

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 22 November 2017

CDDG(2017)21
Item 4.5 of the agenda

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE (CDDG)

CDDG ACTIVITIES IN 2016-2017: REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

For discussion and adoption

Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by the
Directorate General of Democracy
Democratic Governance Department

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The impact of the CDDG's work

The present note sets out the principal outputs and outcomes which the CDDG has delivered in response to its terms of reference adopted by the Committee of Ministers for the period 2016-2017 and the tasks which it was set.

In accordance with those terms of reference, the overall aim of the CDDG is "to promote the common goal of democratic security through the sharing of information about policy, the dissemination of best practice and the development as appropriate of possible standards relating to: modernisation of democratic institutions, public administration reform, citizens' democratic participation and democratic governance (including e-governance and e-democracy) at all levels, including at the local and regional levels.

To this end, the work and activities of the CDDG is structured along three categories:

- 1) *Intergovernmental output and collective action by the Committee and the member States to sustain and promote European norms and standards in democracy and governance*

In the period 2016-2017, the CDDG held high-level exchanges in relation to territorial, public administration and local government reforms with the participation of senior political representatives and ministers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

In line with its terms of reference and mindful of the recommendations set out in the annual reports by the Secretary General, the Committee also prepares practical instruments for use by member states and citizens. In doing so, it pays particular attention to the 12 Principles of Good Governance, the effective implementation of which is "essential to ensure the proper functioning of democracy, to build trust between the citizens and the states, and to meet citizens' legitimate needs and expectations through democratic governance and efficient and transparent service delivery."¹ These include:

- The guidelines on civil participation in political decision making, elaborated in cooperation with the Conference of INGOs. They seek to ensure meaningful and effective participation of all individuals and societal groups and were approved by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2017 (CM(2017)83).
- The revision of Recommendation Rec(2001)19 on the participation of citizens in local public life. The draft texts of the revised recommendation and explanatory report were approved by the CDDG at its meeting on 4-5 December 2017 for transmission to the Committee of Ministers.

¹ Report by the Secretary General 2017 – "State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law: Populism – How strong are Europe's checks and balances?" Chapter 4 – Democratic Institutions, Good Governance, page 91.

2) *Specific activities to support member states with reforms of democratic governance at all levels*

The CDDG also gives support to member States by way of direct action, providing legal advice and practical assistance for specific reforms, oftentimes through the Centre of Expertise. Activities in the field are delivered also in cooperation with other partners, including the Congress, but increasingly also with input from other institutions and organisations such as the EU (e.g. Structural Reform Support Service) and OECD. Significant funding for projects was provided by way of voluntary contributions from external donors such as the EU, Switzerland, Denmark and EEA Norway Grants.

More than 25 member States received support in cooperation with or directly from the Centre of Expertise. In this context, two important instruments stand out: peer reviews providing input by senior officials, members of the CDDG, and international experts from other member states, and toolkits, practical capacity-building aids for the reinforcement and evaluation of authorities' capacities in a variety of areas.

Major projects implemented in Albania, Armenia, Greece, Malta, Serbia, Ukraine and in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries benefitted from legal expertise, technical assistance and practical support measures and training. Four of these were also subject of peer reviews in areas such as intermunicipal cooperation, decentralisation, distribution of powers and competences, training needs for public officials. Projects in EaP countries were organised under the Partnership for Good Governance programme (PGG) (formerly the Partnership Cooperation Framework - PCF).

Small but high-impact activities were organised under the ordinary budget in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Lithuania and Poland on the basis of relevant toolkits.

The toolkits of the Centre of Expertise are regularly revised and updated with input from the CDDG including, in particular, recent updates and additions to the Public Ethics Benchmarking, Leadership Academy Programme and Cross-Border Cooperation tools. Furthermore, two new Toolkits have recently been developed: "Civil Participation in Political Decision-Making", which was directly inspired by the Guidelines on participation prepared by the Committee; and "Municipal Amalgamation", which was elaborated based on plenary exchanges and responses to questionnaires.

In cooperation with the Centre of Expertise, a seminar was organised on "Democratic Governance in Metropolitan Areas" in October 2017 in Thessaloniki in the framework of the CoE/EU Technical Assistance Project on Institutional Enhancement of Local Governance in Greece.

The CDDG was further able to contribute to the Conference on “Good Governance at Local Level: Challenges and Prospects” in Bulgaria (Sofia, March 2016), the International Conference on Local Government Reform and Intermunicipal Cooperation (Cyprus, February 2017) and the Conference on “Improving the quality of Public Administration at Local and Regional Level” in the Czech Republic (Prague, September 2017), held in the context of their respective Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

Furthermore specific activities are delivered in member states through the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE), providing continued support for the Strategy of Good Governance.

2016-2017 saw a marked increase in interest among member States in accreditation for ELoGE following the simplification of the procedures approved by the Committee of Ministers. Four countries received first time accreditation - Malta, Greece, Poland, and Spain (Basque country). Accreditation was renewed for Bulgaria’s ELoGE Programme which is now in its fourth round.. A pilot project for ELoGE was also approved. It will be implemented by the Centre of Expertise in cooperation with the European Federation of Local Government Chief Executives (UDITE) for awarding the Label to individual municipalities from different countries.

As regards the implementation of the Twelve Principles of Good Democratic Governance, the principles of “Openness and Transparency” (Principle 4), “Ethical conduct” (Principle 6) and “Accountability” (Principle 12) have been a particular focal point for the CDDG in light of the findings of the Secretary General’s 2016 Report². Member States indicated “Fair Conduct of Elections, Representation and Participation” (Principle 1), “Efficiency and Effectiveness” (Principle 3), “Openness and Transparency” (Principle 4), “Competence and Capacity” (Principle 7) and “Sound Financial Management” (Principle 10) as specific priorities.

3) *The CDDG also provides means and instruments that allow member states to engage with each other in matters of policy, best practice and standards*

In 2016-2017, ten member states benefitted from the Rapid Response Service (RRS). Eleven RRS requests were sent out. This service, highly valued by member states, enables them to request comparative information from their peers within a short timeframe. Themes addressed include: electoral procedures and referenda, participation, decentralisation, adequacy of financial resources, municipal amalgamation, e-government, as well as training and benefits for public officials. Similar exchanges took place also without Secretariat involvement.

² Report by the Secretary General 2016 – “State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law: A security imperative for Europe.” Chapter 4 – Democratic Institutions, Good Governance, page 78

Delegations from member states also pursued exchanges on a bilateral and multilateral basis on specific topics of interest inspired by the agenda of CDDG activities. This was the case, for example, following the seminar on Democratic Governance in Metropolitan Areas in relation to topics such as financial structures, decentralisation and citizen participation.

In conclusion, the period 2016-2017 has seen sustained development of intergovernmental cooperation in the field of democracy and governance at all levels. The CDDG has thus been able to make a considerable contribution to priorities of the Council of Europe and of the Secretary General as well as to respond to requests and priorities of individual member states. Furthermore, the CDDG provided input and, where possible expertise and assistance, in response to requests from the Committee of Ministers on various issues related to its mandate.

Action required

The members of the CDDG are invited to examine the draft text set out above and to present possible comments and observations as regards its content. It is further invited to instruct the Secretariat on the final text to be presented to the Committee of Ministers.