

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 1 August 2023

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**EUROPEAN COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE
(CDDG)**

**WORKING GROUP ON GOVERNANCE
(GT-G)**

MEETING REPORT

of the informal meeting of 28 June 2023

Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by the
Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity
Democratic Governance Division

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened with Georgios Chrysafis (Greece, Vice-Chair of the GT-G) in the chair; participants then introduced themselves at a tour de table. Daniel Popescu, Head of the Democracy and Governance Department, commented on the diversity of national territorial structures which included situations characterised by large numbers of small municipalities (where intermunicipal arrangements had possibly become a 4th level of governance), countries where the provinces or regions played an important role, and countries where territorial structures were not necessarily uniformly organised and where the number of levels of devolved government could vary.

2. Agenda

The agenda was adopted as it appears in Appendix II.

3. Work on multilevel governance

The Secretariat recalled the [terms of reference](#) of the CDDG with regard to the preparation by the end of 2025 of a report and a draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on multilevel governance (deliverables 5 and 6). It also referred to the [Fourth Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State and Government](#) (Reykjavik, Iceland, 16-17 May 2023) and the importance of the final declaration and Reykjavik Principles of Democracy for future work of the CDDG. On 11 and 12 July, the Committee of Ministers would examine the draft recommendations on deliberative democracy and on the principles of good democratic governance, recently finalised by the CDDG, with a view to their final adoption.

The group then heard a presentation by Louis Meuleman and Ingeborg Niestroy, Public Strategy for Sustainable Development - PS4SD not-for-profit think-tank and advisory network, the new expert-consultants assisting the GT-G for the preparation of the report on multilevel governance (hereinafter MLG) in 2023. Group members sought further views on the extent to which MLG was only about effective co-governance or also good democratic governance. In the ensuing discussion, the following was stressed:

- the report would need to focus on joint actions of different levels of government and frameworks to facilitate / achieve this;
- transparency and accountability were features of good democratic governance and this was not fundamentally altered by MLG arrangements even though overall, there was a greater level of complexity due to multiple accountability relationships; the idea of cooperation or co-governance was often misleading as it was often understood as referring to informal interactions whereas there could be both informal varieties of interactions, and formal ones (as in a federal state);
- the report should make clear what frameworks are needed so that accountability, transparency, inclusiveness and other fundamental principles are not lost;
- the report would need to provide explanations and justification in a tangible and concrete / practical manner and theoretical developments should be limited;

- the importance of the Charter of local self-government should be stressed for its various fundamental principles and the fact that it contemplated self-government primarily with reference to formal arrangements;
- horizontal cooperation too, could involve formal or informal arrangements;
- in some countries, MLG and informal cooperation was part of a working culture e.g. in case an urgent issue arises, it was likely that a working group would be rapidly created together with many different institutions and actors to discuss the extent of the problems, what to do, how to do it, who would deal with what etc., rather than waiting for a legal/institutional/formal framework to be introduced.

The Group then heard a presentation by Georgios Chrysafis on elements to bear in mind, including: the existence of a variety of definitions and terms used in relation to MLG; examples of policies for which MLG was likely to be found (resource and waste management, healthcare, education, crisis management etc); the inherent links between decentralisation and MLG; the importance of the principle of subsidiarity; the importance of certain provisions of the Charter of local self-government (para 2 of the preamble; art 2, art. 3, art. 4 to 6, art. 8 para 3, art. 9 para 1 to 5. He concluded with a list of issues that needed to be addressed in the report: why MLG, what is expected from MLG; which policy areas; to which part of society MLG applies; which responsibilities at which level (criteria) in a MLG system; cost-benefit analyses; decentralisation; regulatory difficulties; accountability, degree of autonomy in a MLG system; and a list of challenges connected to MLG e.g. multiplication of decision centres and "multi-accountability".

In the discussion, participants:

- confirmed that there could indeed be situations of excessive numbers of informal arrangements in MLG;
- stressed that it might be difficult to optimise the various parameters of MLG in a practicable ideal model and that there probably were inevitable trade-offs (e.g. in case of full autonomy, the assistance / intervention of the central State level was more difficult);
- pointed out that ideal lists of devolved / shared competencies and of areas of excellence for MLG could not be drawn in an international context and that typologies would ultimately be more important;
- observed that MLG could arise in various circumstances: good/favourable ones; bad circumstances (the report should state what needs to be complied with in such cases); intermediate situations where MLG was a favourable way of moving forward without changing everything (a sort of mitigation).

The Secretariat then gave an overview of the information provided by the replies to the questionnaire. The Group took note of the information and agreed to extend again the deadline for responses to gather further information from a broader range of countries, especially from outside the EU. The Secretariat also presented the text of a preliminary version of the report on multilevel governance. Participants welcomed the overall structure and suggested improvements:

- some titles needed further adjustment;
- a scoreboard or benchmarks could be good to include;
- the description of MLG could be complemented;
- local authorities should be referred to as “closest to the citizens” (rather than the “lowest level”);
- certain dichotomies presented by Mr Chrysafis could be taken on board;
- the importance of accountability and transparency should be emphasised also in respect of interactions with private stakeholders, as well as the growing importance of legal constructions and entities which can be difficult to apprehend (quangos etc);
- the importance of leadership, information and democracy could be emphasised;
- it would be good to list practical ways to deal with challenges connected to MLG (in the chapter covering the benefits of MLG);
- the practical importance of inter-regional councils, as seen for instance in Slovenia, could be mentioned;
- cross-border cooperation existed also between non-neighbouring countries.

Paul Rowsell (UK, Chair of the CDDG) stressed that there was a risk of seeking to cover too many aspects in the report. It should be clear what the report was aiming at addressing under MLG, i.e. when institutions of different levels are together involved in joint endeavours to deliver outcomes. This leads to formal arrangements and the report would need to list particular behaviours which these arrangements should support. When talking of MLG, the same institutions (centrally, regionally, locally) can be involved in one sort of joint endeavour and then in other endeavours with other partners for other outcomes. The report needed to look at principles to follow for these joint endeavours – “dos and don’ts” – and to point to the variety of ways where MLG happens or is needed. He then presented a revised structure for the report; chapter 4 should be moved/included in chapter 2, covering in one place the reasons, benefits and challenges related to MLG. Chapter 1 would – as in the draft - explain what MLG is about; chapter 3 would address particularities of MLG in crisis situations and chapter 4 should begin to identify elements for a recommendation of the Committee of Ministers. Georgios Chrysafis made further proposals for the structuration within some of the chapters and to avoid redundancies across the report.

4. Next steps

At the closure of discussions, the working group agreed to extend the deadline for additional responses from CDDG members to mid-July. At the next meeting after the summer, a revised report would be presented by the expert consultants (to be circulated to the group 10 days before the meeting), so that by the end of the year, a non-final but well advanced draft would be available.

5. Other business

None

10. Date of the next meeting

The Group agreed that the 2nd regular (in-person) meeting would be held on 21 and 22 September 2023.

APPENDIX I
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ACTING CHAIR / PRESIDENT

Mr Georgios CHRYSAFIS, Directorate of Organising and Functioning of Local Government, Ministry of the Interior

AUSTRIA / AUTRICHE

Apologised for absence

BELGIUM / BELGIQUE

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

CZECH REPUBLIC / REPUBLIQUE TCHEQUE

Mr Kristián MALINA, Ministerial Assistant Principal, Department of Coordination of Public Administration and International Relations Ministry of the Interior

FINLAND / FINLANDE

Mr Markku MÖLLÄRI, Ministerial adviser, Department for Local Affairs and Regional Administration, Ministry of Finance

FRANCE

Ms Camille VALENTIN, Rédactrice juridique, Bureau des structures territoriales, Direction générale des collectivités locales, Ministère de la cohésion des territoires et des relations avec les collectivités territoriales

GREECE / GRECE

Mr Dimitrios PONTIKAKIS, expert within the Department of Legal Entities of Local Government

Mr Ioannis MATHIOUDAKIS, Head of the Coordination Service

ITALY / ITALIE

Mr Pierluigi TROMBETTA, Diplomatic Advisor to the Ministry for Regional Affairs and Autonomy, Presidency of the Council of Ministers

NORWAY / NORVEGE

Ms Sigrid STOKSTAD, Associate Professor in the Department of Public and International Law, Faculty of Law, University of Oslo

SLOVAK REPUBLIC / REPUBLIQUE SLOVAQUE

Ms Veronika LAKATOŠOVÁ, Local Self-Government and Foreign Affairs Unit, Department of Public Administration, Ministry of Interior

UKRAINE

Ms Oksana PAVLIUK, Head of the Unit, Department for local self-government development, territorial organisation of power and administrative-territorial structure; Ministry for Communities, Territories and Infrastructure Development

UNITED KINGDOM / ROYAUME-UNI

Mr Paul ROWSELL, Head of Governance Reform and Democracy Unit, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Local Government & Communities Directorate, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Ms Siobhan SMYTH, Senior Policy Adviser, Governance Reform and Democracy Unit, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Local Government & Communities Directorate, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Ms Kirsty BROWN, Governance Reform and Democracy Unit, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Local Government & Communities Directorate, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Ms Coralie BLATCHFORD NEAVE, Governance Reform and Democracy Unit, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Local Government & Communities Directorate, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

PARTICIPANTS**PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE / ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE**

M. Armen GEVORGYAN, General Rapporteur on local and regional authorities, member of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

M. Guillaume PARENT, Co-Secretary of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE / CONGRES DES POUVOIRS LOCAUX ET REGIONAUX DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

M. Roman CHLAPAK, Secretary of the Governance Committee

CONFERENCE OF INGOS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE / CONFERENCE DES OING DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Apologised for absence

EXPERT-CONSULTANTS

M. Louis MEULEMAN, Public Strategy for Sustainable Development - PS4SD

Ms Ingeborg NIESTROY, Public Strategy for Sustainable Development - PS4SD

SECRETARIAT

Mr Daniel POPESCU, Head of Democracy and Governance Department / Directorate of Human Dignity, Equality and Governance / Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity

Ms Alina TATARENKO – Head of the Democratic Governance Division / Secretary of the CDDG / Directorate of Human Dignity, Equality and Governance / Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity

Mr Christophe SPECKBACHER, Administrator – Democratic Governance Division / Directorate of Human Dignity, Equality and Governance / Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity

Ms Judith ORLAND, Democratic Governance Division – Directorate of Human Dignity, Equality and Governance - Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity

APPENDIX II**AGENDA**

1.	Opening of the meeting	
2.	Adoption of the agenda	[GT-G (2023)OJ2]
3.	<p>Report on multilevel governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof. Dr. Louis Meuleman, Director, Public Strategy for Sustainable Development (PS4SD), Brussels, Vice Chair of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) tbc: general introduction on MLG • Georgios Chrysafis, Vice-Chair of the GT-G: presentation on MLG • CDDG Secretariat: information on the current state of play of responses to the questionnaire • CDDG Secretariat: presentation of the preliminary draft report <p>Q&A and discussion</p>	<p>[GT-G(2023)6]</p> <p>[GT-G(2023)7]</p>
4.	<p>Tour de table: all members and participants present their views on the draft report and proposals.</p> <p>Discussion</p>	
5.	Next steps	
6.	Other business	
7.	<p>Date of the next meeting 21-22 September 2023</p>	
17.00	Close of the meeting	