# Article 21

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Text of Article 21

The General Assembly shall adopt its own rules of procedure. It shall elect its President for each session.

Introductory note

1. During the period under review, the General Assembly amended its rules of procedure. Relevant discussions of the Assembly (including its subsidiary bodies) are summarized in section II.A. The practice of the Assembly concerning the elections of its President is found in section II.B.

1 See GA resolution 52/163. See also A/520/Rev.16, para. 45, p. xx.

I. General survey

2. During the period under review, the General Assembly continued its work aimed at the rationalization of its work and procedures. The rules of procedure of the Assembly have been amended. Thus, several bodies have been involved in relevant discussions. In some cases, recommendations were made, which could have an impact on the preparation of potential future amendments to the rules of procedure of the Assembly. Relevant activities involved the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization and its Working Group,2 the Sixth Committee,3 the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System4 and the Secretary-General of the United Nations.5

2 See para. 3 of the present study.
3 See para. 4 of the present study.
4 See para. 6 of the present study.
5 See paras. 7 and 8 of the present study.

II. Analytical summary of practice

A. Adoption and amendment of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly

1. Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization

3. During its 1997 session,6 the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization considered a draft resolution contained in a working paper submitted by Portugal,7 which suggested increasing the number of Vice-Chairmen of each Main Committee of the General Assembly from two to three by amending rule 103 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly (A/520/Rev.15).8 As explained by the sponsor delegation, this change would make it possible to deal in a better way with the increase in the workload of the Main Committees, especially in cases when their officers had to be absent.9 Furthermore, it was pointed out that since there were only four officers in each Main Committee, one of the five regional groups in the Organization was not represented among the officers of the Committee. Fairness would be restored by having a third Vice-Chairman (thus increasing the number of the officers to five), who would be chosen from the one

6 The Special Committee on the Charter met at United Nations Headquarters from 27 January to 7 February 1997 (see GA (52), Suppl. No. 33, para. 1).
7 A/AC.182/L.92 and Rev.1. See also GA (52), Suppl. No. 33, paras. 133-139.
8 Ibid., para. 133.
9 Ibid., para. 134.
regional group not yet represented. As a result of its deliberations, the Special Committee recommended the draft resolution to the General Assembly for its consideration and adoption.

2. Sixth Committee

4. In 1997, during the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, the Sixth Committee, at its 34th meeting adopted draft resolution A/C.6/52/L.8 entitled “Amendment to rule 103 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly”, which was recommended by the Special Committee. The General Assembly, by its resolution 52/163, decided to amend the first sentence of rule 103 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly to read: “Each Main Committee shall elect a Chairman, three Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur”. The Assembly also decided that the amendment “shall take effect as from the fifty-third session of the General Assembly”.

3. General Assembly (resolutions adopted without reference to a Main Committee)

5. In 1995, during its forty-ninth session, the Assembly adopted resolution 49/252 on the strengthening of the United Nations system, in which it decided inter alia, to establish an open-ended high-level working group of the Assembly under the chairmanship of its President to “specify by consensus those ideas and proposals ... that it concludes are appropriate for the purpose of revitalization, strengthening and reform of the United Nations system”. Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations

6. The working group that was established by Assembly resolution 49/252 and began its work on 14 September 1995 successfully completed its mandate when, after its last substantive session, on 9 and 10 July 1997, in its report of 18 July 1997, it agreed to recommend that the Assembly adopt the draft resolution entitled “Strengthening of the United Nations system”, in the annex to which it was pointed out, inter alia, that its work had focused on improving the capacity of the General Assembly to discharge effectively its functions. In 1997, in its resolution 51/241, the General Assembly adopted the recommendations of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System as contained in the annex to the resolution for implementation effective from 1 January 1998.

Secretary-General

7. In 1998, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the General Assembly on the implementation of its resolution 51/241, stating that the annex to the resolution contained several provisions which, while they might not necessarily require the amendment of the rules of procedure, nonetheless affected the understanding or application of those rules. In his report, the Secretary-General noted, inter alia, that the implementation of paragraph 3 of the annex dealing with the deadline for making the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization available prior to the opening of the regular session of the Assembly required that rule 48 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly be revised to read 30 instead of 45 days; and that rule 1 of the rules of procedure would need to be amended since paragraph 17 of the annex called for the regular sessions of the Assembly to commence on the first Tuesday following 1 September, while rule 1 referred to the third Tuesday in September. In addition, the Secretary-General noted that concerning the fixing of a closing date for the regular session of the Assembly, if the current practice was retained, the closing date would consistently fall on an official holiday of the Organization. He suggested that the Assembly consider opening its session on the Wednesday following the first Monday in September and closing the session on the preceding day. In 1998 and 1999, the General Assembly made decisions regarding the opening and/or closing dates of its fifty-

10 Ibid., para. 135.
11 Ibid., paras. 134-139.
12 A/52/652, paras. 13-16, draft resolution III.
13 GA resolution 52/163, para. 1.
14 Ibid., para. 2. See also rules of procedure of the General Assembly (A/520/Rev.17), para. 46.
15 GA resolution 49/252, paras. 1 and 2.
16 See also in this connection para. 5 of the present study.
17 A/50/24.
18 A/51/24 and annex, para. 1.
19 GA resolution 51/241, para. 1.
20 A/52/855, para. 76 (regarding the references to the rules of procedure, see also paras. 4, 5, 7, 16, 17, 24, 30 and 62). See also Yearbook of the United Nations 1998.
21 A/52/855, para. 5.
22 Ibid., para. 16.
23 Ibid., para. 17.
24 Ibid. See also Yearbook of the United Nations 1998.
second, fifty-third, fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth sessions, on an ad hoc basis, in its resolutions 52/232, 53/224 and 53/239. However, in 1999, in its resolution 53/224, the Assembly, mindful that, for practical reasons, the closing of the regular sessions of the General Assembly should be on Monday, which should not be a holiday, and the opening of the regular sessions should be on the following day, that is on a Tuesday, decided to consider further during its fifty-third session the question of the opening and closing dates of future regular sessions of the General Assembly.

8. In the report of the Secretary-General on the revitalization of the work of the Assembly that was requested by its resolution 48/264, it was, inter alia, pointed out that the implementation of some of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 51/241 concerning the organization and the work of the General Assembly requires that several of its rules of procedure be amended and that the General Assembly take decisions to that effect. The Secretary-General further concluded that a revised edition of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly would not be issued until such decisions had been taken.

B. Elections of the President of the General Assembly

9. At the beginning of the fiftieth, fifty-first, fifty-second, fifty-third and fifty-fourth sessions, only one candidate was nominated. Thus, the President of the General Assembly was in each case elected by acclamation, taking into account the provisions of paragraph 16 of annex VI of the rules of procedure. At the fiftieth session, Diogo Freitas do Amaral (Portugal) was elected President; at the fifty-first session, Razali Ismail (Malaysia) was elected President; at the fifty-second session, Hennadiy Udovenko (Ukraine) was elected President; at the fifty-third session, Didier Opertti (Uruguay) was elected President; and at the fifty-fourth session, Theo-Ben Gurirab (Namibia) was elected President.

25 See para. 1 of GA resolutions 52/232, 53/224 and 53/239.
26 GA resolution 53/224, fourth preambular paragraph and para. 2.
28 A/52/856, para. 38.
29 GA decision 50/302; A/50/PV.1, p. 2; GA decision 51/302; A/51/PV.1, p. 2; GA decision 52/302; A/52/PV.1, p. 2; GA decision 53/302; A/53/PV.1, p. 2; and GA decision 54/302; A/54/PV.1, p. 2.