



Centre of Expertise  
for Local Government Reform



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Centre of Expertise  
Strategic Plan 2017-2022

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Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform  
Directorate General II – Democracy

## Our Mission

Delivering Good Governance to public authorities through capacity building  
legal and policy advice, to ensure compliance with European standards

The Centre of Expertise was established in 2006 to deliver good local and regional governance by promoting European standards and best practice. It has been seeking to do this through continuous investment in research and expertise; creating and developing partnerships and networks with national and international stakeholders; developing impact-oriented practical tools and enlarging its offer of country-specific programmes to reach a wider number of beneficiaries.

The Centre represents cooperation in the “dynamic triangle” of the Council of Europe, which links standard setting, monitoring and technical cooperation. It provides capacity-building programmes, policy advice and legal assistance activities to local, regional, and national authorities in order to support the on-going process of reform of local government and public administration.

The Centre is now in a position to offer cutting-edge expertise on multi-level governance to its partners and beneficiaries. Moreover, it is connected to the Council of Europe intergovernmental Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG), which offers it ready access to high-level government officials from the 47 member States with a reservoir of knowledge and expertise in governance reforms.

The Centre promotes and builds on a unique set of European standards such as the European Charter of Local Self-Government, Committee of Ministers’ Recommendations in this field, and the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance. Most of the Centre’s programmes are based on specific “tools” such as benchmarks, evaluation instruments and innovative methodologies. These tools represent a practical crystallisation of the Council of Europe standards and of best European practice

## Our Vision

The Centre of Expertise as a leading promoter of Good Governance  
at every level in line with European standards and best practice

Advancing into its second decade, the Centre will continue to build on its obvious strength as a repository of European standards and best practice to deliver good governance not only to regional and local authorities but also to central authorities through policy advice, legislative assistance, capacity-building and intergovernmental support.

In the coming five years, the Centre will evolve, and while local government reform will always remain its core area of expertise, the Centre will further expand its work to multi-level governance and offer assistance in the area of public administration.

Going forward, the Centre will continue to mobilise and involve stakeholders from all levels of governance and its broad network of national and international partners in programme design and implementation. This will help improve the impact of its programmes; reinforce commitment to the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance across Europe; and help adapt tools to the domestic contexts and emerging needs.

## Our Working Methods

legal and policy advice, peer reviews, capacity-building tools, network of experts

The Centre relies on external experts (academics and practitioners) and peers (members of the CDDG or other representatives of ministries) for the provision of legal and policy advice and the implementation of its toolkits. All country-specific capacity-building activities are implemented in close cooperation with a broad spectrum of national partners, including governmental agencies, associations of local authorities and institutes (“amplifying institutions”).

The Centre currently has a repertoire of 17 capacity-building tools which take inspiration from the best of European practice and enable the reinforcement and evaluation of the capacities of local authorities with respect to the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance. The tools are grouped around 5 areas:

- democratic participation;
- modern and effective human resource management and leadership;
- institutional capacity and quality public services;
- sound financial management;
- territorial and cross-border cooperation.

Such tools represent template projects including modern instruments derived from New Public Management theory. They have already been implemented successfully and can be adapted quickly and effectively to any national circumstance in order to obtain good impact.

In addition, a broad network of partnerships has been developed with international actors such as the European Union, United Nations, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and bodies such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, the European Association for Local Democracy, the European Association of Local Chief Executives etc.

### Background

Since its inception in 2006, the Centre of Expertise has operated in a rapidly evolving context of decentralisation and public administration reforms: the transfer of functions from the national to the local and/or regional levels has advanced in most member states, decentralisation policies have captured increasing attention and good democratic governance has become a priority across Europe. The tools and methods of the Centre have evolved over the course of its mandate in order to reflect these changes and emerging issues.

Developing from a smaller number of pilot activities in its early years (5 staff members, 5 projects, and a total budget of under 200K in 2006), in 2016, the Centre organised activities in at least 25 member states. Almost 30 staff members are currently working for the Centre, including about 20 project managers and assistants in the field offices of Kyiv, Belgrade, Chisinau, Tirana, and Yerevan. In financial terms, the 2016 activities amounted to over € 3m, some 80% of which came from external funding sources. The most important, multi-component projects were financed externally and implemented in Albania, Armenia, Greece, Malta, Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. In addition, several small but high-impact projects were implemented through the ordinary budget in other states such as Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Lithuania, and Poland.

Now with over ten years of experience in providing legal and policy advice and implementing practical and impact-oriented projects in support of member states advancing governance reforms, the expertise of the Centre is highly regarded by beneficiaries. It carries an added legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders because its tools crystallise and give practical shape and substance to the European standards and to the experience of all 47 member states of the Council of Europe.

## Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2021

The Centre was evaluated at the end of 2016 and the Evaluation Report recommended that *“The management of the Centre, with the participation of all staff and key experts and in consultation with other relevant stakeholders, conduct a strategic planning exercise to define the vision, mission, long term objectives and priorities of the Centre as an institution”*. The Centre’s Strategic Plan 2017-2021 is the result of consultations with staff, colleagues from related sectors, and experts.

After 10 years of solid growth, strong brand recognition among stakeholders and beneficiaries, and highly-valued cutting-edge expertise on multi-level governance, the Centre of Expertise is determined to build on its mission to deliver good governance to central, regional and local authorities through legislative assistance, policy advice, capacity building, and intergovernmental support in the coming years. It will aspire to take a leading role in promoting Good Democratic Governance in Europe.

This vision is fully in line with the current priorities of the Council of Europe’s Secretary General<sup>1</sup> in the pillar of democracy, according to which the main focus is:

- *to ensure good governance at all levels of government, promoting transparency, integrity and accountability, to help rebuild trust in democratic institutions and values, creating a culture of participative democracy... and*
- *to equip citizens and tomorrow’s decision-makers with the necessary skills, knowledge, values, attitudes and critical thinking...*

Therefore, based on the appended SWOT analysis, our 5-year development objectives are:

Objective	Indicators	Action
<p>1. Content: Focus on Priorities</p> <p>Promote the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance and the ELoGE (European Label of Governance’ Excellence) to serve as a capacity-building and a needs assessment tool at all levels of government to help identify project priorities for target countries. Promote the</p>	<p>Evolution in number and types of requests</p> <p>Number of accreditations for ELoGE and other tools</p> <p>Number and areas of requested legal opinions, policy advice and peer reviews</p> <p>Number and frequency of tools implemented</p> <p>Frequency of participation in events and conferences, networking</p>	<p>Generate and support requests for the ELoGE accreditation from member states and relevant organisations. Prioritise good governance projects on ordinary budget. Implement legislative advice and peer reviews on governance reforms.</p> <p>Accreditations for tools: provide accreditations to organisations wishing to use other Council of Europe tools such as Public Ethics Benchmarking (PEB), Human Resources Management (HRM), Local Finance Benchmarking (LFB), etc.</p> <p>Networking: Present and promote 12 Principles and European Label of</p>

<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2018-2019. Priorities of the Secretary General.

<p>European Charter of Local Self-government, decentralisation, subsidiarity, and cross-border cooperation as European values</p>	<p>Number of meetings with permanent representatives in Strasbourg</p>	<p>Governance' Excellence (ELOGE) in Europe and globally.</p> <p>Diplomacy: work with permanent representations in Strasbourg and with international organisations which pursue similar goals (OECD, EU, UN-HABITAT)</p>
<p>2. Upgrade Means</p> <p>Improve resource mobilisation</p> <p>Increase overall budget, both extra-ordinary budget and ordinary budget</p>	<p>Increased overall operational budget</p> <p>Increased funding from the Organisation's ordinary budget</p> <p>Approved Council of Europe Action Plan on Good Governance</p> <p>Flexibility in choosing priorities and projects</p> <p>Value of non-earmarked contributions to Centre's budget to support implementation of this Strategy</p> <p>Recruitment of staff at headquarters and in field offices to support project implementation</p> <p>Number of partnerships established with core donors</p> <p>Number of promotional events for Centre's Strategy</p>	<p>Promote Centre's Strategic Plan among stakeholders to attract support and diversify donor portfolio</p> <p>Establish long-term partnerships with select donors</p> <p>Ensure non-earmarked funding to support research and analysis and more in-depth projects funded by the ordinary budget</p> <p>Or request earmarked voluntary contributions for research purposes (e.g. through a thematic or regional project which would lead to a new tool)</p> <p>Increase share of good governance projects in action plans</p> <p>Propose Council of Europe Action Plans on Good Governance</p> <p>Propose good governance chapters in country and/or regional action plans</p> <p>Fundraise through regular meetings with relevant Council of Europe services and major donors.</p> <p>Explore new sources of funding.</p> <p>NB: the Evaluation Report recommended that "<i>The management of the Centre, in coordination with ODGP (Office of the Directorate General of Programmes), encourages donors to make non-earmarked voluntary contributions in order to support Ordinary Budget-funded activities within the Centre's strategy, with particular emphasis on countries not covered by Action Plans and large programmes.</i>"</p>

<p>3. Upgrade offer</p> <p>Make multi-level governance the core of the Centre's portfolio, while decentralisation and good governance at local and regional level remain as foundation</p>	<p>Number and types of requests for assistance and cooperation</p> <p>Stakeholder / beneficiary feedback indicates improved perception of the Centre's portfolio</p> <p>Number of new and revised tools for central level increased</p> <p>New name of the Centre</p> <p>Increased and diversified pool of experts and areas of expertise</p> <p>Number of meetings of collaborative working groups involving other Council of Europe sectors to support development of Centre's toolkits</p> <p>Number of partnerships established with external partners</p> <p>Number of training activities for experts and staff</p> <p>Increased number and competence of staff</p> <p>Increased number of partners and beneficiaries, also outside of Europe.</p>	<p>Consider changing the name to "Centre of Expertise on Good Governance". Expand to multi-level governance and develop, adapt, and promote capacity building tools for central authorities – e.g. Leadership, Public Ethics, Human Resources Management etc.</p> <p>Carry out a survey to check if the perception among stakeholders has changed; sustain cutting edge expertise on governance through innovation: develop innovative tools to address the current needs but also drive the demand by proposing new tools and use synergies within the Council of Europe for collaborative development of tools and action – e.g. inter-cultural cities, civil society.</p> <p>Update the most used tools and develop at least three new ones, focusing on territorial consolidation, e-governance, and civil participation. Promote the tools which are never or rarely used.</p> <p>Ensure that there are enough experts available in each area, and that gender/country balance is respected.</p> <p>Recruit and train experts through website, networking, ToTs (trainings of trainers).</p> <p>Improve competence of staff by involving them in trainings organised for the Centre's trainers and experts. There should also be enough staff to manage each project efficiently.</p> <p>Open the Centre to global partnerships with international organisations and associations such as UN-HABITAT or the African Academy for Local Government.</p>
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<p>4. Upgrade the Centre</p> <p>Make it a knowledge-based institution and an organisation with high IQ</p> <p>Achieve recognition of the Centre as a special Council of Europe operational unit/think tank delivering good governance to the member states.</p>	<p>Number of clicks and downloads of tools and case-studies from website</p> <p>Number of Centre initiatives validated by CDDG</p> <p>Online tools developed</p> <p>New CDDG standards developed</p> <p>Website maintained by a dedicated staff</p> <p>The Centre is better known to its stakeholders and "clients".</p> <p>Number of users of e-learning platform</p> <p>Donor support for the development and maintenance of the e-knowledge system.</p> <p>Improved visual identity of the Centre – e.g. dodecahedron, own logo.</p>	<p>Develop the Centre's website as a web-based repository of lessons learned and good practices.</p> <p>Create a Community of practice, expand R&amp;D, transit to high IQ organisation.</p> <p>Make innovate outputs from country-specific project available to other beneficiaries and help in adapting them, e.g. the electronic platform for public administration.</p> <p>Create a comprehensive database of outputs of country-specific action to share experience, apply it to other countries, further promote intergovernmental cooperation and serve as a shop-window for further assistance requests.</p> <p>Develop e-learning platform for Good Governance and possibly Leadership Academy.</p> <p>Meet with Council of Europe senior management and bodies to promote the Centre's work.</p> <p>Leverage stakeholders, beneficiaries and member-states as ambassadors to promote the tools of the Centre, attract requests for assistance and commitment to ELoGE.</p> <p>Demonstrate results, rather than reporting on the actions taken.</p> <p>Ensure copyright: e.g. Council of Europe and Centre logo on all tools and reports used by other organisations, ISBN for tools.</p> <p>Develop visual identity (e.g. dodecahedron).</p>
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<p>5. Specialise in regional projects</p> <p>Regional, multi-state projects can be efficient, effective means of promoting shared values, intergovernmental cooperation and peer learning.</p>	<p>By 2021 the Centre implements more regional, multi-state projects.</p>	<p>Continue regional action in Eastern Europe; develop regional action in the Western Balkans, Central Europe and around the Mediterranean.</p>
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## SWOT Analysis

### Strengths

- The strong links between the Centre and the CDDG offer an important resource of international expertise and networking opportunities. They also help to start a dialogue between different levels of government, peer-learning and inter-governmental cooperation.
- The Council of Europe's legal instruments constitute a unique body of European standards on local self-government.
- The Centre's tools represent institutional knowledge and easily-adaptable templates for good quality, tailor-made and impact-oriented projects that promote European standards.
- The Centre's tools are updated in light of experience and feedback in the course of their implementation and in response to emerging trends with respect to decentralisation and public administration reforms.
- The Centre's activities can serve as a catalyst to kick start reforms.
- The Centre is a recognised actor in the field of multi-level governance and is reputed for the pertinence and effectiveness of its activities, especially in beneficiary states.

### Opportunities

- The Centre can involve member States (through the CDDG) and other stakeholders in identifying and planning country-specific activities.
- The participation of stakeholders, donors, beneficiaries and other partners in programming can serve to bolster commitment to project objectives and ensure greater impact and sustainability.
- Beneficiaries can act as ambassadors for the Centre's activities in seeking to leverage donor support and funding.
- New sources of funding have recently been identified as potential boosters of the Centre's projects in EU member states.
- The current trend towards decentralisation in most Council of Europe member states is likely to increase both the demand and donor interest in the Centre's expertise.
- Civil society and academia involvement in decentralisation and governance issues can offer new partnership opportunities.
- The Good Governance website has recently been redesigned in order to inform on ongoing activities and to strengthen the communication in general.

### Weaknesses

- Increased demand for assistance cannot currently be sustained by the limited financial and stretched human resources.
- The pool of external experts is also stretched to its limits in terms of availability and number of trained, experienced professionals ready to work on projects and tools.
- Some of the legal instruments need updating.
- Data collection, reporting, project evaluation (project impact indicators and analysis), and mid-term strategic planning need to be improved.
- The Centre's projects need more internal, domestic, and international support.
- The Centre struggles to gain recognition and support within the Organisation, perhaps because it has been ineffective in communicating its strengths and successes.
- While under continuous improvement, Council of Europe rules are more rigid than those of most development agencies and organisations, which could make the Centre less attractive to donors.

### Threats

- The rise of populism and undermining of democratic culture put the commitment to Council of Europe norms and values at risk.
- Some member states have recently seen a re-centralisation trend, which makes it difficult for the Centre to pursue its activities.
- In a challenging international context of competing demands, good governance is sometimes overlooked in priority-setting by the Organisation and key donors.
- The Centre may enter into competition with larger, better funded and more flexible international agencies (United Nations Development Programme - UNDP, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe - OSCE, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD) and in particular private-law but publicly-owned development consultancies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit - GIZ, International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities - VNG, SKL development agency, owned by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) - SKL. It is important to prevent this through coordination and partnership.