

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 28 November 2025

CDDEM(2025)25

STEERING COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY (CDDEM)

4th plenary meeting

(26-28 November 2025)

ABRIDGED MEETING REPORT

Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

The Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM) held its 4th plenary meeting in Strasbourg on 26–28 November 2025, chaired by the Vice-Chair Mr Vebjørn Heines on 26 and on the morning of 27 November, and by the newly elected Chair, Ms Katrin Kivi, on the afternoon of 27 and on 28 November.

The agenda of the meeting is contained in the appendix. The full report of the meeting including the list of participants is available on the CDDEM's website.

Gender distribution: 97 participants, 44 men (45,5%) and 53 women (52,9%)

List of items for decision by the Committee of Ministers

CDDEM invites the Committee of Ministers to:

- take note of the abridged report of the 4th plenary meeting of the Steering Committee on Democracy (26-28 November 2025);
- take note of the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles and other relevant Council of Europe standards to promote, protect and strengthen democracy throughout the member States.

For subsequent decision by the Committee of Ministers

CDDEM invites the Committee of Ministers to:

- examine, with a view to its possible adoption, draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal status of civil society organisations in Europe;
- take note of the Explanatory memorandum to the draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal status of civil society organisations in Europe.

List of items for information of the Committee of Ministers

A. Completed activities

CDDEM:

- took note of the report of the 4th meeting of the working group GT-CS responsible for preparing the updated draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal status of civil society organisations in Europe. Mr Georgios Chrysafis, Chair of the GT-CS, updated the Committee on the feedback received during the public consultation and the discussions held at the 4th meeting of the working group;
- examined, revised and approved the draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal status of civil society organisations in Europe, and agreed to transmit the text to the Committee of Ministers, after revision by the legal and editorial services of the Secretariat, with a view to its possible adoption by the Ministers' Deputies in 2026;
- in the light of its examination of the draft recommendation, examined and adopted the explanatory memorandum to the draft recommendation, to be published subject to adoption of the recommendation by the Committee of Ministers;

- took note of the report of the 4th meeting of the working group GT-P responsible for preparing the draft Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles and other relevant Council of Europe standards to promote, protect and strengthen democracy throughout the member States. Mr Edwin Lefebvre, Chair of the GT-P, updated the Committee on the feedback received during the public consultation and the discussions held at the 4th meeting of the working group;
- examined, revised and adopted the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles and other relevant Council of Europe standards to promote, protect and strengthen democracy throughout the member States. One delegation underlined the role of the Parameters as guidelines aimed at assisting member States which should not entail the establishment of a new monitoring mechanism. Three delegations indicated that they were each unable to support the wording of one sub-parameter (parameter 7.1., sub-parameter 7, parameter 7.3., sub-parameter 2, and parameter 12.2, sub-parameter 2, respectively). The Committee agreed to transmit the text to the Committee of Ministers for information and possible endorsement.

B. Ongoing activities

Regarding standard-setting activities, CDDEM:

- examined the first draft of the Guidelines on enhancing participation in elections of women, girls, young persons and vulnerable groups, held an exchange of views with Professor Anna Lavizzari, CDDEM consultant, and provided guidance for the further elaboration of the instrument. CDDEM agreed to entrust further development of the Guidelines to the working group GT-P2, assisted by the consultant, in addition to its work on the future framework for the use of the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles;
- took note of the points for preliminary reflection and discussion prepared by the Secretariat for the future recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on multilevel governance; held an exchange of views based on these points and discussed the main orientations, structure, and expected added value of the future recommendation; instructed the Secretariat to prepare, within the working group GT-GPN once constituted, the first outline of the draft recommendation for examination at the next plenary meeting;
- adopted the Terms of Reference for the two working groups for the 2026–2027 biennium. The first working group (GT-P2) will prepare the draft framework for the use of the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles, as well as the draft Guidelines on enhancing the participation in elections of women, girls, young persons and vulnerable groups. The second working group (GT-GPN) will prepare the draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on multilevel governance and the implementation review report on Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on good democratic governance.

In addition, CDDEM:

- welcomed new members from Austria, Denmark, Estonia and Sweden, who joined the Committee since its previous meeting, and new observers European Center for Human Rights, CURE Campaign, the European Council of Spatial Planners and Pax Romana;

- took note of the information provided by the Vice-Chair and the Secretariat on recent developments, including the adoption of the Council of Europe's Programme and Budget 2026–2027 and, in particular, the Revised Terms of Reference of Intergovernmental Structures, which incorporate the adjustments to the CDDEM Terms of Reference considered and proposed by the Committee in spring 2025. The Committee also took note of the preparation of practical guidelines to support Council of Europe bodies and sectors in their engagement with civil society, based on the Committee's Guidance Note on civil society participation in the intergovernmental work of the Council of Europe adopted in 2024;
- examined the draft Study on the advantages and risks of the use of generative artificial intelligence in public debate relating to democratic processes and on AI literacy for democratic life and held an exchange of views with Professor Natali Helberger, CDDEM consultant. The Committee agreed on the process for its finalisation, whereby the Study will be taken note of through written procedure following the submission of possible comments by 20 January 2026;
- held an exchange of views with Mr Matjaž Gruden, Director for Democracy, on the state of play of the New Democratic Pact for Europe, discussing the ongoing contributions of Council of Europe structures, member states and other actors to the Pact consultations and to its three pillars. In this context, the CDDEM's own contribution was highlighted, notably its work on innovation for democracy through deliberative mechanisms, the democratic use of digital technologies, and, in particular, the importance of the Parameters and the future framework for their use as relevant to all three pillars;
- took note of the information on the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (CETS No. 205, the Tromsø Convention), recent developments and ongoing activities under the Convention, provided by Ms Elvana Thaci, Head of the Tromsø Convention Unit;
- took note of the update on the 2025 edition of the World Forum for Democracy provided by Ms Irena Guidikova, Head of Democratic Institutions and Freedoms Department, and discussed the continued relevance of the Forum, underlining the added value of the sustained engagement of young people and of participants from beyond Europe, and recognising the need for further mobilisation and support from member states;
- held an exchange of views with Ms Marie-Hélène Boulanger, Deputy Director and Head of the Unit in charge of Democracy, Citizenship and Free Movement, DG JUST, European Commission, who provided a comprehensive update on the ongoing and planned activities under the European Democracy Shield. The exchange focused in particular on the possible implications of the Shield for the role of online platforms in the context of elections;
- took note of information presented by the CDDEM members from Armenia, Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Montenegro, and the United Kingdom about relevant legislative and policy developments and initiatives in their states;
- took note of the establishment of the Committee of Experts on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (PC-FIMI) that is to operate under the authority of the European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC) and is entrusted to prepare a Feasibility study on the possible elaboration of a Council of Europe legal instrument on foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), with participation of several other committees including CDDEM. The Committee appointed MS Diana Chiriac (Republic of Moldova) as its representative to the PC-FIMI;

- examined the application for observer status submitted by the Open Government Partnership and decided to grant it observer status in accordance with Article 8.a of Resolution CM/Res(2021)3 on intergovernmental committees and subordinate bodies, their terms of reference and working methods;
- in the context of the evaluation of its activities, discussed a methodology for collecting and exchanging information on the impact of its work and on the implementation of Council of Europe standards in member states, and took note of the 2025 Activity Report of the Gender Equality Rapporteur Mr Edwin Lefebvre;
- took note of the High-Level Conference on Building Democratic Resilience to Disinformation, organised by the Council of Europe and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tourism of Malta, that took place on 17 September 2025 under the auspices of the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, and the upcoming conference Shaping democratic renewal: civic space and the path to a New Democratic Pact for Europe that is to take place on 2-3 February in Strasbourg, in the organisation of the Council of Europe;
- discussed and approved the calendar of meetings for 2026 and agreed to hold its 5th and 6th plenary meetings in a hybrid format, in Strasbourg and online, on 8-10 June and 18-20 November 2026 respectively. The first meetings of the new working groups will take place on 19-20 February (GT-GPN) and 26-27 March (GT-P2). In this context, the Committee expressed strong support for the continued organisation of its plenary and working group meetings in a hybrid format;
- adopted the abridged report of the 4th plenary meeting.

Resource implications

The above activities of the CDDEM were conducted within the foreseen budgetary envelopes.

Evaluation of completed activities

As noted above, the CDDEM took note of the completion of the following deliverables:

- draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal status of civil society organisations in Europe;
- Explanatory memorandum to the draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal status of civil society organisations in Europe;
- Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles and other relevant Council of Europe standards to promote, protect and strengthen democracy throughout the member States.

Any changes to the composition of the Committee Bureau

- Ms Katrin Kivi (Estonia) was unanimously elected as chairperson for the first term of office of one year.
- Mr Niklas Wilhelmsson (Finland) was unanimously elected as vice-chairperson for the first term of office of one year.
- Ms Hanneke Palm (Netherlands) and Mr Beat Kuoni (Switzerland) were elected as members of the Bureau for the first term of office of two years.

As a result of the above-mentioned elections, the Bureau of CDDEM is composed as follows:

- Chairperson: Ms Katrin Kivi (Estonia)
- Vice-chairperson: Mr Niklas Wilhelmsson (Finland)
- Members: Ms Lilya Afrikyan (Armenia), Mr Peter Andre (Austria), Mr Pavel Mička (Czechia), Ms Hanneke Palm (Netherlands) and Mr Beat Kuoni (Switzerland).

APPENDIX

AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Adoption of the agenda and order of business
3. Information from the Chair/Vice-Chair and the Secretariat
<i>Implementing the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy</i> 4. Standard setting: Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy
<i>Promoting a safe and enabling civic space and citizen participation</i> 5. Standard setting: Updating Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe
<i>Supporting elections</i> 6. Standard setting: Guidelines on enhancing participation in elections of women, girls and young persons, vulnerable groups
<i>Supporting member states to strengthen and maintain good democratic governance at all levels</i> 7. Standard setting: draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on multilevel governance
<i>Emerging issues</i> 8. Study on advantages and risks of the use of AI in public debate relating to democratic processes and on AI literacy for democratic life
9. Elections of Chair and Vice-Chair, one Bureau member and members of working groups (2026-2027)
10. Information on observers to CDDEM
11. World Forum for Democracy – key takeaways

<i>Information sharing and relevant updates</i> 12. Secretariat of the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (Tromsø Convention)
13. Update on the European Union developments related to safeguarding democracy
14. Update on the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
15. Recent national developments in the areas of activity of the CDDEM
16. Participation of CDDEM members in events of relevance to the CDDEM
17. Date of the next meeting
18. Any other business
19. Adoption of the abridged meeting report