

Submission for 2026 Word of the Year: Accountability!

My submission for the 2026 word of the year is: ACCOUNTABILITY

Current international crises and domestic declines of democracy are due to the fact that political rulers get away with wars of aggression, extra-judicial killings, breaking national and international laws, causing attacks against parliaments, dismantling democratic institutions or enriching themselves and their cronies beyond imagination. In most cases they are evading justice and accountability.

About 20 years ago, I organized an Octopus Conference on corruption and democracy (political finances – conflicts of interest – lobbying – justice) and subsequently edited a publication on this. <https://book.coe.int/en/economy-and-crime-fight-against-corruption/6593-corruption-and-democracy.html>

In my own chapter, I noted the following:

“Over time, democracy has gone through many transformations and now exists in many variations. However, the basic principles of democracy remain the same, namely, the ‘sovereignty of equal citizens and the accountability of unequal rulers’. In fact, a major concern of all democratic systems since the times of ancient Greece has been to ensure the accountability of rulers, to prevent the abuse of power and with it to prevent and control corruption.”

<https://www.alexsas.net/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/370ed1a2-70cd-440a-b4ac-546e3fbcd624/CODEM-extract-chapter-1.pdf>

Some basics: In a democracy, authority and power is delegated by citizens. Those who have been elected to govern must explain and justify their actions. Otherwise power becomes arbitrary and abusive. Accountability is not only provided through elections. Courts, parliaments, oversight bodies and independent media are crucial parts of a system of accountability that holds rulers (and majorities) in check to prevent tyranny and to safeguard fundamental rights and the rule of law.

And international tribunals are designed to hold rulers and other offenders accountable for international crimes.

In short: accountability is crucial for democracy and justice, but also for international peace and the protection of human rights.

And this is why I am submitting “accountability” as my proposal for the 2026 Word of the Year. Or should it be the Word of the Decade or Era?