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Political parties and democracy

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1. Democracy in Europe is in danger. Across the continent, democratic backsliding continues, marked by the corrosion of institutional checks and balances, restrictions on media freedom, disinformation, and foreign interference. It is manifested in declining political participation, weakening public trust, and rising polarisation, which together erode the resilience of democratic systems. Political parties stand at the centre of this crisis. Strong, responsive, and inclusive parties are not only vital for healthy political representation, but indispensable for confronting these threats and safeguarding democracy.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly believes that political parties are the cornerstone of representative democracy. They are the key element of electoral competition, articulate and aggregate citizens' preferences, channel demands into political institutions, facilitate democratic government formation, and enable peaceful alternation of power. Without political parties, pluralism cannot be meaningfully represented, and parliaments cannot function effectively.

3. The Assembly considers that political parties, when they respect democratic norms, foster open competition and act transparently, are not only guarantors of representation but also the most effective agents of democratic renewal in Europe.

4. Political parties play a fundamental role beyond electoral processes. They serve as permanent institutions of democratic education, socialisation, and negotiation. By recruiting political leaders, fostering civic skills, and transmitting democratic values across generations, they build and sustain the trust and legitimacy on which resilient democracies depend. They are uniquely positioned to provide structured fora for dialogue and deliberation, to mediate between diverse social groups, and to transform competing interests into a coherent programme for government.

5. The Assembly observes, however, that political parties in many Council of Europe member States face profound challenges. Long-term decline in membership and active participation, combined with heightened electoral volatility, indicate a weakening of traditional forms of political attachment. Public opinion surveys consistently show that political parties are among the least trusted institutions, with many citizens associating them with elitism, self-interest, or corruption.

6. The erosion of trust has serious consequences. It fuels political apathy, anti-party sentiment, and the rise of anti-establishment movements. Polarisation and political gridlock often stem from parties' inability or unwillingness to build consensus. When parties fail to act as trusted bridges within society, or are perceived as unresponsive to the concerns and needs of citizens, democracy risks becoming dysfunctional.

7. These challenges are unfolding within the broader context of democratic backsliding across Europe, geopolitical

pressures, and persistent attempts at foreign interference aimed at destabilising democracies. At a time when public trust in institutions is fragile, political parties bear a particular responsibility for safeguarding democratic cohesion and stability. Their most basic commitment must be to uphold the core principles of democracy including free and fair elections, respect for pluralism, and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

8. The Assembly, in the fulfilment of its political mandate, has consistently paid close attention to the state of democracy and the institutions that sustain it. It welcomes the call of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for a New Democratic Pact for Europe, and underlines that political parties are an essential motor for democratic renewal.

9. The Council of Europe, particularly through the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), has provided extensive guidance on the regulation and functioning of political parties. Through its "Code of Good Practice in the field of Political Parties" and numerous Opinions, the Venice Commission has underlined foundational principles of transparency, fairness, pluralism, and internal democracy. These standards affirm that political parties must be able to operate freely and independently, while at the same time remaining accountable and respectful of democratic norms.

10. The Assembly considers that these principles remain indispensable for restoring citizens' trust in political parties across Europe, and it is within this framework that it seeks to encourage further modernisation, innovation, and citizen engagement in party life.

11. By enhancing inclusive membership, participatory decision making, and ethical political communication, political parties can reconnect citizens with political institutions and restore confidence in representative democracy. Far from being obsolete, parties can be the central actors in addressing democratic backsliding, rebuilding trust and fostering a democratic culture adapted to contemporary challenges.

12. In light of these considerations, the Assembly underlines that trust must be a guiding principle of all party reform, and calls on political parties across Council of Europe member States to actively demonstrate their integrity, accountability, and responsiveness to citizens' expectations in order to reinforce their role as pillars of both resilient democracies and democratic security in Europe.

13. In order to respond to citizens' expectations, the Assembly calls on political parties to reconnect with citizens by placing social justice and equality at the core of their programmes, ensuring that policies deliver measurable improvements in living standards, access to quality health care, education, housing and decent work.

14. With regard to strengthening the representational link to citizens, the Assembly encourages political parties to widen and deepen opportunities for political participation by:

14.1. developing accessible and flexible pathways for engagement;

14.2. adopting transparent and participatory mechanisms for leadership and candidate selection;

14.3. strengthening intermediary structures, including local branches, affiliated organisations, unions, and civil society platforms, to ensure citizens' perspectives can inform and shape party direction;

14.4. enhancing and sustaining internal forums for deliberation to foster dialogue, reflection, and consensus building among members and supporters.

15. To combat issues of under-representation, the Assembly urges political parties to adopt concrete strategies for inclusion by:

15.1. integrating gender equality, youth participation and diversity into party statutes, vision and strategic plans;

15.2. establishing measurable objectives, targets, and accountability mechanisms to enhance progress on gender balance, youth involvement, and representation of minorities and disadvantaged groups;

15.3. exploring the application of inclusive procedures for candidate selection and leadership recruitment, such as parity measures, transparent quotas, or other measures designed to widen participation;

15.4. ensuring diversity in electoral lists and leadership positions through fair and transparent selection processes.

16. The Assembly further invites political parties to promote diversity and inclusion across their internal functioning by:

16.1. developing support and capacity-building initiatives for under-represented groups;

16.2. endorsing the revised Charter of European political parties for a non-racist and inclusive society;

16.3. establishing mechanisms to prevent and sanction hate speech, incitement to hatred and discrimination by their members.

17. With regard to safeguarding integrity, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to:

17.1. fully implement recommendations by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) on the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns;

17.2. review and enhance national frameworks governing financial contributions to political parties, advertising and electoral campaigns to mitigate the risk of inappropriate or illicit foreign financial interference;

17.3. ensure effective monitoring and introduce clear sanctions against illicit foreign funding.

Amendment 3
Tabled by Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA, Mr Markus WIECHEL, Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK,

Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO, Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 17.3, insert the following paragraph:

"prevent the use of political parties in hybrid warfare, in the spread of division and hostility within society or for pursuing policies that endanger national security, sovereignty or the well-being of citizens."

Amendment 4
Tabled by Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA, Mr Markus WIECHEL, Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK, Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO, Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 17.3, insert the following paragraph:

"ensure that political parties first and foremost serve the interests of their own people and State, as instruments of democratic representation rather than as tools of external manipulation."

18. The Assembly calls on political parties to strengthen internal accountability by:

18.1. adopting codes of conduct and conflict-of-interest rules for party officials;

18.2. establishing transparent disciplinary procedures to address misconduct;

18.3. introducing clear rules on lobbying and relations with donors to safeguard parties from undue influence.

19. In highlighting the role of political parties in sustaining democratic culture, the Assembly:

Amendment 1
Tabled by Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA, Mr Markus WIECHEL, Mr Bob De BRABANDERE, Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK, Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO, Mr Martynas GEDVILAS, Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO, Ms Bianca-Eugenia GAVRILĂ

In the draft resolution, paragraph 19, after the words "in sustaining democratic culture", insert the following words:

", freedom of choice and national representation,"

19.1. calls on political parties to re-centre their role as platforms for dialogue across social divides, promoting compromise and cohesion;

19.2. encourages political parties to provide spaces for democratic education, debate and civic engagement;

19.3. in line with its Resolution 2552 (2024) “Strengthening democracy through participatory and deliberative processes”, calls on political parties to foster more robust

Amendment 2
Tabled by Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA, Mr Markus WIECHEL, Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK,

civic engagement with deliberative technologies and participatory processes.

Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO, Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO, Mr Martynas GEDVILAS

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 19.3, insert the following paragraph:

"condemns political parties that, through their explicit actions or votes, support the deployment of their country's military forces into the territory of other sovereign States or promote expansionism or xenophobia."

Sub-amendment 1 to amendment 2
Tabled by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

In amendment 2, replace the words "the deployment of their country's military forces into the territory of other sovereign States or promote expansionism or xenophobia" with the following words:

"military aggression against sovereign States"

20. The Assembly recommends that political parties harness digital tools and innovations responsibly by:

Amendment 5
Tabled by Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA, Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK, Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO, Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO, Mr Martynas GEDVILAS

In the draft resolution, before paragraph 20, insert the following paragraph:

"The Assembly, taking into account the potential threat of political parties being instrumentalised as vehicles for promoting aggression, expansionism or xenophobia, underlines that such practices constitute an existential danger to democracy, peace and stability in Europe, and therefore: - invites Council of Europe member States to consider measures, in accordance with their legal frameworks, to limit privileges or access to official platforms for members of parties that openly support such practices; - encourages political parties across Europe to review and, where appropriate, suspend co-operation or partnerships with parties and individuals that undermine peace, sovereignty and fundamental democratic values; - calls on Council of Europe member States and political parties to take similar measures towards parties operating in States recognised by the United Nations as aggressors, with the exception of those parties that openly criticise and oppose the aggressive policies of their authorities."

20.1. using online consultations, deliberative forums, and transparent digital primaries to widen citizen participation;

20.2. committing to ethical online campaigning, avoiding manipulative micro-targeting, and ensuring disclosure of digital advertising;

20.3. supporting digital literacy initiatives to help citizens navigate the information environment.

21. As regards its own work, the Assembly, including through its General Rapporteur on democracy, resolves to:

21.1. continue actions to strengthen democracy, counter its backsliding and promote innovative practices to enhance citizens' trust in democratic institutions and their participation in political decision making;

21.2. continue to review, in co-operation with the Venice Commission, the Code of Good Practice in the field of Political Parties and the issues raised in it, with a view to developing it further if required.