



Strasbourg, 12 May 2025

CDDEM-Bu(2025)1

**BUREAU OF THE  
STEERING COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY  
(CDDEM)**

**1st MEETING**

**14 April 2025, 9.30-13.00 / 14.30-17.30 (CET)  
15 April 2025, 9.30-13.00 / 14.30-17.30 (CET)**

**MEETING REPORT**

The Bureau of the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM/ the Committee) held its 1st formal meeting in Strasbourg on 14-15 April 2025. The meeting was chaired by Vebjørn Heines (Norway), Vice-Chair of the CDDEM, in the absence of the CDDEM Chair, Thomas Zandstra (Netherlands). The list of participants appears in Appendix 1.

**1. OPENING OF THE MEETING BY THE VICE-CHAIR**

The Vice-Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all members. Irena Guidikova, Head of the Democratic Institutions and Freedoms Department, offered opening reflections on the CDDEM's work and its impact, with particular emphasis on the importance of the Parameters as a potential *gold standard* for acting on – and for – democracy in Europe. The Bureau was informed of the possibility of creating co-operation projects to support the piloting of the Parameters and was also briefed on the ongoing EU consultation on the "European Democracy Shield."

**2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

The agenda was adopted as set out in Appendix 2.

**3. INFORMATION FROM THE CHAIR/ VICE-CHAIR**

**Meeting of the Committees within the Directorate of Democracy (10 March 2025)**

The Vice-Chair provided an update on the recent meeting of the Chairs of the Council of Europe's intergovernmental committees within the Directorate of Democracy. The meeting aimed to enable the committees to share updates on their current work and priorities, and to prepare for the upcoming meeting of the Secretary General with all intergovernmental committees, scheduled for 24 April (see below). In particular, discussions focused on identifying joint contributions to the implementation of the Secretary General's New Democratic Pact ("the Pact"). Representing the CDDEM at the meeting, the Vice-Chair expressed the Committee's ambition and readiness to play a central role in shaping democracy-related work across the Organisation.



## **Meeting of Presidents of Council of Europe Intergovernmental Committees with the Secretary General (24 April 2025)**

The 2025 annual meeting between the Secretary General and the presidents of intergovernmental committees will focus on the Pact. The Bureau discussed the key messages to be conveyed on behalf of the CDDEM and agreed to highlight the Parameters as a central tool for promoting democratic innovation and resilience across the Council of Europe. It also agreed to position the Committee as a hub for democratic innovation, grounded in dialogue and collaboration with citizens, civil society, and relevant international partners. The Bureau further considered the possibility of calling for increased engagement and investment by member states in democracy-related initiatives. The Vice-Chair undertook to prepare a short paper with the proposed messages to be delivered at the meeting.

### **4. CURRENT ACTIVITIES (STANDARD SETTING, IMPLEMENTATION, EMERGING ISSUES)**

#### **Reykjavik Principles for Democracy**

##### ***Progress of the Parameters for the application and implementation of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy***

The Secretariat reported on the progress of the work carried out within the Working Group on Parameters (GT-P) and provided information on the latest draft, as well as on a potential framework for assessment discussed by the GT-P. The Bureau discussed how to frame the Parameters as a practical tool that synthesises the Council of Europe's standards on democracy without weakening them. It also considered the possibility of inviting the Committee of Ministers to endorse the document and/or to issue a declaration encouraging its use by member states. The Vice-Chair further noted that the Pact could provide a framework for the implementation of the Parameters. The Bureau discussed possibilities for increasing the visibility of the Parameters, for example by promoting their use by the Secretary General in the framework of his annual reports. Finally, the Secretariat informed the Bureau of an upcoming Council of Europe project on freedom of expression, in which the Parameters could be used to analyse and counter disinformation.

##### ***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 Secretariat provided information on the preparation of the study on the advantages and risks of the use of AI in public debate relating to democratic processes and on AI literacy for democratic life, entrusted to a team of researchers led by Professor Natali Helberger at the Dutch AI, Media & Democracy Lab. The Bureau discussed the CDDEM's approach to AI and agreed that the Committee should focus on highlighting the Council of Europe's added value in the resulting study, with an emphasis on innovation and a holistic view of AI. The Secretariat outlined the roadmap leading to the finalisation of the study by November 2025 and informed members that Prof. Helberger would attend the 3rd CDDEM plenary session in May to provide further information and answer questions.

#### **Civil society and citizen participation**

##### ***Updating Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe***

The Secretariat updated the Bureau on the progress of the Working group on civil society participation (GT-CS). Participants discussed how to reinforce the sense of urgency and seriousness of the challenges faced by civil society organisations for their continuous operation. In that vein, the current draft needs some reinforcements. The Bureau also exchanged on how to address the so-called "foreign agents" laws more explicitly in the text and how and where to include a reference to the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) (CM/Rec(2024)2). The Bureau further discussed the contemplated changes in terminology (from "non-governmental" to "civil society" organisation), and in this regard also considered the term "non-state actors"

## **Elections**

### ***Guidelines on enhancing participation in elections of women, girls and young persons, vulnerable groups***

The Bureau members briefly discussed the future Guidelines on enhancing participation in elections of women, girls and young persons and vulnerable groups. A set of orientation questions has been circulated among the CDDEM members to be discussed at the Plenary meeting in May. These questions relate to the scope and format of the future instrument including which, if any, “vulnerable groups” are to be explicitly addressed. In this regard, the Bureau also exchanged views on a potential change of name of the document, reflecting the position of some members that an intersectional approach might be more in line with current work in the area of anti-discrimination and equality. The GT-P will be in charge of drafting the guidelines, with the support of Prof. Anna Lavizzari from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, who will be present during the May plenary to answer questions.

## **Good governance**

### ***Work on multilevel governance, including the preparation of a draft recommendation***

The Secretariat informed the Bureau of preliminary discussions held within the GT-CS regarding future work by the CDDEM on multilevel governance (MLG). The Bureau considered the potential added value of a new Committee of Ministers’ recommendation on the topic, noting that current approaches to MLG in member states often remain confined to the sphere of local self-government, without fully reflecting the broader multi-level, multi-actor, and multi-sector dimensions of governance. A key issue discussed was how a future recommendation could go beyond general principles of MLG, for example, by drawing on member states’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic to formulate more targeted, sector-specific guidance. At the same time, the Bureau considered whether it might be more strategic to frame the initiative in terms of the implementation of democratic principles at all levels of governance, rather than focusing on the concept of MLG itself. In this context, the Bureau highlighted the CDDEM’s potential added value in operationalising the Parameters through such a perspective.

## **5. MID-TERM REVIEW FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE REVISED PROGRAMME AND DRAFT BUDGET 2026-2027**

### **Changes to the CDDEM Terms of Reference (2024-2027)**

The Bureau reviewed proposed changes to the CDDEM’s Terms of Reference for the second biennium of the 2024–2027 programming period. Two new deliverables were suggested: (1) the development of an assessment framework for the Parameters, and (2) follow-up work on the study examining the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on democracy. Additional adjustments included postponing work on multilevel governance and the review of Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 on the principles of good democratic governance to the end of 2027, in line with the biennial cycle. The review of Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)5 on e-voting standards was proposed for the next programming period, starting in 2028. One Bureau member noted that this Recommendation includes a commitment to a biennial review, and alternative proposals might still be explored, depending on the committee’s available resources. It was suggested CDDEM could engage a 2026 discussion in the committee as part of the plenary meeting, followed by a comprehensive review in the subsequent biennium. Given that the CDDEM is currently supported by only one full-time administrator, the Bureau proposed requesting additional resources and extending the duration of meetings to allow for more in-depth discussions and thematic hearings. Bureau members also agreed that, considering the Committee’s central role in both current and broader strategic priorities of the Council of Europe, efforts should be made to secure further support.

## 6. OBSERVER STATUS

The Bureau discussed the process for revisiting observer status applications previously objected to by one member state during the 2nd plenary session. It was agreed that the Secretariat would engage in dialogue with the member state concerned to explore the possibility of a revised position. Failing this, the Committee would proceed in line with the provisions of Resolution CM/Res(2021)3. The Secretariat also informed the Bureau of a new expression of interest in observer status by the organisation “Pax Romana.”

## 7. ELECTIONS

At the 3rd plenary session in May, a new Bureau member will be elected to complete the current one-year term of Ms Silvia Negro Alousque (Spain), who has stepped down. As this mandate expires at the 4th plenary in November 2025, another election will be held then for the subsequent two-year term. The Bureau discussed election procedures and how to encourage candidacies. The Secretariat will circulate a call for nominations.

## 8. RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

### Developments in member states in the field of activities of the CDDEM

The Co-Secretary reported on the Secretariat’s participation in a conference on evidence-based approaches to democratic resilience, hosted by the Netherlands in The Hague on 30–31 January 2025. Ms Becerra shared the main outcomes and noted the Netherlands’ interest in pursuing international follow-up activities, potentially through future member state or Council of Europe-led events.

The Vice-Chair highlighted upcoming high-level events, including a meeting in Stockholm in June marking the 30th anniversary of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), and the 20th Internet Governance Forum, to be held in Lillestrøm, Norway, on 23–27 June 2025.

Ms Lilya Afrikyan (Armenia) announced that the next Global Open Government Summit will take place on 7–9 October 2025 in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain. She proposed a panel on “Democracy under Pressure” and will keep members informed on this initiative.

The Secretary reported that the World Justice Forum will take place in Warsaw, Poland, on 23–26 June 2025, with the Council of Europe invited to contribute to a panel on the independence of civil service and its role in strengthening democracy.

## 9. EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

### Secretary General: development and implementation of the Democracy Pact and the role of the CDDEM in it

The Secretariat outlined the Secretary General’s ongoing plans and activities under the Pact. Among them is a Council of Europe “Hackathon against disinformation” scheduled for 20 June, where CDDEM members could contribute, for example as speakers or mentors. The Bureau reiterated the Committee’s central role in the Pact and underscored the importance of outreach to other Council of Europe committees and external partners, including civil society and international organisations. Members proposed the CDDEM could hold thematic plenary debates as part of the Pact’s flagship events. The Bureau also considered the possible need for a Committee of Ministers’ declaration calling for concrete democracy-related commitments from member states, including dedicated funding.

## **10. EVALUATION OF THE CDDEM ACTIVITIES**

In accordance with their Terms of Reference, intergovernmental committees are asked to evaluate their activities, including the application of adopted standards across member states. Bureau members exchanged views on how best to carry out such evaluations, mindful of limited Secretariat resources. The involvement of civil society was discussed as a potential avenue, and the Parameters were identified as a possible reference point for future evaluations.

## **11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **World Forum for Democracy**

The Bureau explored ways to enhance synergies with the World Forum for Democracy, including how to better integrate CDDEM members and build on the Forum's outcomes. Members agreed that the Forum could serve as a valuable platform to present the Parameters and gather insights on innovative democratic practices, including participatory approaches that align with the goals of the Democracy Pact.

## **12. DATE AND FORMAT OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The second formal meeting of the Bureau will take place on 3-4 November 2025. It will be held in person in Strasbourg, with the possibility of online participation.

**APPENDIX 1****LIST OF PARTICIPANTS****CHAIR / PRESIDENT**

*(Apologised for absence)*

Mr Thomas ZANDSTRA, Deputy Director Democracy and Governance, Democracy and Governance Division, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations

**OTHER MEMBERS / AUTRES MEMBRES**

Ms Lilya AFRIKYAN, Coordinator of the "Open government partnership" Initiative, the Prime Minister's Office

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

Mr Vebjørn HEINES, Policy Director for Democracy and Human Rights, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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

Mr Pavel MIČKA, Head of the unit of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations Office of the Government of the Czech Republic

**SECRETARIAT****SECRETARIAT DU CDDEM / SECRETARIAT DU CDDEM**

Ms Urška UMEK, Secretary of the CDDEM / Secrétaire du CDDEM

Ms Marta BECERRA, Co-Secretary of the CDDEM / Co-Secrétaire du CDDEM

Mr Alexander VOGT

Ms Isabelle ETTER, Assistant / Assistante

**OTHER SECRETARIAT / AUTRE SECRÉTARIAT**

Ms Irena GUIDIKOVA, Head of the Democratic Institutions and Freedoms Department / Cheffe du Service des institutions et des libertés démocratiques

## APPENDIX 2

## AGENDA

1.	<b>Opening of the meeting by the Chair</b>	
2.	<b>Adoption of the agenda</b>	[CDDEM-Bu(2025)OJ1]
3.	<b>Information from the Chair / Vice-Chair</b>  <b>Meetings of the Chairs of Intergovernmental Committees:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meeting of the Committees within the Directorate of Democracy (10 March 2025).</li> <li>- Meeting of all Council of Europe Intergovernmental Committees convoked by the Secretary General (24 April 2025).</li> </ul>	
4.	<b>Current activities (standard setting, implementation, emerging issues)</b>  <i>Reykjavík Principles for Democracy:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Progress of the Parameters for the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy.</li> <li>- Study on advantages and risks of the use of AI in public debate relating to democratic processes and on AI literacy for democratic life.</li> </ul> <i>Civil society and citizen participation:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Updating Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe.</li> </ul> <i>Elections:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Guidelines on enhancing participation in elections of women, girls and young persons, vulnerable groups.</li> </ul> <i>Good governance:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work on multilevel governance, including the preparation of a draft recommendation.</li> </ul>	[GT-P(2025)1] [GT-CS(2025)1] [CDDEM(2025)2, CDDEM(2025)3, CDDEM(2025)6]
5.	<b>Mid-term review for the preparation of the revised Programme and draft Budget 2026-2027</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changes to the CDDEM Terms of Reference (2024-2027)</li> <li>- Lack of resources for CDDEM.</li> </ul>	
6.	<b>Observer status</b>	
7.	<b>Elections</b>	
8.	<b>Relevant developments within the Council of Europe and other institutions</b>  Developments in member states in the field of activities of the CDDEM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International Conference on an evidence-based approach to democratic resilience (The Hague).</li> </ul>	

	- Development of professional competences in public management and administration (Slovenia).	
9.	<b>Exchange of views</b>  - Secretary General: development and implementation of the Democracy Pact and the role of the CDDEM in it.	[SG Inf(2025)3]
10.	<b>Evaluation of the CDDEM activities</b>	[CDDEM(2025)5]
11.	<b>Any other business</b>  World Forum for Democracy	Concept Note of the WFD
12.	<b>Date and format of the next meeting</b>	