

THE REYKJAVIK PARAMETERS FOR DEMOCRACY

A Council of Europe framework
to enhance democratic systems



QUESTIONS – ANSWERS

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1

What exactly are the Reykjavík Parameters for Democracy?

Within the [New Democratic Pact for Europe](#), the Council of Europe has developed a set of parameters to translate the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy, adopted at the [4th Summit of Heads of State and Government](#) of the Council of Europe in May 2023, into practice.

The [Reykjavík Parameters](#) consist of criteria and safeguards necessary for a healthy democracy and are based on Council of Europe treaties, recommendations and other instruments. They are organised in five interlinked and equally important pillars: (I) democratic participation, (II) democratic institutions, (III) democratic governance and integrity, (IV) democratic freedoms, inclusion and civil society and (V) democratic future.

There is a total of 46 parameters divided into 16 key areas of democratic life. They include, for example, free and fair elections, the separation of powers, freedom of expression, assembly and association or citizen participation in decision-making. For each parameter there are indicators that help determine how the parameter should be understood and applied.

2

Why is a set of Parameters for Democracy needed in Europe?

European democracies are facing many challenges today. Citizens are increasingly questioning their trust in leaders and institutions, against a backdrop of disinformation, foreign interference and growing polarisation within society. Rapid technological change, economic inequalities, and pressures on civil society are making it even harder for democracies to work well and deliver to their citizens.

To address these and other challenges, it is important to have a reference framework that reflects a shared understanding of what a healthy, resilient and future-oriented democracy requires. The Reykjavík Parameters, based on Council of Europe instruments and guidance, provide such a framework.

3

If the Reykjavík Parameters are based on existing standards, what is their added value?

Many of the standards needed for a well-functioning democracy already exist in Council of Europe instruments. The Parameters bring them together in one place, making it easier for member states to understand the strengths of their democratic systems, identify areas for improvement, and prepare for future challenges.

4

How do these Parameters relate to other international standards (e.g. United Nations, European Union)?

The Parameters are based on Council of Europe standards, but they also take into account other important international treaties, soft law and best practices. For example, the parameters on anti-corruption are inspired by the Council of Europe conventions on corruption (ETS. No 173 and 174) and the work of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) but also by the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and its Implementation Review Mechanism.

Additionally, the Council of Europe has 75 years of experience in supporting its member states in reinforcing the foundations of democracy and extending its benefits. This expertise in democracy, human rights and the rule of law puts the Organisation in a unique position to support its member states in advancing democracy. It also enables it to provide a platform for countries across Europe to learn from one another and work together to protect democratic security.

5

How can member states apply the Reykjavik Parameters?

Council of Europe members states – and other interested actors – can use the Parameters as a guide to reflect on the functioning of their democracies. This can be done through a voluntary self-assessment of how democratic standards are applied in a country. Such self-assessments can help countries better understand what is working well, where they can make improvements, and how they can further strengthen their democracy. Their outcomes can spark public debate, help shape reforms and public policies, or check whether ongoing reforms are delivering the expected results.

6 Who can use the Parameters?

The Parameters are addressed to Council of Europe member states as the primary guarantors of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the main guardians of democracy and the rule of law.

But anyone can use them to better understand, discuss or assess the state of their democracy. For example, universities could use the Parameters in their research, a national or regional Parliament may want to gather information ahead of debating a complex issue, etc.

7 Are the Parameters mandatory or voluntary?

The use of the Parameters is voluntary. The Parameters do not create new legal obligations; rather, they are based on existing Council of Europe treaties, recommendations and other instruments. At the same time, many of these standards are binding for member states. The parameters relating to freedom of expression or assembly and association, for example, come directly from the requirements of the European Convention on Human Rights as interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights.

8 Do the Parameters require changes to existing national laws or constitutions?

No. The Reykjavík Parameters for Democracy do not require member states to amend their laws or constitutions.

However, if a state – or a university or a civil society organisation – decides to use the Parameters for an assessment, it may identify gaps and vulnerabilities, as well as opportunities to further strengthen its democracy. Based on this, the national authorities may decide to make legal or policy changes to address those gaps

9 What support is available to implement the parameters?

Starting in 2027, the Council of Europe will support the pilot implementation of the Parameters in a few volunteering member states, and it will facilitate exchanges of best practices among countries interested in strengthening their democratic resilience. This will help countries to learn from each other and see how the parameters can be applied in different national contexts.

10

How are different local democratic traditions and political realities taken into account when applying the Parameters?

The Parameters are based on a shared understanding among Council of Europe member states of the principles and conditions that are essential for a healthy democracy. But they also recognise that there is no single model of democracy. Countries have different constitutional traditions, institutions and political cultures. This is why, when applying the Parameters, member states will take their national circumstances into account when assessing how they are meeting their international obligations. For example, how judges are appointed can vary from country to country; what is important is that the appointment procedures are fair and merit-based, allowing judges to perform their duties independently.

11

Will applying the Parameters improve a country's international standing or access to resources?

The Reykjavík Parameters for Democracy are not a certification or a ranking mechanism, nor are they intended to provide funding. Their purpose is to help countries have a better understanding on their democratic systems and guide reforms.

However, a country that chooses to assess its democratic institutions and processes against internationally recognised standards shows a commitment to democracy and good governance. This can help build confidence among citizens and international partners. Strong democratic institutions, transparency and respect for democratic rights are widely recognised as important factors in fostering trust, credibility and constructive international cooperation.



Contribution to the New Democratic Pact for Europe

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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