examine possible changes to the code of conduct for members of the Assembly which would increase the transparency of exchanges with interest representatives, also in compliance with the principles of Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)2, for example, by extending the prohibition on the seeking or taking of instructions to a wider range of members fulfilling important functions, such as chairpersons of committees and sub-committees, leaders of political groups, members of the Bureau of the Assembly and the President of the Assembly.

10. Noting the need to review and further reinforce its outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, civil society, the Assembly resolves to:

- 10.1. make more committee meetings open to the public, by agreeing that all committee hearings will be open to the public as a general rule and considering including such a principle in the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly;
- 10.2. examine the feasibility of regular exchanges between civil society and Assembly members, for example with the Presidential Committee or the Bureau of the Assembly.

11. The Assembly resolves to examine further steps to increase the accessibility of its work, including by:

- 11.1. making it easier for civil society to participate in part-sessions of the Assembly, for example by providing civil society representatives with the opportunity to register directly to have access to Council of Europe premises, simplifying the process for civil society to participate and organise side events (by decreasing the time that such requests need to be made in advance and by making more rooms available), providing a dedicated office space for civil society and allowing civil society to reserve meeting rooms;
- 11.2. making more information available to civil society members attending the Assembly's sessions, such as through information sessions for civil society at the beginning of each Assembly session conducted by the Secretariat and by producing a practical written guide on how to engage with the Assembly;
- 11.3. ensuring that introductory memoranda and minutes of public hearings are declassified as a general rule;
- 11.4. making the Assembly's work more accessible online, including through greater use of live-streaming of public hearings, making introductory memoranda and other committee documents available on the Assembly's website at an earlier stage, creating a user-friendly web page that describes reports currently under preparation and how external actors can make an input to them, and making it possible to subscribe to e-mail updates for the work of each committee.

12. Any changes to the Assembly's Rules of Procedure required to implement this Resolution will be introduced through a subsequent resolution to be adopted on the basis of a report by the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs.

13. Finally, the Assembly is concerned by the development of legislation or government bodies in several member States, ostensibly to address the transparency of foreign funding of civil society organisations and not-for-profit media outlets. The Assembly notes that the positive goal of transparency has been manipulated

in certain “foreign agent” laws to undermine the operation or existence of legitimate groups, by using excessive regulation to create an atmosphere of mistrust and a chilling effect on civil society. This was most notable in the Russian Federation, leading the European Court of Human Rights to find violations of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) for 73 non-governmental organisations in the case of *Ecodefence and Others v. Russia*. The Assembly expresses its deep concern that measures to address “foreign agents” in a number of member States, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary and Georgia, will also damage civil society’s work in favour of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and will make it more difficult, or even impossible, for civil society to engage with international organisations.