

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 14 October 2025

GT-CS(2025)6

**STEERING COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY
(CDDEM)**

**WORKING GROUP ON CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION
(GT-CS)**

REPORT OF THE 4th MEETING

(Hybrid meeting, 22-23 September 2025)

prepared by the
Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity
Democratic Institutions and Civil Society Division

The CDDEM Working Group on Civil Society Participation (GT-CS) held its 4th meeting on 22-23 September 2025 (in person and videoconference via Zoom – 09:30-17:30). The meeting was facilitated by the Chair, Georgios Chrysafis from Greece.

1. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all participants, the list of which appears in Appendix I of this report. The agenda was adopted as it appears in Appendix II.

2. Discussion of the revised draft of the updated Recommendation CM (2007)¹⁴ of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the Legal Status of Non-Governmental Organisations in Europe

The members and participants of the GT-CS examined the draft of the updated Recommendation CM(2007)¹⁴ of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the Legal Status of Civil Society Organisations in Europe prepared by the Council of Europe expert Jeremy McBride, President of the Expert Council of NGO Law of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (CINGO), assisted by the Secretariat. The draft incorporates the feedback received from the [public consultation](#) of the draft during the summer period. Participants also examined the updated Explanatory Memorandum (EM) which accompanied the 2007 Recommendation.

The revised text of the Recommendation was submitted for public consultation on 5 August and remained open until 15 September. Prior to that, three member states (Bulgaria, Germany and the Netherlands) provided written comments during the silent procedure. A further 29 contributions were received from different organisations and individuals during the consultation period. The GT-CS participants welcomed this feedback. Many organisations provided concrete wording suggestions, while others drew attention to broader issues – for example, the need to encourage research on civic space, to favour a risk-based approach to CSOs' accountability requirements, or to further operationalise the concept of enabling environment for CSOs.

Whereas the GT-CS acknowledged many suggestions as appropriate and important, the more detailed proposals cannot be accommodated in the text of the Recommendation. However, where the members considered a detailed explanation or clarification were helpful, they agreed to incorporate it in the Explanatory Memorandum (EM) which is to guide the implementation of the Recommendation.

The members examined the Preamble of the revised draft where additions were proposed to explain the increased importance of international co-operation among CSOs and to acknowledge the differences in sizes and scope in the work of CSOs. The GT-CS considered a valuable addition to refer to international co-operation among civil society in the Appendix and to add the acknowledgment of the diversity of CSOs in the EM.

Participants discussed briefly the definition of CSO under the first section on **Basic principles** and agreed to exemplify in the EM the types of organisations that are covered by the Recommendation, as suggested by several organisations during the public consultation. Furthermore, explicit references to freedoms of assembly and association that should be enjoyed by CSOs will be added to the section. In the second section **Objectives**, an amendment is to stress the need to protect CSOs, members and volunteers, *inter alia*, against stigmatisation. The section also clarifies the possibility of CSOs to support or oppose to candidates and parties beyond electoral periods.

Regarding the third section on **Formation and Membership**, members and participants discussed the different authorisation requirements for establishing CSOs, seeking to better reflect the variety of systems for granting legal personality and limit the reasons to refuse requests for granting legal personality. In the fourth section **Branches**, it was agreed to explicitly dispense with the obligation for a CSO to have a branch in a specific location (country) in order to operate there. Further clarifications were agreed on regarding the reasons for terminating legal personality, both with regard to the Recommendation and the EM.

Under the fifth section **Management**, a wording suggestion from the public consultation was retained to clarify the disqualification to act as an officer of a CSO following a conviction.

Participants agreed to split paragraph 51 in the sixth section **Funding, property and public support** into two separate provisions. The first is to refer to the freedom of CSOs to solicit and receive funding, and the second is to focus on the prohibition of stigmatisation and labelling of organisations for receiving foreign funding. The GT-CS agreed to also accommodate the proposal from the public consultation to broaden the types of public support to CSOs and explain that such support should support their sustainability.

In the seventh section on **Accountability**, the participants agreed to make more explicit the requirement that disclosure and reporting requirements are not unduly burdensome and that they respect the right to privacy of donors, beneficiaries, members, staff and, additionally, volunteers.

Further precisions were retained in this section from the input of the public consultation: the provision that the activities of CSOs should be presumed lawful, which should only be countered by credible evidence; the possibility of a prompt judicial appeal by CSOs in case a request is refused for a suspension of an administrative measure, or the requirement that sanctions should only be used in more serious cases of non-compliance, not just for breaches that can be rectified. The members also agreed to strengthen in the text the protection for CSOs' volunteers.

Section eight **Participation in decision-making** incorporates new wording condensing the requests expressed during the public consultation to reinforce the participation of CSOs in public decision-making. Participants discussed several reinforcements in the text of the Recommendation and agreed to include more details in the EM.

The GT-CS confirmed their agreement to the creation of a new section nine on **Foreign CSOs** to group all requirements applicable to organisations that relocate or are in exile.

During the second day of the meeting the GT-CS examined the changes to the Explanatory Memorandum which will accompany the text of the Recommendation with corresponding revisions and additions. The EM now incorporates further details and examples, including those from stemming the public consultation, providing a rich guide for implementation of the Recommendation.

3. Next steps

GT-CS instructed the Secretariat to revise the text and the EM in accordance with the conclusions and wording suggestions agreed upon during the meeting. The members and participants were invited to send any additional comments to the draft recommendation as examined by the group and to the Explanatory Memorandum as soon as possible.

The Secretariat will consolidate the comments and produce a new draft and will inform the CDDEM Bureau which will meet on 3-4 November of the advancement of the work. Participants also discussed the possibility of holding a short online meeting if there were a need to clarify any final comment or suggestion.

4. Recommendation on multi-level governance

The GT-CS briefly discussed the CDDEM work on multi-level governance, based on the CDDG report on the topic (CDDG(2023)12) and on background note prepared by the Secretariat (GT-CS(2025)5) that provides some points of reflection both in terms of procedure of substance.

The Secretariat reminded that it has been proposed to extend the deadline for finalising the Recommendation on multi-level governance until the end of 2027, in order to allow the CDDEM to continue developing standard-setting instruments within biennial cycles. This means that the work can start in 2026.

In terms of procedure, participants favoured the establishment of a working group and proposed to include other actors beyond the CDDEM members such as local governments or independent experts, but with a limitation in size so as to allow for fruitful and productive exchanges.

On substance, the future instrument on multi-level governance needs to consider the existing work (CDDG, OECD, EU, etc.) and provide an added value. The Recommendation should complement the European Charter of Local Self-government and avoid any language that could unintentionally undermine its guarantees. In turn, the future Recommendation could stress that effective MLG can contribute to the effective implementation of the Charter. Finally, the work on the ground carried out by the Council of Europe Centre for multi-level governance should provide practical evidence that could focus the CDDEM Recommendation.

Several participants delved into the principles and recommendations of the CDDG report and provided orientations on how the Recommendation can build on them. The members emphasised the importance of going beyond decentralisation and incorporating the key question of financing and fiscal equalisation even though this is not a specific focus of the work of the Council of Europe. The exchange confirmed a preference to concentrate on MLG mechanisms and procedures rather than prescribing concrete institutional arrangements, given the diversity of systems across member states. There was one recommendation to include concrete mechanisms for multi-level governance.

While no consensus emerged yet on the precise focus of the future instrument, the discussion confirmed the importance of concentrating on how multilevel, multisector and multi-actor arrangements can be organised in practice, and of providing concrete procedural guidance rooted in Council of Europe principles. The Secretariat will prepare further reflections along these lines to help identify areas of convergence and refine the scope of the future Recommendation. The conclusions of the discussions at GT-CS will be also in the agenda of the CDDEM Bureau in early November.

APPENDIX I
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS / MEMBRES

CHAIR / PRESIDENT

Mr Georgios CHRYSAFIS, expert within the Department of Organisation and Functioning of Second Level of Local Government, Greece

AUSTRIA / AUTRICHE

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

BELGIUM / BELGIQUE

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

CZECHIA / TCHEQUIE

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

FINLAND / FINLANDE

Ms Anu JUVONEN, Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy (KANE)

GERMANY / ALLEMAGNE

Ms Constanze LERNHART, Ministry of Regional Identity, Local Government, Building and Digitalization of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, Head of Unit 302 "Local Government Tasks, Territorial Structure and Interests in Legislation and Administrative Implementation"

Mr Felix BÖTTCHER

GREECE / GRECE

Mr Dimitrios PONTIKAKIS, expert within the Directorate of Organisation and Functioning of Local Government

ITALY / ITALIE

Mr Pierluigi TROMBETTA, Diplomatic advisor to the Italian Minister for Regional Affairs, Minister for Regional Affairs and Autonomies

Ms Maja BOVA

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA / REPUBLIQUE DE MOLDOVA

Ms Lilia PASCAL, Head of the Human Rights and Civil Society Cooperation Directorate

Ms Camelia JALBA

NETHERLANDS / PAYS-BAS

Mr Jesse LOEVINSOHN, Directorate-General Public Administration and Democratic Rule of Law, Democracy and Governance Department, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations

PORTUGAL

Ms Tânia MOURATO, Deputy Director, General Directorate of Local Authorities

ROMANIA / ROUMANIE

Mr Dacian ȚOLEA, Senior Advisor, General Secretariat of the Government, Service for Strategic Support and Cooperation with the Civil Society Organisations

Mr Daniel Ștefan BELINGHER, adviser, General Secretariat of the Government, Service for Strategic Support and Cooperation with the Civil Society Organisations

Mr Claudiu IVAN, adviser, General Secretariat of the Government, Service for Strategic Support and Cooperation with the Civil Society Organisations

SLOVAK REPUBLIC / REPUBLIQUE SLOVAQUE

Ms Zuzana VIZVÁRYOVÁ, General State Advisor, Self- government Unit, Department of the Modernization and Coordination, Public Administration section, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic

SPAIN / ESPAGNE

Mme Ione TRIGO BALLESTEROS, Directrice de Programme, Sous-direction des Relations Internationales et Européennes du Ministère de la Politique territoriale et de la Mémoire démocratique

UNITED KINGDOM / ROYAUME-UNI

Ms Kirsty BROWN, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

CONSULTANT EXPERT / EXPERT CONSULTANT

Mr Jeremy McBride, President of the CINGO Expert Council on NGO Law

OTHER PARTICIPANT / AUTRE PARTICIPANT**EUROPEAN UNION / UNION EUROPEENNE**

Ms Elena HAIG, Legal and Policy Officer, European Commission, DG Justice and Consumers, C.2 Fundamental Rights Policy

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

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

Ms Lotta VALTONEN, Civil Society Unit / Unité de la société civile

OTHER COUNCIL OF EUROPE PARTICIPANTS / AUTRES PARTICIPANTS DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

European Committee on Legal Co-Operation / Comité européen de coopération juridique (CDCJ)

Mr James D'AGOSTINO, Senior Lawyer, Office of the State Advocate, Malta

Youth Department / Service de la Jeunesse

Ms Emma WEDNER, Bureau Member of the Advisory Council on Youth

MONEYVAL and criminal asset recovery / MONEYVAL et le recouvrement des avoirs criminels

Mr Lado LALICIC, Executive Secretary, Head of Division

INTERPRETERS / INTERPRETES

Ms Elisabetta BASSU

Mr Michael HILL

Mr Jean-Jacques PEDUSSAUD

Ms Lucie DEBURLET-SUTER

Ms Julia TANNER

APPENDIX II
AGENDA

Monday, 22 September 2025		
1.	Opening of the meeting by the Chair	
2.	Adoption of the agenda	[GT-CS(2025)OJ2]
3.	Updated Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the Legal Status of Civil Society Organisations in Europe - Discussion of the feedback received during the public consultation	[CDDEM(2025)12 rev.] [GT-CS(2025)4]
4.	Updated Recommendation on the Legal Status of Civil Society Organisations in Europe - Examination and finalisation of the draft Recommendation	[CDDEM(2025)12 rev. 2]
Tuesday, 23 September 2025		
5.	Updated Recommendation on the Legal Status of Civil Society Organisations in Europe - Examination and finalisation of the draft Explanatory Memorandum to the Recommendation	[CDDEM(2025)14 rev]
6.	Recommendation on multi-level governance - Updates by the Secretariat and discussion on the next steps	[GT-CS(2025)5]
7.	Any other business	