



Bureau of the Assembly

Arrangements for the conduct of remote committee meetings

Memorandum prepared by the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly¹

1. At its remote meeting on 30 April 2020, the Bureau of the Assembly agreed to introduce supplementary working methods of committees, on a temporary basis, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic exceptional situation, in order to enable them to continue their activities.² These include the possibility for committees to hold remote meetings, in order to enable Assembly members, who are prevented from travelling because of restrictions decided by member States, to fulfil their mandate in the Assembly and take part in the discussions and decisions of the committees of which they are members.

2. This memorandum sets out general guidelines for the organisation of the remote committee meetings. If agreed by the Bureau they will be applied to all coming remote committee meetings.

1. General framework for remote meetings

1.1 *Technical information*

3. Assembly meetings organised by videoconference (Bureau and committees) will be held via the multilingual conferencing platform KUDO with which the Council of Europe has signed a service contract.

4. KUDO is a multilingual web conferencing platform with human-powered simultaneous interpreting. It fulfils several security conditions (E2EE: end-to-end data encryption; DDoS - a distributed denial-of-service attack prevention, etc.). It ensures the GDPR compliance (the EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679). It offers all guarantees of confidentiality (ISO standards, data protection certifications). Within its "Private Cloud" version it provides even higher security standards. The platform has been evaluated by the Directorate of Information Technology of the Council of Europe and has been recommended for use during remote meetings of different CoE bodies and institutions (a "private cloud" for confidential ones).

1.2 *Participation in remote committee meetings*

5. Each member who has notified the secretariat concerned of his or her participation, at least one week in advance (but not later than 48 hours prior to the meeting when access is not password protected), will receive in due course an electronic link to connect to the meeting.

6. Each participating member will have to authenticate himself/herself with a personal and valid e-mail address at which they can be contacted, as well as with their mobile phone number (delegation secretaries' emails do not constitute a personal address).

¹ As revised and approved by the Bureau of the Assembly at its meeting on 7 May 2020.

² See the memorandum AS/Bur (2020) 18 rev of 30 April 2020.

7. Members are invited to check that they have the necessary technical means (computer, quality audio and video connection, headphones and wired headsets) to take part in these meetings. Tests will be organised beforehand, before the opening of the meeting. Detailed technical instructions will be sent to members separately.

8. All members of a committee, whether they are full members or alternates, may participate. Delegations shall notify the secretariat of the committee concerned, at least one week before the meeting, of the name of the alternate for an absent full member.

9. Members of the Assembly who are not members of the committee concerned, members who are alternates in the committee concerned in case of a full member being present, secretaries of delegations and political groups, members of delegations of observers, partners for democracy and non-member parliaments may follow the remote meeting by requesting an electronic link from the secretariat at least one week before the meeting. They will be given the status of “viewer” and will be allowed to observe the meeting but not take the floor.

1.3. *General principles*

10. The organisation and holding of meetings must guarantee the democratic, orderly and inclusive functioning of the committees and respect the general principles of transparency, security and confidentiality.

11. **Confidentiality rules** must be respected. Committee meetings are not public (Rule 48 of the Rules of Procedure). Members' attention is drawn to the commitment arising from the Code of Conduct for Members of the Assembly (paragraphs 5.1, 5.5 and 13³) and the rules of access to committee meetings (adopted by the Bureau on 22 November 2018).⁴ These rules are absolute with regard to meetings of the Monitoring Committee and the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights.

2. **Arrangements for the conduct of remote committee meetings**

12. Generally speaking, the procedure followed at remote meetings will provide the guarantees that decisions are taken in accordance with the above-mentioned general principles (verification of the identity of members, indication of voting procedures, announcement of the results of the vote, preparation of detailed minutes, etc.).

2.1. *Conduct of remote meetings*

13. The **duration** of each meeting is limited to 2.5 hours per half a day.

14. **Interpretation** during meetings shall be provided in all official and working languages of the Parliamentary Assembly, in accordance with Rule 30.1.

15. The meeting shall be chaired by the chairperson of the committee concerned, including when discussing an item for which he or she acts as rapporteur. The meeting shall be chaired by a vice-chairperson only if the chairperson is totally unavailable.

16. The head of the secretariat of the committee concerned will, in principle, act as moderator, as instructed by the chairperson of the committee, and will be responsible for giving the floor to speakers.

17. The **agenda** will be sent in the usual way, together with the relevant documents. The agenda will be reduced to the essential items relating primarily to the urgent business or to the holding of the next Assembly part-session and the adoption of the reports put on its agenda. Due to current extraordinary

³ “Members shall use information with discretion, and in particular shall not make personal use of information acquired confidentially in the course of their duties.” (paragraph 13)

⁴ “**Committee meetings must not be filmed or recorded, even partially, by those attending or participating in the meetings**” (paragraph 25).

circumstances and to provide members with ample time and opportunity to analyse committee documents, all documents will be transmitted to members one week before the meeting.

18. A **list of speakers** for each item on the agenda will be established, in chronological order, on the basis of requests to speak submitted by members during the meeting. When discussing a report, the rapporteur will be given the floor first. The secretariat will ensure that a list of speakers for each item on the agenda becomes available to members via the KUDO messaging system.

19. In view of the technical conditions, members are invited to favour short, clear and concise speeches. The chairperson of the committee may decide to introduce a time limit on all speeches and interventions by members (for example no more than 2 minutes per intervention). If time allows, the chairperson may give the floor to a member requesting to clarify or explain his/her previously expressed position. In order to facilitate the work of the interpreters, rapporteurs and members are invited to send the secretariat the text of their intervention in advance, if available.

20. Any request of a point of order will have to be signaled to the moderator who will give the floor to the member concerned at a first possible opportunity.

21. Proposals for **amendments** to a draft text should be submitted in writing to the secretariat at least 48 hours before the meeting and compendium of proposed amendments will be transmitted to members by the Secretariat 24 hours before the meeting. Oral amendments are allowed but committee members are advised to avoid them. Sub-amendments shall be made orally in accordance with the rules of making a request for the floor.

2.2. *Conduct of remote voting operations*

22. The KUDO platform integrates a remote voting functionality accessible to participants who may express their position on a given question by voting in favour, against or abstain.

23. The consideration of a preliminary draft text contained in a draft report (Rule 50.2) may be subject to a simplified procedure, without having to vote on the draft paragraph by paragraph, but by deciding only on the amendments submitted in advance by members, followed by a vote on the draft text as a whole. In order to resort to the simplified procedure, the chairperson should clearly seek the consensus of the committee. If a member of the committee objects to the procedure, the simplified procedure should not be used.

24. A vote shall be valid only if at least one third of the committee members took part in it. Number of members which constitute a necessary quorum (one third of the committee members) will be announced by the secretariat before the vote takes place.

25. The moderator/head of the committee secretariat will give the results of each vote, announcing votes for, against and abstentions. The results of a vote corresponding to a roll-call vote which took place during a meeting via the KUDO messaging system will be available to members within 24 hours after the relevant meeting.

26. Until new voting options are available within the KUDO platform, the in-built KUDO remote voting system shall be used for a secret ballot votes while the KUDO messaging system (corresponding to a roll-call vote) shall be used for any other vote.

3. **Decisions by the Bureau**

27. The Bureau of the Assembly is invited to approve the above memorandum, to agree that the arrangements for the conduct of remote meetings specified in it would apply *mutatis muntandis* to its own remote meetings and decide that these arrangements will enter into force as from the day of their approval and remain in force until the opening of the nearest part-session of the Assembly in Strasbourg.