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Bureau of the Assembly

The Assembly's procedures and working methods during sessions and meetings held in physical presence of members: "lessons learned from operating in hybrid format"

Memorandum prepared by the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly¹

1. In response to the exceptional situation brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Parliamentary Assembly introduced additional working methods in 2020, as alternatives to ordinary procedures.
2. By way of a reminder, the Bureau of the Assembly had initially taken a number of measures intended to be applied on a temporary basis, in order to maintain business continuity of its committees, Bureau and Standing Committee, notably through the organisation of online meetings². As the pandemic situation went on, and in the light of its practical experience, the Assembly decided, in November 2020, to amend its Rules of Procedure to incorporate a specific section establishing alternative arrangements for the organisation of Assembly part-sessions and meetings of committees, the Bureau and the Standing Committee in exceptional circumstances³.
3. With the decision of the Bureau of the Assembly of 28 April 2022 to hold Assembly meetings in physical presence of members as of 1 May⁴, the Assembly and its organs returned to the ordinary pattern of functioning followed prior to April 2020⁵.
4. That said, the procedures and practices applied during the last two years have led to a modernisation of the Assembly's functioning and, in many respects, to improvements; some of these procedures had already been called for by the members before the pandemic⁶. It might be desirable,

¹ Document declassified by the Bureau at its meeting of 30 May 2022.

² See the memoranda AS/Bur (2020) 18 rev of 30 April 2020 on "Committees' decision-making framework – adaptation of the working procedures of the committees in response to the COVID-19 pandemic exceptional situation" and AS/Bur (2020) 20 rev of 7 May 2020 on "Arrangements for the conduct of remote committee meetings".

³ See Section XV, Rules 67 to 70 – [Resolution 2349 \(2020\)](#) and the report by the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs (Doc. 15178)

⁴ The members of the Ukrainian delegation who might be prevented from travelling in the coming months will continue to be able to connect to meetings online.

⁵ It should be stressed that, in Resolution 2349, the Assembly clearly affirmed "its willingness to restore its normal mode of operation as soon as possible and to hold its ordinary sessions in the physical presence of its members, thus being better able to fully guarantee the deliberative nature of its functions".

⁶ Such as putting online certain procedures and initiatives, which are now centralised on the pace.coe.int platform

therefore, to make introduce on a permanent basis those arrangements which bring an added value to the Assembly's procedures.

5. Regarding the **organisation of part-sessions and the running of plenary sittings**, the following procedures could continue to be applied:

- the *deadline for tabling amendments*: recent practice has shown that a longer deadline results in the committees, rapporteurs and members being better informed and, thereby, in better prepared debates; the deadline stipulated by the ordinary procedure (less than 24 hours before the opening of the sitting at which the report is debated - Rule 34.6) could be harmonised with the one stipulated for hybrid or online meetings, namely at least two working days before the opening of the sitting concerned (Rule 67.4.d) ;
- *discussion of amendments in plenary sitting*: the provision allowing the floor to be given to the rapporteur if a committee has not been able to adopt a position on amendments to its report that have been tabled (Rule 67.4.d) could also be applied when sessions are held under ordinary conditions;
- *speaking time allocated to rapporteurs during sittings*: since the Bureau decision of 18 June 2021, a rapporteur has 7 minutes to present their report and 3 minutes to reply to speakers' statements. In the light of the experience over the past two years, speaking time for the reply could be extended to 5 minutes, bringing the overall speaking time of allocated to the rapporteur to 12 minutes; one exception might be made in the case of the Monitoring Committee, whose co-rapporteurs could be granted 5 minutes each for the presentation of the report and 5 minutes for replies, to be shared between both co-rapporteurs (bringing the speaking time to a total of 15 minutes);
- *deadline for notification of participation of substitutes*: in the light of the experience of hybrid sessions, it is proposed to close online registration 24 hours before the beginning of each sitting, in order to allow notification of late changes while ensuring that lists of speakers and voters can be properly managed; however, a deadline of three days before the opening of a part-session must be maintained for sittings on Tuesday mornings and Wednesday mornings where electronic voting is to be used for elections.

6. Regarding the **functioning of committees and the running of their meetings**, Committees should re-examine, if necessary, the modalities of examination of draft reports, in the light of their experience between March 2020 and May 2022, in particular, as regards the presentation and consideration of amendments to draft texts.

Likewise, some committees have experimented with the possibility of certain decisions being taken by written consultation of the members via e-mail, one example being the appointment of a rapporteur by consensus in the case of only one candidature. This procedure has improved the reaction time of the Assembly in response to emergency situations.

7. Regarding the election of judges to the European Court of Human Rights and leading officials of the Council of Europe – as well as its own President -, the Assembly introduced a complementary **electoral procedure**⁷ and held electronic voting in 2021 and 2022. This procedure proved to be more functional than the conventional voting method. Certain technical issues encountered by some members in accessing the voting platform have been identified and resolved. Consequently, it would be appropriate to maintain this procedure for the votes that are to take place during the part-sessions in 2022, and possibly 2023⁸.

⁷ See appendix XI to the complementary texts to the rules of procedure (pages 205ff) and [Resolution 2349 \(2020\)](#)

⁸ The Assembly sittings in 2023 will take place in the hemicycle of the European Parliament; the organisation of electronic voting could therefore be opted for.

8. *Within the framework of its competence for the organisation of the part-sessions and plenary sittings of the Assembly*, the Bureau is invited to decide that, as of the June 2022 part-session:

- the speaking time allocated to rapporteurs during sittings will be 7 minutes to present their report and 5 minutes to reply to speakers' statements (with one exception made for the co-rapporteurs on monitoring);
- registration for notification of participation of substitutes will be closed three days before the opening of a part-session for Tuesday morning and Wednesday morning sittings and 24 hours before the beginning of the other sittings;
- the Assembly will hold elections of judges to the European Court of Human Rights [or leading officials of the Council of Europe] by electronic voting, during the June and October 2022 part-sessions.

The Bureau is invited to instruct the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs to examine the changes that might be made to the Rules of Procedure, particularly with regard to the amendment procedure in plenary sitting.