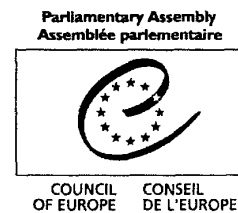


Parliamentary **Assembly**
Assemblée parlementaire



For debate in the Standing Committee — see Rule 15 of the Rules of Procedure

Doc. 10490
7 April 2005

Requests for current affairs and urgent debates (Rules 50.2 and 52.2 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure)

Report
Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities
Rapporteur: Mr Andrea Manzella, Italy, Socialist Group

Summary

The report proposes that the deadlines for the tabling of requests for current affairs and urgent debates should be made more precise and harmonised. This would, in particular, allow the Bureau of the Assembly at its meeting on the Monday of a Part-Session to evaluate all those requests and to submit an appropriate proposal to the Assembly.

I. Draft resolution

1. The Parliamentary Assembly considers that urgent and current affairs debates are useful procedures that enable it to express its views on certain events rapidly.

2. It notes that the Rules of Procedure do not set a specific deadline for submitting requests for urgent debates. However, requests for current affairs debates must be submitted, at the latest, one week before the opening of an Assembly part-session or a meeting of the Standing Committee.

3. The Assembly considers that it is appropriate to lay down more precise rules governing requests for urgent debates and to make those governing requests for current affairs debates more flexible. This would make it easier for the meeting of the Bureau immediately preceding a Part-Session of the Assembly or a meeting of the Standing Committee to evaluate such requests.

4. The Assembly accordingly decides:

i. to add at the end of the first sentence of Rule 50.2 of its Rules of Procedure the following words:

"in time for the last Bureau meeting before the opening of the Part-Session";

ii. to replace the second sentence of Rule 52.2 with the following:

"It shall be submitted in writing in time for the last meeting of the Bureau before the opening of the Part-Session or the meeting of the Standing Committee.";

iii. that these new provisions will enter into force as soon as this resolution is adopted.

II. Explanatory memorandum by the rapporteur, Mr Manzella

A. GENERAL CONTEXT

1. The first Rules of Procedure of the Parliamentary Assembly of 1949 and 1951 already dealt with urgent procedure. However, the possibility of holding current affairs debates was only introduced in July 1985, for a trial period of two years (Resolution 844 (1985)), and definitively maintained and inserted in the Rules of Procedure in July 1987 (Resolution 883 (1987)). Current affairs debates supplement the other ways in which the Assembly and its members can rapidly express their views about certain events. The main advantages of current affairs debates are their brevity and the absence of any vote on a text (draft recommendation or draft resolution) by the Assembly or the Standing Committee. Furthermore, current affairs debates are not based on any reports prepared by an Assembly committee.

2. The motion for a resolution (Doc.10335) on which the present working document is based rightly observes that whereas a request for a debate under urgent procedure can be submitted "at the last moment", a current affairs debate request must be submitted at the latest one week before the opening of the Assembly part-session (or the meeting of the Standing Committee). Therefore, the motion proposes to review the current Rules with a view to introducing more flexibility in order better to allow the Assembly and the Standing Committee to be able to use both procedures for debating ongoing or urgent political issues of concern.

B. PROPOSALS FOR CHANGES

i. *Current affairs debates*

3. Due to the different deadlines for presenting requests for urgent debates and current affairs debates, the latter have been rather rare in recent years.

4. With respect to requests for current affairs debates, a greater flexibility could be achieved by replacing the current wording ("It (a request) shall be submitted in writing not later than one week before the opening of the part-session") of sentence 2 of Rule 52.2. by:

"It shall be submitted in writing in time for the last Bureau meeting before the opening of the Part-Session or the meeting of the Standing Committee".

5. The initial deadline for tabling requests for current affairs debates was five days before the opening of the part-session. Furthermore, there was, under certain conditions, a shorter deadline if this was justified by events (see Resolution 883 (1987). Only later was the deadline prolonged to one week and the possibility of a derogation abolished. The deadline of one week was mainly justified by the fact that "the Bureau should receive any request early enough for its decisions to be properly considered and prepared" (see Doc. 5412, paragraph 12).

6. The rapporteur considers that whereas this argument was pertinent when the possibility of current affairs debates was introduced, such a safeguard is presently no longer necessary.

ii. *Urgent debates*

7. As for urgent debates, it could be useful to make the Assembly's Rules of Procedure more precise regarding the conditions for requesting them. It has been underlined above that "they can be submitted at the last moment". However, to be followed up in the plenary, they must, in practice, be tabled before a Bureau meeting held during a part-session. Therefore, it is proposed to add to the end of the current first sentence of Rule 50.2 ("A request for urgent procedure shall be addressed to the President of the Assembly") the following words:

"in time for the last Bureau meeting before the opening of the Part-Session".

8. There is a particular rule for urgent procedure in the Standing Committee (Rule 51) which reads as follows:

"A request for urgent procedure shall be addressed to the President of the Assembly, no later than one week before the meeting of the Standing Committee".

9. At present this provision scarcely has a practical application as none of the Assembly's committees meet in the immediate framework of the Standing Committee¹. Therefore, as part of a mid-term review of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure, thought should be given to:

- whether this provision should be maintained (or amended);
- the possibility of holding meetings of the Political Affairs Committee (or, possibly, another committee) in the framework of those of the Standing Committee.

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10. If the proposed changes to the Rules of Procedure were adopted, the Monday morning Bureau meeting would have at its disposal all the relevant requests for urgent and/or current affairs debates during an Assembly part-session. It could then weigh them up and make a proposal on them to the Assembly. Furthermore, Assembly committees would have time during the week to take them into account. In the case of the Standing Committee, the more flexible rules on current affairs debates would enable it to react promptly to any urgent political matters that arose.

C. FINAL REMARK

11. The new provisions of the Rules of Procedure should enter into force as soon as the Standing Committee has adopted this resolution.

¹ However, on 18 March 2005 the Standing Committee held a debate under urgent procedure (see Recommendation 1695 (2005)).

Committee responsible for the report: Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities

Reference to committee: Doc. 10335 and Ref. 3021 of 23 November 2004

Draft resolution unanimously adopted on 17 March 2005

Members of the committee: Mr Andreas **Gross**, (Chairperson), Mr Andrea **Manzella**, Mrs Ganka **Samoilovska-Cvetanova**, Mrs Lene Garsdal (Vice-Chairpersons), Mr Sándor Albert, Mr Gulumhuseyn Alibeyli, Mr Ioannis Bougas, Mrs Anne **Brasseur**, Mr Aslan **Cebeci**, Mr Jonas **Cekuolis**, Mr Manlio Collavini (alternate: Mr Giuseppe **Mulas**), Mrs Helen D'Amato, Mrs Krystyna Doktorowicz, Mr Miljenko Dorić, Mr Vangjel Dule, Mr Mats **Einarsson**, Mr Herbert Frankenhauser, Mr Tihomir Gligorić, Mrs Arlette Grosskost, Mr Gerd Höfer, Mr Serhiy **Holovaty**, Mr Tomáš Jirsa, Mr Armand Jung, Mr Erik Jurgens, Mrs Mojca **Kucler-Dolinar**, Mr Markku Laukkanen, Mr Per Erik **Monsen**, Mrs Nóra Nagy, Mr Ionel Olteanu, Mr Alexey Ostrovsky, Mr Julio Padilla, Mr Ivan Pavlov, Mrs Sólveig Pétursdóttir, Mr Christos Pourgourides, Mrs Valentina Radulović Šćepanović, Mr Armen Rustamyan, Mr Fernando Santos Pereira, Mr Peter **Schieder**, Mr Yuri Sharandin (alternate: Mr Valeriy **Fedorov**), Mr Christophe Spiliotis-Saquet, Mr Victor Stepaniuc, Mr Karim **van Overmeire**, Mr Rudolf **Vis**, Mr David **Wilshire**, Mr G.V. Wright.

*NB: The names of those members present at the meeting are printed in **bold**.*

Secretary of the committee: Mr Mario Heinrich.

