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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.

> Appendix to the draft resolution – Modalities relating to the external and interparliamentary relations of the Assembly

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

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Rian Vogels, rapporteur

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*[3], 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

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.

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.