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STEERING COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY (CDDEM)

MEETING REPORT

5th Plenary meeting
(8-10 June 2026)

Strasbourg
Palais de l'Europe – Room 8
(and online via Zoom)

Web: www.coe.int/cddem

The Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM) held its 5th plenary meeting in Strasbourg and online on 8-10 June 2026, with Ms Katrin Kivi (Estonia) in the Chair.

1. Opening of the Meeting

The meeting was opened by the Chair, who welcomed all participants, including newly joined members from Norway, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, as well as new observer organisation– the Open Government Partnership. 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 Chair and the Secretariat

The Chair welcomed Roberto Olla, Head of Department of Democratic Institutions and Freedoms. Mr. Olla offered an overview of the Council of Europe's strategic priorities following the decisions of the Ministerial meeting held in Chisinau (Republic of Moldova) in May. He highlighted the centrality of the New Democratic Pact for Europe, and the contribution of CDDEM through the Reykjavik Parameters for Democracy. Mr Olla underlined the Organisation's priorities of restoring trust in democratic institutions, supporting democracy through technological innovation (including AI), and strengthening democratic security in times of internal and external challenges. He further stressed that democratic security is an essential precondition for peace and prosperity, referencing recent Council of Europe initiatives on supporting accountability for Ukraine and on FIMI (Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference). Mr Olla stressed that the CDDEM's contributions – including the Reykjavik parameters for democracy and ongoing work with International IDEA on a framework to support their use – position it as a key player in supporting the Council's democracy pillar for the years ahead.

4. Exchange of views on the New Democratic Pact for Europe with the Secretary General

The CDDEM Chair warmly welcomed Mr Alain Berset, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to the plenary meeting. Mr Berset emphasised the critical importance of democratic security in the current context of ongoing crises and geopolitical pressures. He underscored that security and peace are not solely military concerns but must be built on robust democratic values, institutions, and processes. The Secretary General highlighted key Council of Europe initiatives, such as the New Democratic Pact for Europe and the work towards a legal instrument – potentially a framework convention – on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), as essential instruments to reinforce democracy during a period marked by war, disinformation, economic uncertainty, and democratic decline. He stressed that democratic principles are at the heart of the European way of life and are under increasing pressure both externally and internally across the continent.

Mr Berset outlined the political momentum stemming from the Reykjavik summit of Heads of State and Government in May 2023, noting the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy as a starting impulse. The Secretary General called for the principles to be made more concrete and utilised at all levels of governance, emphasising the strategic role of CDDEM in piloting and testing the Committee's recently adopted Reykjavik Parameters, that operationalise the principles. He also mentioned the ongoing consultation process for the New Democratic Pact for Europe, inviting all member states to actively participate to shape the outcomes. The Secretary General recognised the growing public disenchantment with democracy amid a continuous chain of crisis, urging for practical tools and a toolbox for member states to reinforce democratic legitimacy and trust.

Lastly, the Secretary General focused on the concept of democratic security, a term originating from the Council of Europe. He warned that rising investments in defence, coupled with democratic backsliding, could be perilous, especially considering unpredictable future leadership. He urged that defending democracy is not only about ensuring political rights and participation but is intimately linked to maintaining peace and security. He called upon the CDDEM to be proactive, deliver practical solutions, and reinforce the unique legal framework of the Council of Europe in supporting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. He then noted the importance of CDDEM as a multiplier of good practices and a bridge to member states.

Before concluding his intervention, the Secretary General emphasised the unique nature of the Council of Europe, highlighting its creation of not just an organisation for discussions among 46 member states, but also a Convention system centred on the European Convention of Human Rights. He noted that this framework has resulted in a common legal system across all member states, underpinned by over one million court decisions addressing democracy, rule of law, and human rights. Unlike other institutions, the Council's approach integrates shared case law into each national legal system, forming a common ground for the protection of democratic principles.

A fruitful exchange with CDDEM participants followed the Secretary General's opening remarks. All delegations concurred with the concerns over democratic decline and the ongoing internal and external threats to democracy. Several avenues for action were evoked in the debate including the reinforcement of cooperation within the different structures of the Council of Europe but also with other organisations such as OECD or EU that play complementary roles. The importance of youth and civil society involvement, of civic education and of providing concrete innovative tools and guidance to counter democratic backsliding were also mentioned in the exchanges. Many speakers evoked the need for robust electoral observation, both before and after election day, to respond to current challenges to election integrity. The Secretary General concluded with a call for a long-term perspective and the use of democratic foresight analysis, to foster innovation and to maintain a focus on technological developments, including AI, affecting our democratic fabric.

5. Standard setting: Progress of the methodological framework for the application of the Reykjavík Parameters for Democracy

Mr Edwin Lefebvre (Belgium), Chair of the Working Group on the Reykjavík Parameters for Democracy: framework and methodology for their application (GT-P2), informed the Committee of the progress made by the working group in preparing the methodological framework to support the application of the Reykjavik Parameters for Democracy. The Parameters are designed as a voluntary, flexible checklist tool for states, not as a new monitoring or ranking system. Their intent is to support self-assessment, peer learning, and policy improvement, tailored to differences in national systems, legal frameworks, and traditions.

Gentiana Gola from International IDEA presented the experience of the organisation in conducting democracy assessments. Due to its relevant work on the matter, International IDEA is collaborating with the Council of Europe in developing the methodological framework for the application of the Parameters. Ms Gola introduced her organisation and its primary focus on advancing and protecting democracy worldwide through knowledge production, technical assistance, and convening global stakeholders. The Global State of Democracy (GSOD) initiative is central to their work, featuring both quantitative indices and the Democracy Tracker (updated monthly), which together provide comprehensive, publicly available tools for analysing democratic performance across 174 countries. These tools, along with locally led State of Democracy assessments are designed to support governments in analysing and improving their democratic institutions.

International IDEA's methodology is based on aggregated data from 155 indicators sourced from reputable organisations and projects such as the Varieties of Democracy project, Freedom House, the World Bank, and others. The State of Democracy Assessment Framework, launched in 2000 empowers national teams – often led by governments – to conduct comprehensive, context-sensitive evaluations of their country's democratic health based on local priorities and history. The framework produces actionable reports with policy recommendations that help guide reforms, making it a trusted and practical tool for democratic improvement worldwide.

Following the introduction of the work of GT-P2 and the presentation by International IDEA, several delegations welcomed the flexibility and voluntary approach of the framework for the application of the Parameters. Many interventions clarified that the application of the Parameters should be contextualised to the national democratic systems. One delegation welcomed the interdependence and comprehensiveness of the democratic dimensions covered in the Parameters while other delegation reminded that, while flexible and adaptable, the final objective of the Parameters is to concretise the ambition to strengthen our democracies as expressed at the highest political level during the Reykjavik Summit. Some challenges were also noted, including the large number of parameters, the potential overlap with existing tools and monitoring mechanisms (GRECO, Venice Commission) and the need to integrate existing data sources such as V-DEM or others. CDDEM observers welcomed the comprehensiveness of the Parameters and called for inclusivity and participation in the development of the methodology.

Following the general comments, the Secretariat provided further clarification on the voluntary nature of the application of the Parameters which will function as self-assessments and recalled that if a member state so wishes, there could be a possibility for sectoral exercises focusing on themes of highest national priority. The discussion was closed with a call for volunteering countries to pilot the application of the Reykjavik Parameters. Estonia and Republic of Moldova expressed interest in undergoing the first pilot self-assessments.

The Secretariat reminded participants that the framework and methodology for the application of the Reykjavik Parameters is to be finalised by the end of 2027, according to the Committee's terms of reference. To conclude, participants were invited to actively participate in the CDDEM public hearing on the Reykjavik Parameters for Democracy, a hybrid event held on the last day of the plenary meeting, aiming to present the Parameters to a broader public, including academia and civil society, and gather feedback on their application.

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

The CDDEM examined and discussed the revised 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 prepared by the working group GT-P2. As introduction of this discussion, the Committee exchanged with Ms Aurora Ailincăi, Head of Anti-discrimination and Inclusion department. Ms Ailincăi commended the guidelines for their thorough coverage of groups relevant to her department's work, such as national minorities, Roma, and women and girls, and acknowledged that many of her department's studies and priorities were already referenced.

Ms Ailincăi proposed three main suggestions to improve the guidelines. First, that equality be made a more explicit and transversal theme throughout the document, as a core condition for democracy. Second, she recommended refining terminology by moving away from expressions such as “persons in vulnerable situations” and instead using phrases such as “persons/groups exposed to discrimination,” which better conveyed that exclusion resulted from social and structural barriers rather than inherent characteristics. Third, the speaker suggested that the guidelines further clarify the relationship between electoral participation and wider political engagement noting that political participation involved access

to information, education, civic engagement, and leadership opportunities before election day. To conclude, Ms Ailincăi stressed the importance of addressing hate speech and hate crime, citing ECRI monitoring that demonstrated how hate speech not only harmed direct victims but also intimidated communities and discouraged participation in public and political life.

CDDEM participants agreed on the need to align terminology to the Council of Europe standards and with the importance of producing a comprehensive yet practical and useful guidelines.

Following the exchange, Edwin Lefebvre, Chair of GT-P2, provided a summary of the work of the working group which had decided to adopt a broad approach in terms of target groups, to include both active and passive voting and to address in the guidelines a broad range of barriers. Professor Lavizzari, Council of Europe consultant, clarified the new additions to the draft as compared to the first draft examined by CDDEM during its 4th plenary meeting and thanked delegations for submitting promising practices. The CDDEM then examined the draft guidelines in detail. The members looked at the 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. Member states had been invited to submit their own good practices. A total of 14 contributions were received by the Secretariat.

The draft guidelines are preceded by a summary of key principles and actions structured by stakeholders – governments, electoral management bodies, political parties, parliaments, civil society and media. Delegations made comments and suggestions regarding the need to frame age requirement as a key barrier for voting, with the representative from the Advisory Council on Youth strongly supporting its inclusion. They also discussed the potential referencing of “gender recognition” and the importance of respecting national constitutional limitations. As the summary reflects the different sections of the guidelines, those comments were addressed in their respective sections.

On the section of **legal and institutional factors**, delegations discussed the need to include age as a prominent barrier, with the youth delegate favouring its inclusion. A delegation sought further clarifications around voting rights for persons with disabilities for which the Secretariat and the consultant favoured the broad approach adopted by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Another delegation highlighted the need to respect the freedom of political parties when it comes to promoting diversity. The last point raised by several delegations on this section concerned restrictions on collecting and processing data related to ethnic origin or disability as part of electoral monitoring. They requested explicit references to legal limitations.

On **administrative and procedural factors**, CDDEM participants welcomed the inclusion of diversity requirements and trainings on diversity for observation missions’ staff. On **socio economic-factors** delegations commented on polling station accessibility; they requested clarifications on whether dedicated transport should be provided for certain groups or rather public transport should be facilitated. They also discussed the importance of including protections against pressures or manipulations in cases of e-voting

On the section of **information and education factors** the CDDEM members made editorial comments, generally agreeing on the substance of the section. Under **intersectionality and inclusive design**, a delegation reiterated the need for clarity in the handling of sensitive data, notably regarding disabilities. To conclude, a delegation praised the guidelines’ holistic approach, emphasising structural and systemic barriers and the importance of practical suggestions and case studies.

The working group will continue reviewing the draft in its upcoming meeting in October with a view to finalise the guidelines by the end of 2026.

7. Report following exchanges on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)5 on standards for e-voting and Guidelines on new technologies and the different stages of the electoral process, involving the Venice Commission and Election Management Bodies

The Chair explained that the aim of the review exercise is to provide updates and foster exchanges on how these Council of Europe standards are being applied and to address challenges and threats related to security and transparency in the use of new technologies in electoral processes. The review will culminate in an implementation report, preceded by a workshop scheduled back-to-back with the sixth CDDEM plenary in November 2026. The draft concept note circulated by the Secretariat outlines the workshop's structure and topics. The Secretariat also suggested to circulate a questionnaire to update the information gathered on the use of new technologies at different stages of the electoral process submitted to the late European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) in 2023.

Several delegations welcomed the proposed workshop and the review of the e-voting Recommendation and Guidelines on the use of new technologies in electoral processes in Council of Europe member states including through the circulation of a questionnaire. Speakers noted significant changes since the recommendation was adopted. While e-voting is not widespread (with Estonia as a key exception), the digitalisation of electoral processes has introduced new challenges, especially concerning the activities of electoral management bodies (EMBs), foreign software and digital infrastructure, the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance, and security of election data. They urged a broad perspective for the review and advocated for a workshop involving both EMBs (practitioners) and policy experts. A delegation commented on the need to address data protection as it is included in the guidelines on new technologies. Other delegations questioned the inclusion of issues such as hybrid attacks, manipulation and other attempts to undermine voter confidence.

The Secretariat agreed to circulate a questionnaire with the support of an expert consultant by mid-July. As a result of the discussion at the plenary, the review will focus less on detailed and technical aspects of ICT, instead concentrating on key developments, challenges, and positive outcomes in transparency and security – acknowledging foreign manipulation, AI, and data protection as relevant. Cross-committee collaboration (CD-NET in particular) on information manipulation will be promoted to avoid overlaps and ensure alignment.

8. Standard setting: draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on multilevel governance

Mr Alfonso García Romero, Chair of the working group on multi-level governance (GT-GPN) provided an overview of the progress of the work on preparing a drafting a recommendation on multi-level governance (MLG). He emphasised the need for effective solutions to current multilevel governance challenges and the importance of considering territorial diversity as a source of transformation. He identified classic challenges (democratic resilience, rights, rule of law) and new ones (AI governance, climate change, crisis management, sovereignty erosion). Mr García Romero stressed the need for a flexible recommendation adaptable to diverse constitutional systems and highlighted the proven benefits of decentralisation and autonomy for positive democratic evolution.

Following the introduction, the Chair introduced the two expert consultants that will support the work of the GT-GPN, Dr. Cezary Trutkowski, Chair of the Executive Board, Jerzy Regulski Foundation in Support of Local Democracy, and Professor Ioannis Papadopoulos (Professor Emeritus, University of Lausanne). Dr Trutkowski outlined the principles contained in the outline of the recommendation on multilevel governance. He explained the rationale for the principles to be adaptable across unitary, federal, and asymmetric systems, focusing on relationships rather than prescriptive institutional models. He introduced eleven proposed principles categorised by groups: democratic foundation (embeddedness, accountability), mutual respect, subsidiarity and coordination, stable legal frameworks, fiscal sustainability, supervision, dispute resolution, openness and inclusion, transparency,

and capacity building. Dr Trutkowski emphasised the need to avoid accountability-free zones and ensure mutual respect between tiers, clarity in resource allocation, and inclusivity, while also highlighting citizen participation and protections for minorities. He welcomed feedback on the potential reduction of the number of principles, the need for an explanatory memorandum, and the operationalisation of fiscal arrangements.

On his turn, Prof. Papadopoulos reflected on multilevel governance's potential to counter democratic backsliding. He emphasised the need for effective checks and balances at all levels, noting elections are not always sufficient protection but remain necessary for reversing illiberal rule. Prof. Papadopoulos discussed multilevel governance's opportunities and risks, stressing the importance of institutional design and robust public commitment to liberal democratic norms. He highlighted meaningful citizen participation, autonomous civil society, pluralist media, and oversight by supranational bodies as significant safeguards.

Following the presentation of the draft outline of the recommendation, several CDDEM participants commented on the integration of the Charter for Local Self-Government in the text, on the need to further clarify fiscal arrangements and to further promote democratic accountability and give greater emphasis to representative bodies and elections in MLG. In general, the drafting of an explanatory memorandum was welcomed to keep the recommendation more precise and focused. One delegation called for a greater recognition of the role of MLG in ecological and digital transitions and another delegation advocated for more emphasis on relational and processual dimensions such as trust, and collaboration rather than purely institutional arrangements. The Congress also intervened to call for attention to the Charter and to take into account its monitoring experience. The Congress could also look at MLG in its monitoring activities in the future.

9. Implementation review report on Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 on the Principles of Good Democratic Governance

The Chair reminded that the implementation review report is to be concluded by the Committee by the end of 2027. The GT-GPN working group – tasked with preparing this CDDEM deliverable – agreed that a questionnaire to member states could be helpful to initiate the review process. Additionally, given the broad scope of the Recommendation and in line with its provisions, the GT-GPN proposed focusing the review on the principle of good administration, as this was deemed to offer the greatest potential for added value from the CDDEM within the broader context of the Council of Europe work. This approach would also help avoid duplication of other Council of Europe work with relevance to the recommendation (for example, on the prevention of corruption). This approach was approved by the CDDEM Bureau during its meeting in April 2026. The Congress highlighted their own review on the implementation of ELOGE (European Label of Governance Excellence). This report could also contribute to the review.

The CDDEM agreed to the focused review and the distribution of a questionnaire to be prepared by the Secretariat.

10. Implementation review report on Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)6 on deliberative democracy and/or handbook collecting best practices

The Chair outlined the possibilities for reviewing the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)6 on deliberative democracy which is to be finalised by the end of 2027. The CDDEM Bureau had explored different options for gathering input: circulation of a questionnaire, information from Council of Europe existing projects, desk research, and/or using the existing draft text on participatory mechanisms.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities provided a brief summary of their projects on participatory democracy that could be used for the review.

The Secretariat reminded that a set of questions had been circulated to collect information for the preparation of the methodology that will support the use of the Reykjavik Parameters" (item 4). Member states were encouraged to continue responding to the questionnaire, as it would assist in drafting the review and avoid redundant calls for information from member states.

11. Study on advantages and risks of the use of generative artificial intelligence in public debate relating to democratic processes and an instrument/practical tool to build on its findings

The CDDEM adopted the finalised study on generative artificial intelligence (AI) and democracy, which was completed based on feedback received from the UK, the Netherlands, and the Steering Committee for New and Emerging Digital Technologies (CDNET). The Committee members were also invited to reflect on, and provide orientations for, the CDDEM's future work on AI and the development of a practical instrument or tool to follow up on the study.

The discussion revolved around how best to translate the study's recommendations into action. Members generally agreed that AI's impact on electoral processes, political campaigning, civic participation, and the structural implications of AI infrastructure were central issues for the CDDEM. However, some voiced concerns over the Committee's capacity to address the full breadth of AI's influence. In this regard, it was noted that other committees such as CDNET, as well as other organisations, for example the EU, all have an important role to play in addressing various aspects of AI. One delegation favoured a focus on citizen involvement and human-centric values, another encouraged continued exploration of how AI could actively support democracy, and yet another intervention pointed to the urgency of embedding democratic principles in AI development and regulation. Consensus emerged on the need for the CDDEM to build on the study and develop a practical tool, focusing on areas such as electoral processes, civic engagement, and information integrity.

12. Requests for observer status

The CDDEM examined two observer applications from ASSEDEL and Nordic Safe Cities. Both organisations presented their missions and history, followed by several questions from the Committee on their funding, structure, geographic scope, and added value for the CDDEM's mandate. Delegations highlighted the need for observer organisations to have broad (preferably Europe-wide) representation, sustainable finances, transparency of operation, and clear practical experience in democracy and human rights. Questions were raised as to the interpretation of the criteria for granting the observer status approved by the Committee and whether the applicants could be considered to meet them. Ultimately, no consensus was reached on the applications, and the plenary resolved, after debate, to postpone the final decision to the next session in November. Members agreed to concurrently review and refine observer status criteria to strengthen clarity and transparency in the granting of observer status.

13. Update on the work of PC-FIMI (European Committee on Crime Problems, CDPC)

Mr Kristian Bartholin, Secretary to the Committee of Experts on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (PC-FIMI), presented the feasibility study on FIMI and the progress toward an international legal instrument targeting FIMI threats, starting with the completion of a feasibility study to which CDDEM had contributed. A new set of draft terms of reference for an ad-hoc committee to prepare such instrument (potentially a framework convention) has been presented by the Secretary General to the Committee of Ministers. Once the future ad hoc committee will be established, the CDDEM will be invited to appoint a representative. Throughout the work of PC-FIMI it had been clear that FIMI is not only about interference in elections but generally on sovereignty and the ability of democratic institutions and processes to function properly.

The discussion illuminated the complexity and multijurisdictional nature of FIMI, its impact on election security but more generally on trust in democratic institutions, and the need for a robust coordinated yet rights-respecting response. CDDEM members and participants raised questions on the interplay with EU regulations and the New Democratic Pact for Europe (to which the work on FIMI is an integral part), the involvement of civil society in the preparation of the legal instrument, and the anticipated implementation timeline (one year and a half). CDDEM reiterated its continued substantive engagement with the work on FIMI.

14. Update on the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

The CDDEM welcomed Ms Claudia Luciani, Director of the Congress, who provided an update on the Congress' ongoing activities, in particular in the framework of the New Democratic Pact for Europe. Ms Luciani highlighted the Congress's commitment to multilevel governance, participatory and deliberative democracy, and election observation, which align closely with the priorities of the CDDEM. Central to the Congress's current efforts is a comprehensive consultation phase involving local governments and associations across Europe, as well as some outside Europe. The results of these consultations indicate widespread concern about four main themes: disinformation and hate speech, social justice and equality, preservation of election processes and democratic institutions, and the impact of innovation on democracy. One way of integrating these themes in the work of the Congress can be through the application of the Reykjavik Parameters in its monitoring work or in elections observation. Ms Luciani invited the CDDEM to reflect on the possibility of a recommendation on the matter.

Ms Luciani also commented on the Congress' interest in addressing hate speech against politicians and recalled the ongoing discussions with PACE to advance in this area and to promote citizens' engagement through deliberative democracy initiatives. She emphasised the importance of ongoing cooperation and synergies between the Congress and the CDDEM, especially as the consultations of the New Democratic Pact are developed.

15. Update on the work of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

The CDDEM welcomed Ms Catherine Hugel, Head of Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. Ms Hegel noted that the Assembly acts as a unique bridge between national parliaments and the Council of Europe, fostering public debate and generating shared recommendations for both national governments and the Committee of Ministers. Ms Hegel affirmed PACE's readiness to support the implementation of the Reykjavik Parameters. She also informed the Committee about a recent PACE resolution on countering foreign interference, as well as work on new technologies, including a report currently in preparation on the disruptive effects of AI on democracy. PACE is furthermore working on themes such as hate speech and violence against politicians, the functioning of political parties and elections in times of crisis.

One of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy's key areas of focus is reflection on an early warning mechanism to recognise and address democratic backsliding, in which the Reykjavik parameters can have an important role. Another major area of work is protecting election observers and addressing the growing importance (and challenges) of out-of-country voting. Ms Hugel highlighted that PACE has established a special commission to coordinate its contribution to the New Democratic Pact for Europe and is organising conferences in Budapest and Warsaw on youth engagement and parliamentary diplomacy, whose outcomes are to inform the preparation of the Pact.

Finally, the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections will try to translate the Reykjavik Parameters into practical checklists for election observation, aiming to address challenges such as foreign influence and technology-related threats.

16. World Forum for Democracy (WFD)

*Meeting report
[CDDEM(2026)12]*

The CDDEM Secretariat informed the CDDEM that the World Forum for Democracy will be held in Strasbourg on 2-3 November 2026, featuring a condensed two-day official programme and a third day dedicated to informal activities for select stakeholder groups. This year's forum is framed by ongoing consultations for the New Democratic Pact for Europe, aiming to serve as a wider venue for testing ideas and priorities drawn from these consultations. Attendees will include policymakers, civil society, youth, academia, think tanks, and media, providing a broad audience for interactive debate and collective engagement.

The main themes for the Forum this year are "democratic security" and "democratic foresight." The event will include plenary sessions with political leaders, focus on building a shared understanding of democratic security, and feature foresight exercises designed to anticipate future scenarios for democracy. These will explore institutional, digital, and socioeconomic dimensions, with expert and civil society contributions presenting scenarios and sparking potentially controversial debate. Specific issues such as critical thinking, FIMI, disinformation, and corruption will also be addressed, drawing on expertise from Council of Europe bodies such as GRECO.

The aim is for the Forum to be both expert-driven but broadly accessible. It will incorporate input from member states with experience in democratic foresight, cultural and artistic side programs. The CDDEM was invited to provide suggestions as the final program is still being shaped.

In the ensuing discussion, delegations welcomed the focus on democratic foresight and the Forum's link to the consultations for the Pact. They highlighted the value of not only addressing threats but also fostering positive innovation, participation and collective responses. The French delegation, evoking the strong partnership of France and its local and regional entities in the Forum, called for a stronger geographic balance and broader member state involvement in the organisation of the Forum, encouraging high-level participation from all member states. That delegation concluded that the Forum, rooted in the Reykjavik Parameters and the New Democratic Pact for Europe, should become a powerful collective moment defending democracy at a time when it is under threat.

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

Mr. Daniel Fleischer-Ambrus, European Commission (DG JUST), briefed the committee on latest updates on the implementation of the EU's multi-pronged European Democracy Shield. He informed of the launch of the European Centre for Democratic Resilience and its work on a Handbook to support resilient elections, and a Blueprint for countering FIMI and Disinformation. Under the first pillar of the Shield (on safeguarding the integrity of the information space), a European Network of Fact-Checkers has already been created. Under the second pillar of the Shield (on stronger democratic institutions, free and fair elections and free and independent media), different actions have been taken. Co-operation has been reinforced with member states in the context of the European Cooperation Network on Elections, in particular on election integrity, political campaigning, AI in elections, and on safety in politics. The network is also increasingly involving EU candidate countries where relevant. On safety in politics the focus is on online and offline threats, with a particular attention to local politicians, women and heightened groups of risk of discrimination. Work is also ongoing to address the use of Artificial Intelligence in electoral processes, building on the existing legal and policy framework, including the Digital Services Act, the AI Act, the Regulation on transparency and targeting of political advertising and the Commission Recommendation on inclusive and resilient elections. Actions have also been launched to support free and independent media and media pluralism, such as the renewal of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) mandate. Work is also ongoing to further support journalists, building on the Directive and the Recommendation on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings ('Strategic lawsuits against public participation'). Mr Fleischer-Ambrus also referred to the participation of Marja Ruotanen

to a recent High-Level Event on Combatting SLAPPs. Under the third pillar of the Shield (on societal resilience and citizens' engagement), Mr Fleischer-Ambrus informed the committee about the updated teacher guidelines on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy, and the launch of a new Network of National Authorities on Citizen Participation as well as the organisation of civic tech hackathon to promote civic tech solutions to complementing in person citizen participation. Mr Fleischer-Ambrus underlined to look forward to continue to work together with CDDEM and the Council of Europe on common efforts to support democracy.

Several Committee members raised questions on the evaluation of the impacts of new regulation (e.g., on political advertising for small parties and NGOs that rely on online platforms for their communication), on what strategies are used for corporate engagement with large online platforms, on the importance of citizen engagement and the role of civil society in furthering resilience. The EU representative recalled the different initiatives to engage with citizens and the Civil Society Strategy adopted together with the European Democracy Shield. On the impact of EU legislation, Mr Fleischer Ambrus mentioned that some regulations are quite recent and that the Commission has established a network of national contact points to address challenges in relation, for example, on the platform's decisions not to carry political advertisements. Participants agreed on the value of deeper coordination between the Council of Europe and EU, with regular knowledge-sharing and consultation regarding the organisations' parallel initiatives aiming to strengthen democratic resilience and civil society.

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

Croatia informed that it has initiated a cross-country project in cooperation with the OECD, titled "Protecting Civic Space to Foster More Meaningful Public Participation." This two-year initiative, which runs until April 2028, aims to enhance the involvement of civil society in public policy and decision-making processes. Four other member states – Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, and Lithuania – are also participating. The project includes mutual visits and exchanges of expertise among these countries to share experiences and improve policies regarding civic space.

Albania reported on an EU-funded partnership with International IDEA aiming to strengthen the Albanian parliament for EU integration. Operating under the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance, the project focuses on enhancing legislative oversight, representative capacities, and governance in a transparent, inclusive, and accountable manner.

Finland highlighted a pilot exercise with International IDEA on election security, a national programme on deliberative democracy, and strengthened youth participation. The election security exercise led to revisions in security measures and proposed amendments to election law. Finland is also introducing deliberative processes at all governmental levels, guided by Council of Europe standards, and has developed a youth e-platform with 20,000 participants whose input is integrated into national reports.

The United Kingdom updated on four key areas: the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act, ongoing local government reorganisation to single-tier authorities, the May 2026 elections (observed for the first time by the Congress), and efforts to boost democratic participation. The new Act provides local leaders more power and funding, reorganisation strengthens local councils, and the elections were deemed well-organised. Innovative practices such as voting hubs have been piloted to enhance accessibility and engagement.

Armenia reported that it had recently hosted the European Political Dialogue Forum and parallel events focused on democratic threats and hybrid challenges, involving high-level speakers and panellists. Furthermore, new laws have been introduced to support civic space and financial sustainability of civil society and media organizations. Armenia launched a youth participation programme across ten

communities, and developed legislation for AI labelling in political campaigns, requesting support from the Council of Europe for practical enforcement and the detection of synthetic content.

Slovenia mentioned the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment at local and national levels through election laws requiring gender quotas. Local lists require at least 40% representation of each gender, and 33% at the national level, including European Parliament elections. These quotas have improved women's representation in politics; 35% of municipal councillors are women and nearly half of supervisory board members. Slovenia will hold local elections in November and plans to invite the Congress to observe.

Ireland informed about the establishment of a Local Democracy Taskforce (established in 2025). The work of the Taskforce was organised into a number of key pillars - structure, finance, functions, and governance/accountability with Councillors' powers being considered under each pillar. The work of the Taskforce had regard to the work already undertaken by a number of bodies including the 2023 report of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Additionally, Ireland's Electoral Commission is conducting the National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS), aimed at building a democratic data bank to track public attitudes, turnout, and participation over time.

Norway is revising its Political Parties Act through a commission set to report in June 2027. The revision focuses on regulating money in politics amid new challenges like digital campaigns, micro-targeting, AI, and third-party or anonymous donations. The update aims to address emerging risks and reinforce the democratic process.

The Netherlands' government and cabinet have prioritised democratic resilience, focusing on FIMI detection, broad democratic participation, and safety in political life. The delegation reported that the Netherlands is advancing a national lobby register linked to GRECO and the EU's defence of democracy package, supporting transparent governance and accountable decision-making. As the Netherlands prepares for its upcoming presidency of the Committee of Ministers, the Dutch delegate mentioned their continued engagement on the Reykjavik Parameters and the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Sweden's parliament adopted a constitutional amendment proposal to strengthen institutional protections for democracy and the rule of law. The amendments require, among other things, a higher threshold for changing fundamental laws (a majority for the first vote and two-thirds for the second, with a general election between votes). The proposal also entails proposals to reinforce the long-term protection of the independence of the courts and judiciary. These changes are proposed to take effect in April 2027.

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

Vice-Chair Niklas Wilhelmsson (Finland) reported on his participation at the Conference "Towards trusted and inclusive electoral processes: the role of observers" co-organised by the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe in Paris on 28-29 April 2026 within the framework of the New Democratic Pact for Europe. At the event, he emphasised that the integrity of elections goes beyond election day, and it covers the legal framework, the campaign environment, media freedom, access to information, and whether candidates and voters can participate without fear or pressure. New technologies and digital campaigning further expand this pre-election space where influence and manipulation can occur. Vice-Chair highlighted that the CDDEM should explore possible avenues for action aimed at strengthening the protection of election observers and ensuring credible, inclusive electoral processes.

20. CDDEM priority topics for the next quadrennium: initial reflections

The CDDEM held a preliminary debate on potential areas of work for the upcoming programming period (2028-2031). Members consistently identified the security elements of democracy as a major priority, reflecting on the need to bolster the resilience of democratic institutions against a range of threats. This included safeguarding politicians/elected representatives and other actors, especially during but also beyond election periods. Another significant theme was the impact of technological developments – including AI and algorithms – on democratic processes, elections, and public debate. Several participants highlighted both the opportunities and risks presented by rapid technological change, particularly AI's dual capacity to support and disrupt democratic institutions. Electoral observation emerged as a matter of concern that may require a dedicated framework for domestic and international observation of elections. Several members pointed to other topics such as protecting civil servants from intimidation, excessive surveillance's impact on democratic life, citizen access and participation in environmental decision-making, and emerging social threats such as online toxic masculinity. There was a general call for strengthened coordination between Council of Europe committees and for a meaningful integration of the youth perspective.

21. Dates of the next meeting

The next plenary meeting of CDDEM will take place on 18-20 November 2026.

22. Any other business

CDDEM members and observers were reminded of the upcoming deadline (22 June) to provide potential feedback on the draft CDDEM comments prepared by the Secretariat on Congress Recommendation 543 (2026) "Free elections at the local and regional level: A fundamental right to strengthen grassroots democracy" and on the Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2305 (2026) – "Violence and hate speech against politicians: a threat to democracy".

23. Adoption of the abridged meeting report

The CDDEM adopted the abridged report of its 5th plenary meeting as it appears in document CDDEM(2026)11.

APPENDIX I

AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Adoption of the agenda and order of business
3. Information from the Chair and the Secretariat
4. Exchange of views on the New Democratic Pact for Europe with the Secretary General
<i>Implementing the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy</i> 5. Standard setting: Framework for supporting the use of the Reykjavik Parameters for the application and implementation of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy
<i>Supporting elections</i> 6. Standard setting: Guidelines on enhancing participation in elections of women, girls and young persons, vulnerable groups 7. Report following exchanges on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)5 on standards for e-voting and Guidelines on new technologies and the different stages of the electoral process, involving the Venice Commission and Election Management Bodies
<i>Supporting member states to strengthen and maintain good democratic governance at all levels</i> 8. Standard setting: draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on multilevel governance 9. Implementation review report on Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 on the Principles of Good Democratic Governance
<i>Participatory and deliberative democracy</i> 10. Implementation review report on Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)6 on deliberative democracy and/or handbook collecting best practices
<i>Emerging issues</i> 11. Study on advantages and risks of the use of generative artificial intelligence in public debate relating to democratic processes and an instrument/practical tool to build on its findings

12. Requests for observer status with the CDDEM
13. Update on the work of PC-FIMI (European Committee on Crime Problems, CDPC)
14. Update on the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
15. Update on the work of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly
16. World Forum for Democracy
17. Update on the European Union developments related to safeguarding democracy
18. Recent national developments in the areas of activity of the CDDEM
19. Participation of CDDEM members in events of relevance to the CDDEM
20. CDDEM priority topics for the next quadrennium: initial reflections
21. Dates of the next meeting
22. Any other business
23. Adoption of the abridged meeting report

APPENDIX II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS / MEMBRES

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