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**EUROPEAN COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE
(CDDG)**

**REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL REFLECTION GROUP
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND FOLLOW-UP**

INFORMATION NOTE

For information and discussion by the CDDG

Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by the
Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity
Democratic Governance Division

1. Background

1. Following an invitation by the Committee of Ministers at its 132nd Session in Turin (Italy) on 20 May 2022, a High-level Reflection Group was set up by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in June 2022 to prepare a report on the future of the Council of Europe in the light of the current general context in Europe.

2. The report was released on 5 October 2022 ([news and link to the report](#)). The CDDG Bureau, at its 24th meeting (13-14 October) asked the Secretariat to prepare an information note for the CDDG highlighting some of the findings of the said report, together with additional information on follow-up action given to it by the Council of Europe / Committee of Ministers.

2. Findings and conclusions of the report which are of particular relevance for the CDDG

3. The introduction recalls the various considerations and concerns which have led to the report and its recommendations (pp 9 to 11): the Russian Federation's aggression on Ukraine acting as a "wake-up call", "the questioning of the principle of the rule of law, challenges to our common human rights protection system and many other challenges to our societies"; "Long term, unresolved frozen conflicts persist", "democratic security as the key for member states to address these challenges together and to secure peace and prosperity in Europe"; "Our democracies are not established once and for all. We need to strive to uphold them each and every day, continuously, in all parts of our continent, at all levels of government, and guard against authoritarian leaders and democratic backsliding. Democracy is not just about what happens on election day. True democracies require that elections be free and fair, that opposition candidates may present themselves without fear of arrest or being silenced by other means, that power be transferred between parties based on free and fair election results and that there be systems in place to ensure that an incumbent president or prime minister does not resort to any means possible to remain in power indefinitely."

4. The report contains a number of suggestions and recommendations. Some of these are of general importance and concern desirable reforms and the working methods; others concern the strengthening of action in certain areas of work.

5. The excerpts below are highlighted insofar as they may concern the CDDG's own future work rather than Council of Europe reforms with a broader impact, for instance the holding of a fourth summit and institutionalising such summits as a periodic event, financial issues, deepening partnerships with the EU, UN etc.

A. Examples of new working methods recommended

- *The group (...) further appreciates the role of youth as advocates and practitioners of democratic citizenship and human rights education in line with the Council of Europe Youth Strategy 2030. **With this in mind, the group recommends ensuring the inclusion of a "youth perspective" in the Organisation's intergovernmental and other deliberation by consulting European youth organisations when shaping public policies in any given field.** And this also in light of a recent informal exchange of views at a Committee of Ministers' working group related to the participation of organisations representing youth, in particular the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), in the development of "soft-law" instruments in the Council of Europe.(...) **In addition, each international legal instrument adopted by the Council of Europe should highlight the impact it may or may not have on young people (this is a practice which should be developed at national level too).** (page 16)*
- *The Council of Europe must be visible in all member states. Its achievements must be communicated and its success stories told. The group takes note of ongoing initiatives, such as the Council of Europe Week or the project on the impact of the European Convention on Human Rights (...) but **recommends that more outreach be carried out by all bodies of the Council of Europe to promote the Organisation and its values.** (page 18)*
- *(...) The group **recommends that the Council of Europe continues supporting Ukraine within its areas of expertise and its mandate.**(page 28)*

B. Substantive relevant suggestions and recommendations for the CDDG

- *In addition, a number of member states (e.g. Ireland) have developed and are implementing deliberative and participatory forms of democracy to complement and reinforce citizens' trust in democratic institutions. In this context, **the Council of Europe could promote deeper democratic citizenship by encouraging member states to introduce citizens' assemblies, youth parliaments and other ways to empower citizens.**(page 15)*
- *In 2016, in Brussels, the Ministers for Education of the member states committed themselves to establishing the Reference Framework of Competences for a Culture of Democracy (RFCDC). **The group recommends developing a new legal instrument on education for democracy based on the RFCDC in order to strengthen the democratic culture in our member states and give further impetus to its implementation.** (page 15)*
- *(...) The group notes that the Parliamentary Assembly issued a report in 2022, "Safeguarding and promoting genuine democracy in Europe", which contains suggestions for "early warning mechanisms" and a "Permanent Platform on Democracy". **The group recommends that the Council of Europe develops its own benchmarks and indices for principles of good democratic governance. A Council of Europe democracy index could be explored.** (pp. 15-16)*

3. Follow-up action given to date (situation as of 7 November)

6. On 12 October, the Minister of State for European Affairs of Ireland, under that country's Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, gave his backing to a fourth summit of Council of Europe Heads of State and Government, so as to follow-up on the recommendations of the High-Level Reflection Group. Addressing the Parliamentary Assembly, the Minister urged parliamentarians from across Europe to call on their governments to do the same.

7. The Committee of Ministers established an *Ad hoc Working Party* (GT-SOM4) *to reflect on the organisational and other arrangements for a possible 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe*, which met several times in October. The Ministers' Deputies eventually [agreed on 3 November](#) that **a fourth Summit be held in Reykjavik, Iceland, on 16-17 May 2023, under the Icelandic presidency of the Committee of ministers**. GT-SOM4 has been tasked with the preparation of the documents to be adopted at the Summit and instructed to report back regularly. The Ministers' Deputies also invited the Secretariat together with the host country to make the necessary practical arrangements for the holding of the Summit.