

International Conference Multilevel Governance Approaches to Reinforce Democratic Resilience and Build Public Trust

CONCLUSIONS

29 April 2026, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova

Context

In the Reykjavík Declaration "United around our values", the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe made a strong commitment "to securing and strengthening democracy and good governance at all levels throughout Europe", underlining the essential role of multilevel governance in achieving these aims, and adopting the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy.

This Conference, organised under the Presidency of the Republic of Moldova of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, draws on Parameters for application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy, builds on the conclusions of the Multilevel Governance Conference held in Gozo, Malta in June 2025 and is a contribution to the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Key findings of the Conference

In a global context marked by democratic backsliding and declining citizens' trust in democratic institutions, participants reaffirmed that effective multilevel governance — grounded in co-operation, participation and accountability — is essential to ensure that democratic institutions deliver for all.

Experience and practice of territorial administrative and multilevel governance reforms from across Europe shared at the conference underlined that such reforms can help reinforce democratic resilience, build public trust in institutions, strengthen local democracy, and improve delivery of services to citizens.

The design and implementation of these reforms have taken different forms and have been adopted at different speeds in member states – there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Council of Europe standards such as the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance should guide the preparation of reforms.

The forthcoming parameters for application and implementation of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy can help member States identify their strengths and improve their responses to potential vulnerabilities in the preparation and implementation of democratic governance reforms.



This initiative is a contribution towards the

New Democratic Pact for Europe

Key takeaways from plenary and breakout group discussions

1. Effective coordination and cooperation between multilevel governance actors helps:

- Ensure complementarity of action across levels of governance;
- Improve policy coherence effectiveness of governance;
- Increase efficiency and accessibility in service delivery;
- Build trust between public authorities, citizens and civil society organisations.

Such cooperation frameworks should be flexible but also clearly define roles and responsibilities.

2. Territorial consolidation and amalgamation can strengthen local democracy without undermining local identity:

- Delivering policymaking centred on people's legitimate needs and expectations ;
- Ensuring local authorities benefit from economies of scale to increase investment opportunities and improve infrastructure and services;
- Promoting shared services and increased resources can help deliver responsive and resilient democratic governance;
- Intermunicipal and interregional co-operation can address capacity constraints, optimise resources and ensure equitable access to high-quality public services.

3. Engaging citizens is key to the sustainability of reform processes:

- Convening local stakeholders and involving them in decision-making and policy delivery builds trust and ensures citizen-centred service delivery;
- Strengthening transparency, accountability and responsiveness in public decision-making are essential elements of good democratic governance;
- Citizen education and targeted messaging helps engage diverse groups of citizens, enhancing the feedback loop, building trust, promoting transparency.

Priority actions

In order to give effect to these findings, the Conference emphasised the need to:

- Encourage member States to make use of the Parameters for the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy;
- Foster new forms of democratic practice - deliberative processes, multi-level governance cooperation, and peer-to-peer exchanges - as instruments to rebuild trust, prevent institutional fatigue and respond to evolving democratic expectations;
- Strengthen institutional capacity at all levels of governance through targeted support, peer learning and technical assistance;
- Ensure that transfers of competences between levels of governance are accompanied by adequate administrative, financial and human resources;
- Support continued exchange of good practices and multilateral co-operation between member States and relevant stakeholders.

