

The Parliamentary Code of Conduct

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF HEIGHTENED CONFLICT

Open European Dialogue

October 2024

In times of intense political division, *The Parliamentary Code of Conduct* offers a set of principles and practical recommendations drafted by politicians, for politicians, to exercise leadership effectively, responsibly, and strategically amidst societal tensions and conflict.

POLITICAL POSTURE

- **Keep an open mind** - approach issues with a spirit of enquiry and a willingness to understand different perspectives.
- **Be honest** - explain your decisions clearly and transparently, yet be honest in acknowledging the justifiability of other positions.
- **Lead with respect** – avoid using shame or humiliation as tactics in political discourse.
- **Show empathy** – rehumanize the debate and maintain rivals not enemies.
- **Nurture human relationships and dialogue** – gather with others across party lines and find opportunities to talk openly.
- **Don't be afraid to say sorry** - admit mistakes and apologize when necessary, learn from the successes and failures of other politicians as well as your own.
- **Listen deeply** – focus on hearing others fully before speaking.

PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBILITY

- **Do the research** - ensure your facts are accurate, and stay open to changing your mind when new information emerges.
- **Embrace conflict** - as a natural and essential part of democracy. The desire to eliminate conflict is deeply undemocratic.

- **Structure debates thoughtfully** – in a complex world, ordering debates and discussions is a public service.
- **Keep your promises**– say what you’ll do, and do what you say. Don’t promise things you know you can’t deliver.

STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

- **Focus on solutions, not problems** – aim for compromise by thinking about problems with a solution-oriented mindset.
- **Target issues, not individuals** – stick to advancing your positive agenda rather than reacting to others’ negative agendas.
- **Know your counterpart** – take time to understand how they think and the values that shape their positions.
- **Allow others to save face** – when navigating conflict, give people the space to maintain their sense of dignity.
- **Avoid binary positions** – steer clear of encouraging the entrenchment of rigid, either/or positions and inject nuance into the debate.
- **Take a 360° view** - sit with all stakeholders and engage them in conversation before making decisions.
- **Use process and moderation as tools** – these are effective methods to advance discussion and make progress on stale debates.
- **Pick your battles**– avoid creating unnecessary enemies by picking conflicts that truly matter.

RESOURCE YOURSELF

- **Take breaks when negotiating** – recharge, a calm mind and body will help you negotiate more effectively.
- **Stand firm in your position** – embody it fully, but don’t take conflict and disagreements personally.
- **Lead with vision** – know where you want to go, but be flexible in how you get there. Never lose sight of your purpose and the people you work to serve - and remember, *if you won’t do it, who will?*