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CDDEM(2025)26

STEERING COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY
(CDDEM)

MEETING REPORT

4th Plenary meeting
(26-28 November 2025)

Strasbourg
Palais de l'Europe – Room 8
Agora - Room G02
(and online via KUDO)

Web: www.coe.int/cddem

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

1. Opening of the Meeting

The meeting was opened by the outgoing Vice-Chair, who welcomed all participants, including newly joined members from Austria, Denmark, Estonia, and Sweden, as well as new observer organisations – the European Center for Human Rights, CURE Campaign, European Council of Spatial Planners, and Pax Romana. The list of participants appears in Appendix II below.

2. Adoption of the Agenda and Order of Business

The CDDEM adopted the draft agenda without changes, as it appears in [Appendix I](#) below. Together with the abridged and full meeting reports, the agenda is also available on the [CDDEM's website](#).

3. Information from the Vice-Chair and the Secretariat

The Vice-Chair and the Secretariat opened with an overview of significant programmatic developments. They reported that the “New Democratic Pact for Europe” – the flagship initiative out of the Reykjavik Summit – had moved into its consultation phase, with CDDEM positioned as a knowledge and orientation hub for methodological and inclusive aspects of the Pact. The Secretariat outlined a series of adjustments in the work programme of the Committee: plenaries now span three days instead of two and use a hybrid format to ensure contributions from both in-person and online members as well as experts and observers. In light of the Committee of Ministers’ mid-term review of the organisation’s programme for 2026–2027, the CDDEM’s mandate had been updated to include:

- delivery of a methodological framework to support the use of the Reykjavik Parameters;
- development of a practical tool following the findings of the study on the advantages and risks of the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in public debate relating to democratic process and on AI literacy for democratic life;
- revised timeline for the reviews of two instruments (Recommendation CM(2023)5 on good democratic governance and Recommendation CM(2023) 6 on deliberative democracy) and of the future Committee of Ministers’ recommendation on multilevel governance.

4. Standard setting: Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the [Reykjavik Principles for Democracy](#)

Mr Edwin Lefebvre (Belgium), Chair of the Working Group on Parameters for the Application and Implementation of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy (GT-P), informed the Committee of the progress made on the text since the last CDDEM plenary. He referred to the contributions received during the public consultation held in summer 2025 and outlined the main conclusions of the fourth meeting of the Working Group, which took place on 13–14 October 2025.

Following the introduction, the Committee reviewed the text of the Parameters section by section. The United Kingdom, Azerbaijan and the Netherlands, among others, proposed clarifications to the introductory section, in particular to further specify the intended addressees of the Parameters, the modalities for their revision, and their link to the New Democratic Pact for Europe. The CDDEM agreed on revised wording aimed at avoiding ambiguity and ensuring consistency with the Committee’s mandate, underlining that the Parameters are primarily intended as a self-assessment and learning tool for states, while remaining open for use by other actors, such as researchers and civil society. Azerbaijan and Hungary expressed the position that the Parameters should not result in any additional

assessment of member states or a covert expansion of monitoring. Several states registered their concern about new procedures, emphasising national diversity and self-determination.

Regarding individual parameters, the CDDEM decided as follows:

- On Parameter 1.1 (electoral legal framework), the discussion focused on whether fundamental elements of electoral law may be amended in the year preceding elections. The Venice Commission and the Secretariat recalled both the principle of stability of electoral law and the possibility of introducing amendments in narrowly defined circumstances, provided they serve a democratic purpose and are based on a broad consensus. Croatia advocated for strict adherence to the Venice Commission's recommendation to preserve the stability of electoral law in the year before elections. The CDDEM ultimately agreed to reflect a degree of flexibility in the Parameters, as outlined above.
- On Parameter 1.2 (universal and equal suffrage), the debate focused on how to describe the allocation of seats among constituencies. France and the United Kingdom argued for "evenly" rather than "proportionally" as purely proportional allocation is not always possible, while Norway suggested using both terms, given the variety of electoral systems. The Committee ultimately agreed on a slightly amended formulation requiring that "equal suffrage" be respected, thereby avoiding prescriptive designations.
- In relation to Parameter 2.1 (freedom of assembly), France raised a concern about a potential inconsistency relating to the criteria for the dispersal of assemblies in cases of formal irregularities, noting that many states require prior notification or registration of assemblies. In this context, the Committee drew on the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), as well as the guidelines of the Venice Commission and ODIHR, and agreed on a nuanced approach whereby dispersal should occur only where strictly necessary and proportionate, and solely as a measure of last resort.
- Germany raised a point on the administrative oversight over local authorities in Parameter 4.1 (local and regional competences), suggesting further detailed language to guarantee local discretion and secure judicial remedies – especially relevant to delegated powers. Several delegations, while recognising the value of discretion, advocated for simplicity, ultimately supporting a formulation that prioritises compliance with law/constitution and, where possible, leaves discretion in delegated domains.
- In relation to Parameter 5.1 (checks and balances), Croatia favoured leaving any criteria for constitutional amendments to the national legal order. Several other delegations considered it valuable to keep a reference to the guidance provided by the Venice Commission on constitutional amendments while avoiding any prescriptive requirements. The Committee ultimately agreed to retain a light-touch sub-parameter that refers to this guidance without introducing prescriptive criteria.
- Germany raised concerns regarding the first sub-parameter under Parameter 6.2 (Parliamentary ethics and conduct) based on the concept of free mandate and the privacy of elected representatives. It was pointed out that the wording is in line with GRECO's recommendations and the Committee of Ministers, which several representatives of other Member States in plenary supported. Germany referred to their lobby register and their understanding that this constitutes the "regulation" required in the sub-parameter. Ultimately, the first sub-parameter's wording was retained.
- The Committee held an in-depth discussion on Parameter 7.3, during which Germany and Croatia proposed more nuanced language to reflect the diversity of national prosecutorial systems, including differences in hierarchical structures, degrees of autonomy and accountability arrangements. Several other delegations supported retaining a clear indicator on political independence in individual cases. Croatia noted that the second sub-parameter was inconsistent with the first one, which is clear, logical and the essence of the rule of law. While accommodating to the agreed wording of the second sub-parameter in order to address the legal framework that exist in some other member states, the Croatian delegation maintained that this should be done through

a text which would not conflict with the first sub-parameter, which confirms the independence of the office of public prosecutor. The Committee agreed on revised wording, noting that certain reservations would be reflected in the report in light of the variations among domestic systems.

- Discussions under Parameter 8.1 focused on asset declaration requirements for top executive functions, with Germany suggesting their deletion due to differing obligations across functions. Following exchanges with other delegations, it was agreed to retain the reference to “top executive functions”, in line with GRECO recommendation. In addition, Germany’s proposal to include the notion of “necessary” independence of anti-corruption and anti-money laundering authorities was accepted and incorporated into Parameter 8.3.
- In relation to Parameter 12.2 (equality, diversity and inclusion), Azerbaijan stressed the diversity of national legal frameworks, noting that some states do not recognise non-binary gender identities and therefore requested the inclusion of the phrase “where applicable in accordance with national legislation”, a position echoed by Hungary. The Netherlands and Belgium observed that Council of Europe standards should not be limited by specific national legislation. Reference was also made to the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights on the rights of LGBTI persons, as well as to the recent adoption of the Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation on the rights of intersex people. Azerbaijan further clarified that its national legislation does not recognise non-binary gender.
- On Parameter 13 (protected civic space), the discussions focused on the access to funding of national human rights institutions. Germany supported the inclusion of a reference to NHRIs’ access to funding, while several other delegations argued that the emphasis should be placed on the adequacy and sufficiency of funding to enable these institutions to carry out their mandate effectively. The latter approach was ultimately retained.

Finalising the text, the CDDEM adopted the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy.

Three delegations indicated that they were unable to support the final wording of one specific sub-parameter each:

- Sweden expressed reservations with regard to Parameter 7.1 (independence and impartiality of the judiciary), sub-parameter 7, considering that judges’ remuneration could also be determined in accordance with national labour market models. As this addition did not receive support from the plenary, Sweden indicated that it could not support the final wording of this sub-parameter.
- Germany, on the basis that the German prosecution forms part of its executive branch, raised a concern in relation to Parameter 7.3 (prosecutorial objectivity, impartiality and accountability), sub-parameter 2, proposing that the reference to the prevention of political interference in individual cases be limited to situations where such interference lacks a legal basis. As their proposal for change was not retained, Germany indicated that it could not support the final wording of the sub-parameter.
- Azerbaijan indicated, with regard to Parameter 12.2 (equal access to and enjoyment of rights), sub-parameter 2, that it would interpret the provision in line with its national legislation, which recognises only two biological sexes and does not recognise the concept of non-binary gender and only recognises two biological sexes. The delegation noted that it did not align itself with section of the document to the extent that it contradicts national legislation.

The Secretariat noted that the final version of the Parameters would be submitted to the Committee of Ministers for information and possible endorsement, together with an explanation of the reservations expressed.

5. Standard setting: draft Recommendation on multilevel governance

The Secretariat had shared the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the working group in charge of the elaboration of the recommendation and explained the two main tasks of the GT-GPN Working Group: drafting a new recommendation on multilevel governance (MLG), taking into account the report of the former European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) on the matter and the substantial work of OECD, and preparing an implementation review of Recommendation CM(2023)5 on Good Democratic Governance.

Greece and Belgium emphasised the need to clarify decentralisation and deconcentration, subsidiarity and proportionality, vertical/horizontal relationships, and take into account the political and administrative diversity of European systems. Several delegations noted that fiscal and economic coordination issues – particularly in times of crisis – merit a mention, however, the future recommendation should not duplicate work already done by other entities. Belgium and the United Kingdom favoured a citizen-centred approach, with practical examples of multi-level governance (MLG). The Committee concluded that the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and OECD should be closely involved in the preparation of the recommendation, and that best practices should guide scope and ambition.

The Secretariat shared that a working outline would be ready for the next plenary; and members were asked to provide updates from national MLG innovations.

6. Emerging issues: Study on advantages and risks of the use of AI in public debate relating to democratic processes and on AI literacy for democratic life

The CDDEM reviewed and discussed the draft Study presented by Professor Natali Helberger (University of Amsterdam), CDDEM consultant. The study examines the advantages and risks posed by generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) for democratic processes, with a particular focus on public debate, elections and the media. Grounded in the Council of Europe's standards – notably the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law – it translates current interdisciplinary research into policy-relevant insights and priorities for democratic governance of AI. The draft study identifies a number of opportunities brought by GenAI – enhanced inclusion, high-quality content, innovative participation, new formats of information and communication – as well as serious risks – disinformation, deepfakes, news manipulation, trust erosion, concentration of digital power by a few powerful actors, etc.

The analysis is structured around three core case studies: First, journalism is examined as a cornerstone of democratic societies; the second case study focuses on electoral processes and political campaigning. GenAI can support political actors through operational efficiencies, content creation and citizen engagement, potentially lowering entry barriers for less-resourced actors. At the same time, the report documents risks of manipulation, hyper-personalised messaging, large-scale production of low-quality or misleading content, and foreign influence operations. The third case study addresses the infrastructural dimension of GenAI. The report highlights how control over data, computing power and cloud infrastructure by a small number of global technology companies creates power asymmetries, democratic dependencies and challenges for digital sovereignty. These structural factors, though often invisible, profoundly affect the conditions for public debate, accountability and democratic self-determination.

In its conclusions, the report stresses that GenAI governance should address both risks and opportunities. It calls for the development of substantive guidance on when GenAI use threatens democracy and human rights, while also promoting public-interest innovation that supports pluralism, participation and freedom of expression.

The Committee agreed that all written comments to the study should be submitted by 20 January 2026, with a view to final adoption by written procedure.

7. Standard setting: draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal status of civil society organisations in Europe

The Chair of GT-CS Working Group, Georgios Chrysafis (Greece), introduced the draft Recommendation, recalling an extensive consultation process which consisted of written submissions from civil society, Council of Europe bodies, and national authorities in the preparation of the recommendation.

The Committee first discussed the appropriate terminology, agreeing to use “civil society organisation (CSO)” rather than “non-governmental organisation (NGO)” in order to reflect contemporary use and align with the practice of other European and international institutions, while making clear that political parties fall outside the scope of the text. The discussion then turned to provisions on registration, with a shared emphasis on avoiding arbitrary obstacles and ensuring clarity as to what may constitute a “manifest inconsistency” with democratic principles. In this context, Austria, together with other delegations, proposed wording that was accepted by the Committee.

Germany and Austria expressed support for including safeguards for civil society organisations receiving foreign funding, in order to prevent such funding from being used as a pretext for stigmatising or restrictive labelling. At the same time, they suggested additional wording to enhance clarity. The CDDEM consultant, Mr Jeremy McBride, advised against referring to any specific stigmatising labels in the text, regardless of their denomination, recalling in particular the European Court of Human Rights’ judgment in *Ecodefence* as well as more recent trends affecting civic space. The Committee ultimately agreed on using broad, principled language, complemented by references to relevant case law in the Explanatory Memorandum.

The Committee also exchanged views on financial transparency obligations for CSOs. Czechia highlighted the risk that additional reporting requirements could be instrumentalised to impose disproportionate burdens on CSOs compared to commercial entities, while Germany noted that in certain contexts some overlap of obligations may be unavoidable. The Committee agreed that any such requirements should remain proportionate and avoid duplicating existing obligations.

There was broad agreement on the importance of accountability for CSOs. In this context, the Committee reaffirmed the need to distinguish clearly between proportionate oversight aimed at legitimate objectives such as anti-corruption and anti-money laundering, and measures that are restrictive, excessive or duplicative in nature.

Several delegations supported strengthening the language on CSO participation in policymaking and oversight processes, in particular at national and regional levels. However, in light of the diversity of national frameworks, the Committee opted for flexible wording. A reference to the functioning of CSOs in emergency or conflict situations was also welcomed, reflecting growing concerns in this area.

The Committee subsequently finalised and approved the text of the Recommendation and adopted the Explanatory Memorandum, subject to legal and editorial review, with a view to its submission to the Committee of Ministers for possible adoption in early 2026.

8. Elections of Chair and Vice-Chair, one-three Bureau members and members of working groups (2026-2027)

- Katrin Kivi (Estonia) was unanimously elected as Chairperson for the first term of office of one year.
- Niklas Wilhelmsson (Finland) was unanimously elected as Vice-chairperson for the first term of office of one year.
- 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: Katrin Kivi (Estonia)
- Vice-chairperson: Niklas Wilhelmsson (Finland)
- Members: Lilya Afrikyan (Armenia), Peter Andre (Austria), Pavel Mička (Czechia), Hanneke Palm (Netherlands) and Beat Kuoni (Switzerland).

The Committee also adopted the Terms of Reference (ToR) and selected the members of its two working groups for the period 2026-2027.

The CDDEM elected seven members for the working group on multi-level governance (GT-GPN):

- Peter Andre (Austria),
- Edwin Lefebre (Belgium),
- Petr Schlezinger (Czechia)
- Georgios Chrysafis (Greece),
- Alfonso Carlos Garcia Romero (Spain),
- Tânia Mourato (Portugal),
- Kirsty Brown (United Kingdom),

The CDDEM elected by acclamation six members of the working group on Parameters for the application and implementation of Reykjavik Principles for Democracy – framework for application (GT-P2):

- Peter Andre (Austria)
- Georgios Chrysafis (Greece)
- Xavier Coller Porta (Spain)
- Edwin Lefebre (Belgium)
- Hester Mennes (Netherlands)
- Coralie Blatchford-Neave (United Kingdom)

9. Standard setting: Guidelines on enhancing participation in elections of women, girls and young persons, and vulnerable groups

The CDDEM examined and discussed the first draft of the Guidelines on enhancing the participation in elections of women, girls and young persons, and vulnerable groups, to be finalised until the end of 2026. As part of this discussion, Professor Anna Lavizzari (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), CDDEM consultant, introduced the structure and overall approach of the draft, which aims to provide principle-based and practical guidance grounded in Council of Europe standards. The draft guidelines are organised around five thematic areas addressing barriers to participation in the electoral process: legal and institutional; administrative and procedural; socio-economic; informational and educational; and social and cultural. For each area, the draft proposes recommendations, illustrates good practices,

and includes focused examples. A template was also presented to facilitate the submission by member states of their own good practices.

In this context, it was noted that a key consideration in the drafting process is finding an appropriate balance between articulating general principles and offering sufficiently concrete guidance that can be of practical use to member states.

Several delegations and participants provided substantive feedback. The Netherlands and the Advisory Council on Youth highlighted the importance of compiling a diverse range of good practices from across member states. The Netherlands also raised concerns regarding provisions referring to assistance by a “trusted person”, pointing to potential risks of undue influence, and suggested placing greater emphasis on accessibility measures, such as accessible polling stations, alternative voting arrangements, and assistance by polling station staff. Germany raised questions regarding measures aimed at incentivising the participation of under-represented groups, including the use of voluntary or mandatory quotas, and their potential implications for the principles governing political party formation and candidate selection. The Advisory Council on Youth underlined that young people should not be treated as a homogenous group and called for more targeted and disaggregated approaches. Malta and Switzerland shared national experiences aimed at lowering participation barriers, including measures addressing participation of young people and persons with a migrant background, as well as initiatives such as lowering the voting age and the use of gender quota mechanisms.

The Committee agreed that the preparation of the guidelines will continue within the GT-P2 working group and invited delegations to submit further written comments and contributions ahead of the preparation of the next draft.

10. World Forum for Democracy (WFD) – key takeaways

Ms Irena Guidikova, Head of Democratic Institutions and Freedoms, summarised the key findings of the World Forum for Democracy’s 13th edition, which took place on 5-7 November 2025 in Strasbourg.

According to the Forum discussion, strengthening democratic resilience requires making participation and culture integral to democratic systems. Deliberative democracy should be embedded structurally, including through legal provisions to use deliberative processes in clearly defined circumstances, and by ensuring that the outcomes of citizens’ assemblies and similar mechanisms meaningfully inform decision-making.

Cultural freedom should be firmly protected in law, drawing on the full safeguards of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and complemented by governance frameworks that shield cultural institutions and artists from political pressure. The Council of Europe is particularly well placed to support member states in better understanding the relationship between culture and democracy. Cultural activities, ranging from heritage and the arts to sports, youth work, technology, gaming and social media, can foster civic exchange, inclusion and democratic engagement across diverse communities. Ms Guidikova also mentioned the critical role of media, digital literacy, and democratic education in resilience to disinformation.

France, Estonia, the Advisory Council on Youth, and Armenia reflected on how these findings could be applied at national level and suggested ways for CDDEM to contribute substantively to future Forums.

11. Update on the European Union developments related to safeguarding democracy

Ms Marie-Hélène Boulanger (Deputy Director and Head of the Unit in charge of Democracy, Citizenship and Free Movement, DG JUST, European Commission,) presented the European Union's Democracy Shield, structured around three main pillars: strengthening the integrity of the information space (including measures related to FIMI, the Digital Services Act and the AI Act); reinforcing elections and democratic institutions (through enhanced resilience, common risk assessment protocols, fact-checking and the development of a new support toolkit); and boosting societal participation (notably through civic education, media literacy, inclusiveness and support for local initiatives). She also informed the Committee that work is under way on the establishment of a European Democratic Resilience Centre and an associated stakeholder platform.

In response to questions from delegations, Ms Boulanger provided clarifications on the timeline for the implementation of activities and the funding of the European Democratic Resilience Centre, indicating that its development would be phased through 2027 and rely on existing EU funding instruments. She also addressed questions concerning the withdrawal of major online platforms from political advertising markets and the potential differentiated impact on smaller or emerging political actors. In this context, she underlined that the Commission is preparing guidance and pursuing ongoing dialogue with national authorities, companies and other stakeholders to address these challenges.

Member states broadly welcomed the initiative and underlined the importance of continuing and further strengthening cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Union in this area.

12. Application for observer status to CDDEM

Mr Paul Maassen presented the application of the Government Partnership (OGP). The organisation aims to unite governments and civil-society reformers worldwide to build more transparent, accountable, participatory and inclusive governance. It includes 74 countries and 150 local governments as well as civil society organizations.

The Committee examined the application, during which Azerbaijan recalled the importance of ensuring that observer activities fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states. Following the discussion, the CDDEM decided to grant observer status to OGP.

13. Evaluation of CDDEM activities

The Committee exchanged views on a possible methodology for collecting and sharing 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. In this context, the plenary underlined the importance of ensuring that any such methodology remains proportionate and does not place an undue burden on member states. It was noted that this could include, for example, a concise online questionnaire to be prepared by the Secretariat and circulated to delegations.

14. New Democratic Pact for Europe: state of play

Mr Matjaž Gruden (Director for Democracy) provided an update on the [New Democratic Pact for Europe](#), highlighting also the central role of the Parameters within the Pact. He informed the Committee of the state of play, the three pillars of the Pact, and its launch as an inclusive process of reflection and innovation, described as a broad and critical effort to reinforce the foundations of democracy and make it tangible for all. While underlining that there is no need to reinvent existing frameworks, given the solid body of Council of Europe standards in the field of democracy, he stressed the importance of creating

space for mutual learning and innovation. Mr Gruden further emphasised that the active engagement and contributions of member states are essential to the success of the Pact, alongside the involvement of other stakeholders, including civil society and young people. In this context, the CDDEM's methodological and knowledge-based work, notably through the Parameters, was identified as forming the backbone of the Pact.

The CDDEM reiterated their interest in the process of the Pact and to continue contribution to its implementation. Finland informed the organisation of a [round table](#) organised by Finnish authorities on using foresight for strengthening democracies. The event included the presence of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Mr Alain Berset, who underlined that "Europe needs shared approach to the future, not built top-down, but together". Norway, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova and Montenegro supported the importance on the work on enhancing democratic culture, practices and institutions. The EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) also shared their interest to enhance synergies with the Council of Europe. Finally, the Committee reiterated their wish to exchange with the Secretary General about the Pact, and the role of the Committee and of the member states.

15. Recent national developments in the areas of activity of the CDDEM

Armenia reported that the government has made public participation a core pillar of its public administration reforms, establishing a Participatory and Open Governance Issues Department in the Prime Minister's Office to coordinate engagement with civil society and expert communities. The delegate noted that the Government had expanded Public Councils across ministries to ensure diverse input and now requires stakeholder consultation from the earliest stages of policy and legislative development. Enhanced transparency measures, such as publishing agendas and drafts and livestreaming Public Council meetings, aim to strengthen accountability. The delegate also highlighted mechanisms to ensure balanced regional participation beyond Yerevan.

The United Kingdom reported on the developments concerning English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, which aims to expand and deepen devolution by creating Strategic Authorities and enhancing mayoral powers in certain areas. The Council of Nations and Regions continued its work, with its May 2025 meeting addressing international trade and opportunities linked to AI for economic growth and for public services. The Government also launched the UK Civil Society Covenant to strengthen civil society's role through a new Civil Society Council. In addition, efforts to increase democratic participation are advancing, with plans to pilot flexible, modernised in-person voting options during the 2026 and 2027 local elections.

Estonia informed that after having co-chaired the Media Freedom Coalition for the last two years, in 2025 the country was chairing the Freedom Online Coalition which focuses on information integrity, human rights respecting digital space, including digital public infrastructure. The Estonian delegate briefed on events taking place in 2026 on the same topic, particularly with a focus on countering disinformation and foreign interference in elections.

Finland presented its current democracy and civil society policy programme and briefed on a recent amendment of election law to give better access to people with disabilities. The delegate also presented a pilot to improve voter turnout and strengthen the participation of children and young people and a media project on protecting elections, in collaboration with IDEA international. New training curriculums for election staff have been developed following the results of a project that identified training gaps.

Czechia presented two developments, an updated methodology for the participation of civil society organisations on government structures at central level and on another one on how to partner for implementing EU funds. Secondly, the launching by the Office of the Government of a joint research project with academia on evaluating the services and activities provided by civil society from the perspective of their beneficiaries.

Belgium discussed local and regional democracy, mentioning the abolition of mandatory vote in Flanders, as well as the fact that each municipality has a duty to have an ethical committee and approve a code of ethics to be evaluated twice in every legislature.

Montenegro shared information about the reform of the electoral system which was agreed in July 2025. The gender quota had increased from 30% to 40%, and every third candidate should be from the underrepresented gender. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently finalising its strategy for the next four years, with one strategic priority being the defence of democracy and upholding human rights in international law.

16. Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (Tromsø Convention)

Ms Elvana Thaci (Tromsø Convention Unit) provided an overview of recent developments and ongoing activities under the Convention. The Tromsø Convention, formally the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (2009), is the first legally binding international treaty guaranteeing the public's right to access government-held information. It requires public authorities to respond to requests, provide documents in accessible formats, and justify any refusal using clearly defined exceptions such as national security, privacy, or commercial confidentiality. The convention also promotes proactive transparency, effective appeal mechanisms, and fair processing of requests.

The Tromsø Convention's monitoring mechanism relies on periodic reporting and review. States must submit implementation reports, which are examined by the Access Information Group (AIG), the designated Council of Europe body that produces a baseline evaluation report, which assesses compliance, identifies gaps, and issues recommendations for member states. Monitoring emphasises dialogue, transparency, and cooperative improvement rather than sanctions, supporting consistent application of access-to-information standards.

Members were encouraged to promote the Convention domestically and to share effective implementation approaches.

17. Participation of CDDEM members in events of relevance to the CDDEM

The Vice-Chair and the recently elected Chair of CDDEM reported on their participation in the Conference "Building Democratic Resilience to Disinformation" hosted by the Council of Europe and Malta's Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism, which took place in Malta on 17 September 2025.

18. Upcoming Council of Europe events

The Secretariat briefed the members on the upcoming conference "Shaping democratic renewal: civic space and the path to a New Democratic Pact for Europe" which will take place on 2-3 February 2026 in Strasbourg. Further details will be shared via email.

19. CDDEM Calendar of meetings for 2026

Members agreed to hold their 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.

20. Any other business

After reviewing the remit and terms of reference of the newly established Committee of Experts on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (PC-FIMI), which must prepare a feasibility study for a potential legal instrument on FIMI, MS Diana Chiriac (Republic of Moldova) was confirmed as CDDEM's appointed representative to PC-FIMI. Other members were invited to indicate interest if the CDDEM assigned representative needed further support; the Secretariat will coordinate further as the workplan and timeline of PC-FIMI become clearer.

21. Adoption of the abridged meeting report

The CDDEM adopted the abridged report of its 4th plenary meeting as it appears in document CDDEM(2025)25.

APPENDIX I

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

Information sharing and relevant updates

- 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.** Recent national developments in the areas of activity of the CDDEM
- 15.** Participation of CDDEM members in events of relevance to the CDDEM
- 16.** Date of the next meeting
- 17.** Any other business
- 18.** Adoption of the abridged meeting report

APPENDIX II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS / MEMBRES

CHAIR / PRESIDENTE

Ms Katrin KIVI, Director of Division for Human Rights, Department for International Organisations and Human Rights, Ambassador at large for Human Rights and Migration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

VICE-CHAIR / VICE-PRESIDENT

Mr Vebjørn HEINES, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Norway to the Council of Europe

ALBANIA / ALBANIE

Ms Ardiana HOBDAI, Director, Department for International Organisations, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs

ARMENIA / ARMENIE

Ms Lilya AFRIKYAN, Head of the Participatory and Open Governance Issues Department, the Prime Minister's Office

AUSTRIA / AUTRICHE

Mr Peter ANDRE, Ministry of Interior, Senior Expert for Legal Affairs

Mr Armin KLIMENTA, Amt der Wiener Landesregierung

AZERBAIJAN / AZERBAIDJAN

Mr Parviz RUSTAMOV, Head of Division, Department for Cooperation with International Human Rights Institutions, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

BELGIUM / BELGIQUE

Mr Edwin LEFEBRE, Deputy Director, Ministry of the Flemish Community, Agency for Home Affairs

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