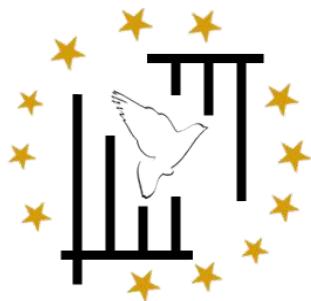


# ASSEDEL



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## Contribution on the Implementation of the Partner for Democracy Status by the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan: Parliamentary Oversight, Media Freedom, and Civic Space, 2022-2025

ASSEDEL (European Association for the Defense of Rights and Freedoms) is a non-profit association, governed by its statutes, in accordance with articles 21 to 79-III of the local civil code of Alsace Moselle relating to associations. Its purpose is to disseminate, promote and defend human rights and fundamental freedoms in the spirit of the European Convention on Human Rights, both within the Council of Europe and the European Parliament and at local level, national and international. In addition, the organization guides and supports victims of human rights violations.

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**This report examines developments in Kyrgyzstan's implementation of its Partner for Democracy commitments between 2022-2025, with a focus on legislative, institutional, and human rights-related dimensions.**

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this contribution is to provide an updated assessment of how the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic has implemented the commitments undertaken under the Partner for Democracy status, granted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in 2014. The last comprehensive evaluation PACE Resolution 2465 (2022) on “The honoring of obligations and commitments by Kyrgyzstan” identified concerns related to the concentration of political power, the shrinking space for independent media, and weaknesses in parliamentary oversight, but did not cover the profound developments that have occurred since 2022.<sup>1</sup>

A new assessment is necessary because the political and legal environment in Kyrgyzstan has changed significantly since the publication of the 2022 report. New legislation adopted between 2023 and 2025 including the Law on Mass Media (2024), the “Foreign Representatives” Law on NGOs (2024), and amendments on “false information” has been widely criticized for restricting fundamental freedoms and diverging from Council of Europe standards.<sup>2</sup>

In parallel, the human rights and media environment has deteriorated further. Independent outlets such as Temirov Live, Kloop, and Ait Ait Dese were declared ‘extremist’ by the Oktyabrsky District Court of Bishkek on 27 October 2025, resulting in the blocking of their platforms and a ban on their publications.<sup>3</sup> Journalists have been subjected to intimidation, criminal charges, and in several cases prison sentences, including the October 2024 conviction of two Kloop-affiliated cameramen by the Leninsky District Court of Bishkek, as well as the ongoing politically motivated prosecution of investigative journalist Bolot Temirov.<sup>4</sup>

These developments must also be understood within the context of the 2021 Constitution, which strengthened presidential authority at the expense of parliamentary checks and balances. International organizations including the European Union, OSCE/ODIHR, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and UN human rights mandate holders have documented a steady deterioration in democratic governance, civil society freedoms, and political pluralism.<sup>5</sup>

**For these reasons, an updated PACE assessment is essential. The adoption of new restrictive laws, the increased pressure on independent media and civil society, and the shift in political dynamics since 2022 collectively justify a renewed evaluation of Kyrgyzstan’s compliance with its Partner for Democracy commitments.**

## 2. Implementation of Commitments under the Partner for Democracy Status

### 2.1 Implementation of Legislative Commitments

#### Conformity of new laws with CoE standards.

Since 2022, Kyrgyzstan has adopted a series of legislative measures that raise significant concerns regarding conformity with Council of Europe (CoE) standards. Two of the most consequential laws were passed on June 25, 2025. The first law on the Ombudsman effectively merged the National Center for the Prevention of Torture with the Ombudsman’s office, weakening the Center’s independence and undermining the state’s obligations under the UN

Convention against Torture. The second, the Law on Mass Media, grants authorities broad powers to deny registration to media outlets, obstruct their work, and close them without judicial oversight. These measures were rushed through parliament in a single day, with substantial amendments from earlier versions, preventing proper scrutiny or consultation by civil society or international experts.<sup>5</sup>

### **Use or absence of Venice Commission consultations.**

The Venice Commission’s guidance was reportedly absent during this legislative process, raising questions about conformity with CoE standards on transparency, rule of law, and human rights protection.

Further legislative restrictions were enacted with the amendments to the Code of Offenses in July 2025, introducing administrative fines for spreading “false or unreliable” information via mass media or the internet. These fines target both individuals and media outlets, creating a chilling effect on independent journalism (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2025).<sup>6</sup> Earlier amendments in February 2025 introduced fines for defamation and insult, adjudicated in brief administrative hearings that bypass thorough judicial review, further weakening protections for freedom of expression.<sup>10</sup>

### **Adoption of laws affecting democratic governance.**

In 2024, Kyrgyzstan also adopted a “foreign agents” law, requiring NGOs and media rights organizations that receive foreign funding and engage in activities defined as political to register as “foreign representatives.” The law grants authorities sweeping oversight powers and the ability to suspend or liquidate noncompliant organisations.<sup>11</sup>

International observers, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and CPJ, have expressed concern that these measures severely restrict civil society and are inconsistent with international standards for freedom of association and expression.

These legislative developments collectively demonstrate a trend toward consolidation of executive power, weakening independent oversight, and constraining fundamental rights, contrary to the commitments associated with Partner for Democracy status.

## **2.2 Parliamentary Functioning and Democratic Practices**

### **Oversight performance after the 2021 Constitution.**

Following the adoption of the 2021 Constitution, Kyrgyzstan’s political system shifted decisively toward stronger presidential authority, weakening the parliament’s oversight capacity.<sup>12</sup> This concentration of executive power has unfolded alongside increasing legal and extralegal pressure on opposition actors, further reducing parliamentary independence. Since 2022, the legislature has shown limited ability to scrutinize the expanding executive, as politically motivated arrests, prosecutions, and administrative pressure have narrowed the diversity of parliamentary voices. The case of opposition politician Orozayim Narmatova whose mandate was revoked in early 2022 and who was later arrested in Moscow and extradited to Kyrgyzstan illustrates how coercive practices undermine parliamentary autonomy.<sup>8</sup> These trends follow earlier mass surveillance of opposition candidates

in

2021,

justified by the Ministry of Interior on vague security grounds, which had a chilling effect on political engagement.

### **Committee work and internal parliamentary procedures.**

The post-2021 constitutional framework, combined with the executive's growing use of administrative tools, has significantly weakened parliament's role as a check on presidential power, with parliamentary mechanisms increasingly limited to formal committee work and internal procedures. Since 2022, committee functioning has been constrained by reduced pluralism, restrictive electoral thresholds, pressure on opposition actors, and executive influence over legislative priorities. Although committees continue to meet procedurally, these conditions limit their ability to provide policy debate or substantive scrutiny.<sup>13</sup>

The parliament's limited capacity to challenge executive initiatives is reflected in the rapid passage often with minimal deliberation, limited civil-society consultation, and no Venice Commission input of key laws affecting media, civil society, and democratic governance, including the "false information" provisions, defamation amendments, and the foreign representatives law.

### **Pluralism, opposition, political competition.**

Pluralism and political competition have deteriorated markedly. Political parties remain weak and personality-driven, often tied to patronage networks, while the 2021 referendum raised structural barriers for smaller parties by increasing the national threshold to 5% and maintaining the 0.5% regional requirement. Since 2022, repression of opposition actors has intensified, and political dynamics continue to be influenced by networks with alleged criminal ties that gained prominence during the 2020–2021 turbulence. The targeting of opposition-linked journalists and activists including the January 2024 arrests of 11 Temirov Live journalists on accusations of "calling for mass riots" as well as the expanded use of harsh defamation and "false information" laws, has further constrained civic and political space. These developments entrench the dominance of pro-government forces and limit alternative political activity.<sup>14</sup>

## **2.3 Human Rights–Related Commitments**

### **Media regulation and press freedom after 2022.**

Since 2022, Kyrgyzstan has undergone a rapid deterioration in media freedom, marked by the adoption of increasingly restrictive legislation and the systematic targeting of independent journalists. These developments stand in clear contrast with the commitments undertaken under the Partner for Democracy Status, particularly regarding freedom of expression, media pluralism, and alignment with Council of Europe standards.<sup>14</sup>

A series of legislative amendments adopted between 2023 and 2025 significantly expanded the state's authority to penalise journalists and regulate online content. In February 2024, amendments introducing administrative fines for defamation and insult entered into force, allowing the police to process complaints and administrative courts to issue penalties in expedited hearings. In July 2025, further amendments criminalising the dissemination of "false

or unreliable information” were adopted, imposing fines on both individuals and media outlets and raising concerns about vague definitions that enable political misuse.

Parallel to these legislative changes, several emblematic cases illustrate growing pressure on independent journalism. In January 2024, authorities arrested 11 investigative journalists associated with Temirov Live and Ait Ait Dese, charging them with “calls for mass riots” based on social media content dating from January 2024. Despite the absence of substantiated evidence including the conclusion of a linguistics expert that no calls to violence were present the journalists were held in harsh pretrial conditions. In October 2024, four of them were convicted, with sentences ranging from probation to six years’ imprisonment, in proceedings widely condemned as politically motivated.

This sustained crackdown, combined with the blocking of prominent platforms such as Kloop (February 2024), reflects a marked shift toward an increasingly restrictive information environment inconsistent with CoE standards on freedom of expression.

#### **Civil society environment (NGO legislation, public participation).**

The legislative environment for NGOs has deteriorated significantly since 2022. In March 2024, the parliament adopted the “foreign representatives” law, inspired by the Russian “foreign agents” framework. The law requires foreign-funded NGOs engaged in broadly defined “political activities” to register as “foreign representatives,” label all publications accordingly, undergo costly annual audits, and submit to extensive administrative oversight. Authorities may suspend NGO activities for six months in cases of non-compliance and subsequently seek liquidation through the courts.

Civil society organizations, UN special rapporteurs, the OSCE, and international legal experts have criticized the law for introducing excessive administrative control, undermining freedom of association, and creating an environment of stigmatization that discourages civic participation. Although President Japarov justified the law as a means to ensure “financial transparency,” independent legal experts emphasize that NGOs were already subject to comprehensive reporting requirements.

These developments have led to a shrinking civic space, reduced involvement of NGOs in public consultations, and a general decline in the environment for public participation contradicting the democratic commitments expected under the Partner for Democracy framework.

#### **Impact of recent reforms on fundamental freedoms.**

Taken together, recent legislative and political changes have had a direct negative impact on fundamental freedoms. The combination of restrictive media laws, the criminalization of critical speech, pressures on opposition actors, and the heightened regulation of NGOs has resulted in a more coercive and controlled civic environment.

The expanded use of administrative offences to penalise journalists, activists, and media outlets create significant obstacles to freedom of expression. Restrictions on NGO activities diminish the opportunities for civil society to engage in democratic processes, monitor government actions, or provide independent expertise. The cumulative effect of these developments also weakens judicial independence and public trust in democratic institutions.<sup>17</sup>

Overall, the trajectory since 2022 demonstrates a systematic decline in compliance with the human rights commitments embedded in the Partner for Democracy Status, particularly regarding freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the protection of individuals who criticise the authorities.

### **3. Cooperation with Council of Europe Mechanisms**

#### **3.1 Engagement with PACE**

##### **Attendance and activity of Kyrgyz delegation 2022–2024.**

Since 2022, cooperation between the Kyrgyz Parliament (Jogorku Kenesh) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has remained regular but limited in depth.<sup>18</sup> Kyrgyzstan has consistently maintained a parliamentary delegation to PACE, with the official roster including members such as Vice-Speaker Nurbek Sydygaliev and MPs Dinara Ashimova and Akylbek Tumonbaev appearing in Assembly documentation for 2022–2024.

Participation in PACE sessions has continued, demonstrating institutional commitment to the Partner for Democracy status. A notable example is the participation of Vice-Speaker Sydygaliev in the **Autumn Session (28 September – 4 October 2024)** in Strasbourg, where the Kyrgyz delegation attended plenary debates and meetings of several key committees, including the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, and the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development. This engagement shows readiness of Kyrgyz parliamentarians to remain present within the Assembly's framework.<sup>12</sup>

##### **Substantive contributions to debates or committees.**

However, the substantive contribution of the Kyrgyz delegation to PACE's work remains limited. A review of member activity records shows very few authored reports, motions, or committee opinions and limited involvement in rapporteurships. Most Kyrgyz members' PACE activity pages list attendance only, without legislative or thematic input. This continuing pattern mirrors earlier PACE assessments noting “mixed results” in parliamentary cooperation.

Kyrgyz MPs have used the PACE forum mainly for political interventions on regional issues, rather than CoE-relevant thematic contributions.<sup>19</sup> For instance, MP Dinara Ashimova raised the issue of Tajik–Kyrgyz border clashes during a PACE plenary session, drawing attention to what she described as “Tajikistan’s military aggression.” While this demonstrates active political engagement, it does not reflect systematic contributions to broader CoE standards or legislative reform dialogue.

Overall, engagement with PACE between 2022 and 2024 can be characterised as present and politically expressive, but not yet aligned with the deeper, expert-level cooperation expected under the Partner for Democracy status.

## 3.2 Interaction with the Venice Commission

### Opinions requested or relevant since 2022.

Kyrgyzstan's interaction with the Venice Commission has been intermittent since 2022. Even as the country adopted several major laws with direct implications for democratic governance, the authorities have not systematically requested Venice Commission opinions, despite previous recommendations to do so.<sup>20</sup>

Some legislative acts with profound implications such as the 2024 "foreign agents" law, amendments to the Code of Offences on "false information", and proposals affecting the functioning of media and NGOs were adopted without prior consultation with the Venice Commission. This omission is significant because these laws introduce restrictions in areas directly covered by Council of Europe standards: freedom of expression, freedom of association, and civic participation.<sup>13</sup>

### Use of Venice Commission guidance in drafting laws.

Nevertheless, cooperation has not ceased entirely. The Venice Commission provided **legal assistance to the PACE Election Observation Mission** during the Kyrgyz parliamentary elections of November 2025, joining the mission's briefings and providing expert legal analysis during the observation process. Although outside your strict time window, this example shows that **CoE expert bodies remain engaged**, even if such engagement is still mostly reactive rather than systematically requested by Kyrgyz authorities.<sup>21</sup>

The general picture since 2022, therefore, is one of limited and selective interaction, falling short of the regular consultation practices expected from Partner for Democracy parliaments when drafting laws with constitutional or rights-related implications.

## 3.3 Cooperation on Electoral Standards

### Participation in OSCE/ODIHR and PACE election missions.

Kyrgyzstan has continued to participate in electoral processes involving PACE and OSCE/ODIHR, though implementation of recommendations remains inconsistent.<sup>22</sup>

PACE and ODIHR observers have repeatedly issued recommendations concerning the transparency of campaign financing, the inclusiveness of candidate registration, and the neutrality of law-enforcement bodies. Since 2022, some improvements have been noted for example, logistical facilitation for observers and formal openness to international monitoring missions.<sup>14</sup>

However, other areas have deteriorated. The post-2022 period is marked by:

- further constraints on media and civil society, which negatively affect the electoral environment;
- criminal and administrative cases against journalists and activists, including those reporting on corruption or political elites;
- the continued influence of patronage networks and local power groups, especially during campaign periods;

- growing use of legal tools (e.g., “false information” laws, foreign agent legislation) that risk impacting electoral debate.

### **Implementation of election-related recommendations.**

The **Venice Commission’s participation** in the PACE election observation for the 2025 parliamentary elections confirms that cooperation with CoE election mechanisms persists. However, the effectiveness of electoral standards implementation remains uneven, and domestic legal reforms introduced since 2022 have often deviated further from CoE electoral and democratic norms.<sup>23</sup>

## **4. Obstacles to Effective Implementation**

### **4.1 Political and Constitutional Constraints**

#### **Strong presidential system reducing parliamentary initiative.**

Since the adoption of the 2021 Constitution, Kyrgyzstan has operated under a significantly strengthened presidential system, which has reshaped political power and weakened the institutional architecture necessary for effective democratic oversight. Multiple international assessments since 2022 indicate that the concentration of authority in the executive has reduced the parliament’s policymaking initiative and limited its capacity to meaningfully influence the legislative agenda. Analyses by the International Crisis Group (2023–2024) and Carnegie Endowment (2022–2023) highlight that decision making is heavily centralized in the presidential administration, with the Jogorku Kenesh increasingly relegated to a reactive role.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Impact on checks and balances.**

The diminished system of checks and balances creates structural barriers to the implementation of commitments under the Partner for Democracy status. The OSCE/ODIHR has noted that the parliament’s oversight of the security services, budget execution, and constitutional compliance remains weak, partly due to the constitutional redesign but also due to informal political dynamics. These constraints limit parliamentary engagement with European legislative standards and reduce its autonomy when reviewing or contesting executive-led reforms.<sup>25</sup>

### **4.2 Institutional and Technical Capacity Gaps**

#### **Limited staff expertise in European legal norms.**

Beyond political constraints, institutional capacity poses a substantial obstacle to aligning national legislation and practice with Council of Europe (CoE) norms. UNDP governance assessments (2022–2024) underline deficits in legislative drafting expertise, insufficient comparative-law analysis, and a lack of familiarity among staff with European legal standards. Parliamentary committees often lack professionalized research and analytical units, weakening their ability to evaluate complex legal reforms or incorporate Venice Commission guidance.<sup>26</sup>

## **Need for better drafting, legal review, and research tools.**

Similarly, the OECD (2022–2023) identifies structural problems across public administration: limited inter-agency coordination, insufficient legal-review mechanisms, and reliance on ad hoc external expertise. The OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek has repeatedly emphasized the need for capacity building in human rights institutions, including training on European human rights jurisprudence and more consistent engagement with international reporting obligations. The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) adds that weaknesses in judicial independence and prosecutorial oversight further undermine the institutional environment necessary for the effective implementation of CoE-aligned reforms.<sup>27</sup>

## **4.3 Geopolitical and External Pressures**

### **Influence of Russia, China, EAEU, CSTO.**

Kyrgyzstan's geopolitical environment significantly shapes and often constrains its ability to prioritize and implement Council of Europe commitments. The country remains economically and socially dependent on Russia, particularly through labor migration, remittances, energy supplies, and membership in regional organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Analyses by Chatham House (2022–2024) and Carnegie Russia Eurasia (2022–2023) show that Moscow continues to exert structural influence over political and legislative preferences, especially in fields where European standards diverge sharply from Russian models, such as media regulation, NGO oversight, and security governance.<sup>28</sup>

Economic dependence on China adds another dimension. Large-scale infrastructure financing, concessional loans, and sovereign debt exposure create incentives for political stability and executive-controlled governance rather than pluralistic, CoE-compatible frameworks (Asian Development Bank 2023). This dual dependency narrows the political space for reforms associated with democratic checks and balances.

European sources further confirm the geopolitical constraints. According to the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS 2023–2024), Russia's war in Ukraine has closed traditional West-bound trade routes through Russia, making Central Asia including Kyrgyzstan increasingly reliant on Russia and China for market access, investment, and transport corridors. Without coordinated European engagement, the EU warns that Central Asian states risk becoming "overly dependent on China and Russia for trade and investment," reducing incentives to adopt European-aligned reforms. The EU identifies Trans-Caspian connectivity as crucial for diversifying partnerships and enabling political autonomy.

EU External Action Service (EEAS 2022–2024) assessments similarly affirm that geopolitical pressures, combined with regional security tensions, tend to deprioritize Council of Europe-aligned reforms in favor of pragmatic alignment with neighboring powers. UN OHCHR reports note that several restrictive post-2022 laws affecting civil society, media freedom, and public participation mirror Russian legislative trends.

Russia's role as an energy supplier and infrastructure provider further reinforces its influence: by controlling prices, supply routes, and investment frameworks, Moscow can exert pressure on Kyrgyzstan's economy. This practical leverage increases the political cost of adopting

reforms, especially those contradicting Russian strategic interests shaping domestic calculations on which CoE commitments are feasible or desirable.

### **Their effect on prioritizing CoE-aligned reforms.**

Kyrgyzstan's ability to fully prioritize reforms required by the Council of Europe (CoE) is significantly shaped and often constrained by its geopolitical dependencies on Russia, China, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). These relationships generate both structural and strategic pressures that make domestic reform alignment with European standards politically costly.<sup>29</sup>

#### **First, Russia's economic and social leverage creates direct disincentives to pursue reforms that may be perceived as Western-oriented.**

Approximately one million Kyrgyz citizens work in Russia, and remittances represent one of the largest sources of national income, making Kyrgyzstan highly sensitive to any change in Russian migration rules (Clingendael Institute, 2025; RCSP, 2024). This dependence limits Bishkek's readiness to adopt reforms such as those involving civil society, media freedom, or rule of law that Moscow typically views as part of a Western political agenda. Russia's role as an energy supplier and EAEU trade hub further reinforces this vulnerability (RCSP, 2024).

#### **Second, security dependence under the CSTO and the presence of Russian military infrastructure reduce policy autonomy.**

Kyrgyzstan relies on Russia for regional stability, border security, and military cooperation (Eurasianet, 2023). Any reform that could weaken Russian strategic influence such as judiciary restructuring, expanded human rights commitments, or stronger checks on executive power may be deprioritized due to fears of losing security guarantees.

#### **Third, Kyrgyzstan's participation in the EAEU creates regulatory obligations that sometimes conflict with EU/CoE standards.**

Because the EAEU sets common customs, trade, and technical regulations, aligning legislation with European norms may require renegotiating obligations with Russia and other EAEU members, an economically and politically sensitive process (Euronews, 2024).

As a result, CoE-aligned reforms especially those involving democratic governance, judicial independence, anti-corruption mechanisms, and civil liberties often lose priority to policies that maintain economic stability, secure remittance flows, and preserve strategic ties with Moscow and Beijing. Kyrgyzstan is therefore incentivized to selectively adopt less politically sensitive CoE requirements (such as administrative or technical reforms), while delaying or softening reforms that may disrupt its geopolitical dependencies.

## 5. Recommendations

### 5.1 To the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan

#### **Increase use of Venice Commission consultations.**

The Venice Commission has already demonstrated its readiness to support Kyrgyz institutions, as shown by its 2025 delegation assisting the PACE observation mission during the 30 November 2025 parliamentary elections. This cooperation illustrates that regular, institutionalized consultation with the Venice Commission is both feasible and beneficial.

However, Parliament should request Venice Commission opinions before adopting key constitutional, electoral, judicial, and civil-society-related legislation. This would ensure that new laws conform to European democratic standards and avoid later incompatibilities.<sup>30</sup>

Several laws adopted since 2022 require revision due to concerns raised by international bodies:

- The 2024–2025 “foreign representatives” law, which mirrors Russia’s 2012 “foreign agents” model, imposes burdensome reporting, stigmatizing labels, and wide definitions of political activity.
- Amendments affecting media, NGOs, and public participation, which risk eroding pluralism and civic engagement.<sup>18</sup>

Parliament should undertake a comprehensive compatibility review using Venice Commission guidance and OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.

#### **Strengthen parliamentary oversight mechanisms.**

To enhance democratic governance and align with Council of Europe standards, the Jogorku Kenesh should strengthen parliamentary oversight over the executive and legislative processes. Since 2022, Kyrgyzstan has increasingly adopted restrictive legislation on civil society, including the 2024–2025 “foreign representatives” law, which mirrors Russia’s 2012 ‘foreign agents’ model. This law introduces broad definitions of political activity, burdensome reporting obligations, and enhanced supervisory powers, which international organizations such as the UN, ICNL, and CPJ argue are designed to stigmatize and constrain independent NGOs, human rights groups, and media-support organizations.

By improving parliamentary oversight, the legislature could better scrutinize such laws, ensure their conformity with European standards, and safeguard civil society space. This includes strengthening committees responsible for human rights, budgeting, and legal affairs; ensuring equal access to information for opposition and civil society actors; institutionalizing interpellations; and cooperating with independent monitoring bodies such as the Chamber of Accounts. Strengthened oversight would reduce the risk of laws undermining fundamental freedoms, increase transparency, and reinforce the balance of power within the political system.<sup>31</sup>

Since 2022, the Parliament has adopted several laws that international bodies argue undermine human rights, media freedom, and institutional independence, core principles of the Council of Europe. These include:

- The 2024–2025 “Foreign Representatives” law, which imposes burdensome registration, reporting, and labeling requirements on NGOs receiving foreign funding. The UN OHCHR, ICNL, and the Committee to Protect Journalists warn that the law stigmatizes civil society and mirrors Russia’s 2012 “foreign agents” framework rather than CoE norms.
- The 2025 Law on the Ombudsman, which dismantled the independent National Center for the Prevention of Torture and transferred its mandate to the Ombudsman reducing oversight and violating UN standards for preventing torture.
- Media and “false information” amendments (2024–2025), which allow authorities to block outlets, impose heavy fines, and restrict press freedom. These measures contradict CoE standards on free expression and independent journalism.

To align with CoE commitments, Parliament should conduct a comprehensive legal review of these laws, request Venice Commission opinions, and amend or repeal provisions that conflict with human rights, media freedom, and institutional independence.

### **Improve transparency and public involvement.**

To restore public trust and meet CoE benchmarks for democratic governance, the Parliament should:

- Conduct genuine public consultations before adopting laws;
- Publish draft laws and impact assessments in advance;
- Strengthen cooperation with independent NGOs, media associations, legal experts, and academia;
- Avoid fast-tracking legislation without clear justification.

This would address concerns documented by international observers regarding accelerated procedures and limited civic input since 2022.<sup>32</sup>

## **5.2 To PACE and the Council of Europe**

### **Provide targeted technical support for parliamentary staff.**

The Parliamentary Assembly should expand its technical assistance to the Jogorku Kenesh by providing specialised training modules for parliamentary committees, legal drafting departments, and staff responsible for human rights and constitutional review. Such assistance is consistent with existing CoE practice in Central Asia: under the “Central Asia Rule of Law Programme”, co-funded by the EU and implemented by the Council of Europe, the CoE already provides technical expertise on legislative reform, judicial standards, and human rights compliance across the region, including Kyrgyzstan (Council of Europe – Central Asia Rule of Law Programme). Strengthening parliamentary staff capacities would help align Kyrgyz

legislation with Venice Commission opinions and European standards of rule of law, transparency, and proportionality.<sup>33</sup>

### **Establish annual implementation check-ins.**

PACE should institutionalise annual progress reviews evaluating how Kyrgyzstan implements recommendations from PACE monitoring, Venice Commission opinions, and CoE technical assistance programmes. This approach reflects CoE precedent: in the “Support for democratic reforms, human rights mechanisms and the principles of rule of law in Latin America, Central Asia and Mongolia (2024–2026)” programme, the CoE conducts periodic assessments and monitoring missions to track implementation of reforms and legislative alignment (CoE Joint EU–CoE Programme 2024–2026).

Creating similar annual check-ins for Kyrgyzstan would ensure continuity, help identify legislative backsliding, and provide structured opportunities for targeted follow-up support.<sup>34</sup>

### **Connect PACE cooperation with broader CoE and EU programs.**

Cooperation with Kyrgyzstan should be embedded within the wider landscape of **EU–CoE–Central Asia** initiatives. The EU and the Council of Europe already jointly finance multiple regional and national programmes that support governance, rule of law, and institutional reform. Examples include:

- the Central Asia Rule of Law Programme (EU + CoE), covering judicial reform, anti-corruption, and legal alignment (CoE Central Asia Programme);
- the EU–Kyrgyzstan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), signed in June 2024, which creates a robust framework for cooperation on rule of law, civil society, judicial reforms, governance, digitalisation, and human development (EEAS Factsheet: Kyrgyzstan 2024);
- the EU’s Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives, which provide concrete financial and institutional support for infrastructure, governance, water management, digitalisation, and resilience in Central Asia (European Commission – Global Gateway Central Asia).<sup>35</sup>

Linking PACE’s parliamentary cooperation with these broader mechanisms would:

- reinforce policy coherence;
- ensure that parliamentary reforms are matched with technical and financial resources;
- and help Kyrgyzstan align more effectively with CoE and EU rule-of-law and human-rights frameworks.
- Given that Kyrgyzstan is already a beneficiary of EU–CoE joint programmes, strengthening these institutional linkages is both feasible and mutually advantageous.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **Kyrgyzstan has made some progress but faces significant challenges in implementing commitments.**

Kyrgyzstan has made selective progress in maintaining cooperation with international institutions and improving certain technical aspects of electoral administration. However, the country continues to face serious structural obstacles in fulfilling the democratic and human rights commitments associated with its Partner for Democracy status.<sup>36</sup> Recent assessments by the OSCE/ODIHR and the UN Human Rights Committee highlight a persistent deterioration in civic space, growing pressure on independent media, and weakened institutional checks and balances, notwithstanding limited procedural improvements.

#### **Sustained dialogue and targeted support will be essential.**

In this context, sustained engagement and more systematic follow-up from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be essential. Long-term technical assistance, regular monitoring, and structured dialogue as demonstrated in ongoing Council of Europe programmes in Central Asia remain necessary to support meaningful reform and prevent further legislative backsliding.<sup>37</sup>

#### **The next review cycle will determine the future effectiveness of the partnership.**

The upcoming review cycle will therefore be decisive. Kyrgyzstan's ability to reverse the post-2022 trend of restrictive legislation and to re-align its legal system and institutional practice with European standards will determine the credibility and future direction of the partnership. Progress will depend not only on domestic political will, but also on coherent and well-coordinated international support.

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