



Resolution 1871 (2012)¹
Provisional version

Self-evaluation by Europe's national parliaments: procedural guidelines to improve the quality of parliamentary work

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In the debate it held in June 2010 on democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives, which led to the adoption of Resolution 1746 (2010), the Parliamentary Assembly noted that there was a crisis in representative democracy and called for the development of a new culture of political responsibility in terms of responsiveness and accountability, as well as transparency.
2. In Resolution 1547 (2007) on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe, the Assembly already expressed its concern about the increasing number of deficits in democracy and the dysfunction of political institutions to be observed in Council of Europe member States. The Assembly also noted that the decline in interest towards the dominant political parties and parliament was the result of a critical assessment of the work of these institutions.
3. The economic, financial and social crisis which many States in Europe have been facing since 2008 has not only increased the requirement for transparency in public decision-making and greater accountability among political players but also radically intensified the calling into question of the representative system as the foundation of our democratic societies: citizens want to be fully informed, while also demanding the right to be more closely involved in the decision-making process and the conduct of public affairs. Against this background of crisis in which representative institutions are facing public criticism, parliaments are simultaneously demanding to exercise greater scrutiny over governments' decisions. However, many national parliaments in Europe do not have a strong constitutional or institutional basis or are politically subordinated to the executive branch.
4. The performance of parliament is one of the essential indicators of the state of democracy in a country. In the above-mentioned context, measuring the democratic performance of parliaments in Council of Europe member States may therefore be useful. Self-evaluation by parliaments according to agreed benchmarks and a clearly established procedural framework could be one of the possible responses to the above problems, as a tool for identifying solutions to the shortcomings observed in representative democracy. Self-assessment should be aimed at improving the quality of parliamentary work rather than the efficiency of parliaments in the strict sense and should form the basis for promoting good practices for a "good" parliament. Using self-evaluation to demonstrate the quality of parliaments and their ability effectively to address economic and social challenges can help to stem the loss of trust in the power and legitimacy of democratic institutions.
5. Several specialised organisations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Parliamentary Assembly of La Francophonie, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have developed methodologies, toolkits and benchmarks with which parliaments can evaluate the democratic quality of their functioning. Although differences exist with regard to the various benchmarks, there is an emerging consensus on the key elements of such standards.

1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 9 March 2012 (see Doc. 12875, report of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Gross).

6. The Assembly welcomes the fact that some parliaments in Europe have already carried out self-evaluations of their performance. Several procedures and practices have been identified by the Assembly and could therefore be recommended to the attention of the national parliaments which have prepared or begun preparing standards for parliamentary self-evaluation.
7. As is shown by the examples of assessments of parliaments, there is rarely any question of a procedural framework. The Assembly has therefore prepared the appended procedural guidelines and invites national parliaments of the Council of Europe's member States to be guided by them in any rules on self-evaluation they prepare.
8. The Assembly believes that parliaments should also define the framework in which follow-up to the recommendations made in self-evaluation exercises can be debated and urges them to consider the possibility of setting up steering groups, self-reflection groups and parliamentary think tanks.
9. The Assembly also believes that the self-evaluation tools which it intends to promote for national parliaments could be useful in connection with the follow-up to the reform it undertook during 2011 to strengthen and improve the effectiveness of its functioning, the coherence of its structures and the credibility and visibility of its actions.
10. Lastly, the Assembly notes that the parliaments of some Council of Europe member States are affected by sometimes serious democratic failings or shortcomings. It believes that it is necessary to look more closely at the democratic functioning of national parliaments and draw up benchmarks and standards in this area, as a guide to parliamentary good practice, in particular with regard to restoring parliaments' powers of scrutiny and the role of opposition parties, in order to consolidate representative democracy as the foundation of our political institutions.

Procedural guidelines for self-evaluation by national parliaments in Europe

The following issues and questions may be taken into account when drawing up procedural guidelines:

1. The basis for carrying out a self-assessment is the existence of a majority of members of parliament who wish to take specific steps to improve the quality of parliamentary inputs and outputs in order to make parliament's functioning more effective and efficient.
2. Who should be able to request an evaluation (a quorum of individual members of parliament, political groups of parliaments, bodies of parliaments (Bureau, Conference of Presidents, etc.)).
3. Which body of parliament should take the decision to carry out a self-evaluation.
4. Should this performance assessment be done by an existing body of the parliament, by a specially appointed body (such as an ad hoc committee, a steering committee or an assessment panel), by an independent panel or by a specialised non-governmental organisation (NGO)? Or should all members of parliament participate in the evaluation process?
5. What should be the composition of any specially appointed parliamentary body (proportional representation of political groups; possible inclusion of outside experts; possible appointment of a chairperson from the opposition, etc.).
6. In bicameral parliaments, it may be appropriate that both chambers participate in the self-assessment at the same time.
7. What should be the terms of reference and road map for the organ/body/panel carrying out the evaluation (indications concerning the contents of such terms of reference, including presentation of proposals for the future); possible fixing of benchmarks and tools to be applied; adaptation of any toolkits used to the special purposes of the parliament to be assessed.
8. Any indications concerning the form of the report on the evaluation of the parliament.
9. To whom/which body of the parliament should the report on the evaluation be presented (President of the Parliament, Bureau, Conference of Presidents, etc.).
10. Forms of consideration of the report (all the parliamentary bodies and individual members of parliament quoted in the report should be able to express their views); consultation of other parliamentary bodies (political groups, any specialised committees).

11. The body examining the report on the evaluation of the parliament should be able to approve conclusions (or recommendations) on it, to be submitted, if possible, to the plenary.
12. Follow-up to the report and the above-mentioned recommendations, as self-assessment is a continuous process.