

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 19 March 2026

GT-GPN(2026)3

**STEERING COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY
(CDDEM)**

**WORKING GROUP ON MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE
(GT-GPN)**

REPORT OF THE 1ST MEETING

(Hybrid meeting, 16-17 February 2026)

prepared by the Secretariat

The CDDEM Working Group on multi-level governance (GT-GPN) held its first meeting on 16–17 February 2026 in a hybrid format (in person and via videoconference on Zoom). The meeting was facilitated by the CDDEM Secretariat (Co-Secretary Marta Becerra), with the agreement of the GT-GPN, as the Chair participated online.

1. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

The Secretariat opened the meeting and welcomed all participants whose names appear in Appendix I to this report. An additional agenda item (elections) was proposed, and the agenda was adopted accordingly, as set out in Appendix II.

2. Information and discussion on the terms of reference, working methods and timetable

The Secretariat informed the participants on the background of the work on multi-level governance (MLG), linking CDDEM work on good democratic governance to other relevant topics, notably the implementation of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy, civil participation and civic space, and supporting elections. Participants were further informed on the process of elaborating a Council of Europe Recommendation, formalities and working methods, and the calendar of working group meetings. The Secretariat also drew members' and participants' attention to the document GT-GPN(2026)¹ containing background documents on MLG and the calendar of deliverables and meetings.

3. Tour de table

Members of the working group shared general comments about the relevance of multi-level governance in their own national contexts and recent developments regarding public administration and governance. The representatives of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities emphasised the priority they assign to implementing multi-level governance schemes. The representative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Isabelle Chatry, Head of Unit of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions & Cities, welcomed the work of the Council of Europe in this area and stressed her wish for complementarity reaffirming the organisations' respective strengths.

The Secretariat further presented the guiding principles of standard setting at the Council of Europe, including the requirements of evidence-based interventions, transparency and accountability, inclusiveness, agility and flexibility, innovation, and continuity. Participants also got acquainted with the structure of the upcoming draft recommendation (preamble, operative part, appendix with the guidelines on MLG) and the possible advantages of elaborating an explanatory memorandum to the future instrument.

The group discussed the possibility of preparing a feasibility study in preparation of the draft recommendation that could be useful to gather good practices and to provide more detailed guidance adding to the report of the late European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG). Finally, the members decided that the current basis of information suffices to kick start the work on the new Recommendations, and therefore, a feasibility study was not considered necessary.

4. Elections

The working group GT-GPN elected **Alfonso Carlos García Romero (Spain)** as Chair and **Peter Andre (Austria)** as Vice-Chair.

5. Exchange with Karoline Fernández de la Hoz Zeitle, Chair of the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on Intercultural Inclusion (ADI-INT) on the Committee's experience on multi-level governance for intercultural integration.

The GT-GPN benefited from the online presence of the Chair of the ADI-INT who shared the Committee's experience working on multi-level governance from the angle of intercultural integration.

Ms Fernández de la Hoz Zeitle informed the working group that the ADI-INT is composed of representatives from several levels of governance (national, regional and local) and shared that, even when competences are clear, implementing MLG mechanisms can be hindered by limited communication and/or data sharing, resulting in misalignment of policy-making. She recommended reinforcing political engagement, especially at the local level, and investing in strategic communication to counter polarisation and unfounded resistance. She also advocated a better understanding of the guidance and tools available from the Council of Europe.

The ADI-INT Chair presented one of the key deliverables of the Expert committee, a self-assessment tool on multilevel governance for intercultural integration. The tool entails an online interactive questionnaire that allows for a flexible use by different governance levels. It can be utilised as a tool for multi-level cooperation and dialogue. Ms Fernández de la Hoz Zeitle clarified that ADI-INT had drawn inspiration from the intercultural cities programme, and that the final objective of the tool is not to score but to self-assess and allow for peer learning.

In the ensuing discussions, GT-GPN members asked about the practical application of the tool by member states in light of its voluntary nature (self-assessment), how the scoring functions, and how results are presented. The speaker underlined the flexibility of the tool to be applied at different levels of government for evidence-based policy making and for also for training purposes.

6. Exchange with Isabelle CHATRY, Head of Unit, OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions & Cities

Ms Isabelle Chatry informed the working group that the OECD has established key structures such as the Regional Development Policy Committee (RDPC) and an expert group on multilevel governance and public investment to enhance coordination and share experience among member countries. Over time, the concept of multilevel governance has evolved from being closely associated with EU cohesion policy to becoming a global and operational framework, now central to governance principles and applicable across diverse institutional contexts worldwide.

Ms Chatry highlighted significant trends in decentralisation globally, with data showing increased regional and local authority since 1950, and a substantial role for subnational governments in public spending and investment. To support better governance, the OECD has issued important policy instruments and guidelines. The Recommendation on Effective Public Investment across Levels of Government (2014) and the more recent Recommendation on Regional Development Policy (2023) were provided as examples. Finally, Ms Chatry noted that reforms in multilevel governance are ongoing and driven by both short-term shocks – such as economic crises, geopolitical changes, and pandemics – and long-term trends like demographic shifts, climate transition, and digitalisation.

Members and participants of GT-GPN expressed interest in the work of OECD on MLG and in their questions and comments addressed several key topics, starting with asymmetric decentralisation. The relationship between decentralisation and regional inequalities was also discussed; while decentralisation can increase inequalities if not designed well, instruments such as equalisation mechanisms are critical for balancing disparities.

Other questions addressed the involvement of the private sector, and risks involved in public-private partnerships (PPPs). Ms Chatry advised the working group to focus on administrative and fiscal decentralisation, stakeholder involvement, and civil society engagement to maximise the strengths and expertise of the Council of Europe.

7. Discussion on the preparation of the first draft of the recommendation on multi-level governance.

The Secretariat informed the working group that the draft Recommendation on multi-level governance should be finalised until the end of 2027. Following a general introduction of document GT-GPN (2026)², the working group decided to have a first round of general comments followed by the examination of the proposed possible principles of MLG as presented in the document.

Participants discussed the level of detail of the future Recommendation on MLG, as well as how to better guide MLG mechanisms in the contemporary network society. The discussion moved beyond the vertical distribution of powers towards a shared exercise of government that works more efficiently and manages relationships better, as stressed by the OECD representative. It was also emphasised in the discussions that this would be of great value to national, regional and local authorities, and ultimately to citizens.

On the **introductory elements** of the future Recommendation, the working group agreed to ground the draft Recommendation on the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy. Participants highlighted the need to clarify the concept of MLG and of decentralisation as well as the role of non-state actors, including civil society. To enrich the text, also references to the conclusions of the Maltese Presidency conference on “Multilevel Governance approaches to address environmental challenges: overcoming institutional silos and developing cross-sector collaboration” (Gozo, 13 June 2025) and of the upcoming Ministerial meeting in Chisinau under the Moldovan Presidency could be added.

Regarding the first proposed principle of the Recommendation, **compliance with the principles of good democratic governance**, members pointed out to the importance of avoiding contradicting the principles contained in Recommendation CM/Rec (2025)³ and highlighted the importance of accommodating diverse MLG arrangements in member states. On the second proposed principle, **respect for each institution / institutional autonomy**, members generally agreed with its content, underlining in particular the importance of respect for the mandates of regional and local elected authorities by other elected bodies.

With regard to the principles underpinning the **rationale** and **legislative framework**, the group discussed the importance of balancing a clear legal basis for MLG with a flexible system that allows for rapid adjustments, particularly in disaster management scenarios. Members also emphasised that the regulatory environment must ensure coherence and functional clarity across governance levels to prevent duplication and gaps, and to avoid institutional conflicts and foster citizen trust.

Regarding the principle on **oversight, responsibilities and resources**, a proposal was made to rather consider its elements as an “enabling framework”. Members agreed to further emphasise the need for local/regional governments to have access to their own resources, in order to deliver on their responsibilities and provide the necessary services. They also highlighted the importance of clarifying how political oversight is to be implemented in practice to avoid abuses.

Under the principle of **accountability**, members agreed it was necessary to clarify the transparency requirements for reporting, while avoiding excessive burdens in reporting obligations. Discussing in more detail on the principle **transparency and openness**, the working group concluded to distinguish between external transparency towards citizens and internal accountability, as well as to include in the future recommendation provisions on ensuring data protection and on oversight mechanisms.

On the principle addressing **capacity building and innovation**, the working group considered it necessary to include civil society, as well as elected and public servants at all levels as targets groups, and to promote mobility across levels of government. Additionally, cross-border cooperation could be mentioned under this principle.

On the possible principle on **MLG in the management of crisis and emergencies**, the working group participants reflected on the need to also include international cooperation in the management of crisis and to add a reference to civil society (volunteers). The OECD representative suggested the possibility to elaborate further on funding aspects under this section.

8. Next steps

The Secretariat informed that a first outline of the Recommendation would be shared in the coming months, to be examined at the 5th plenary session of CDDEM in June 2026. The drafting process could be assisted by an external consultant.

9. Any other business

The GT-GPN discussed its second deliverable for the 2026–2027 period: the implementation review report on Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 concerning the Principles of Good Democratic Governance. Participants agreed that a questionnaire to delegations would be helpful to initiate this process. Given the broad scope of the Recommendation, and in line with its provisions, members proposed focusing the review on the principle of good administration, as this was deemed to offer the greatest potential for added value from the CDDEM within the broader context of the Council of Europe's work. This approach would also help to avoid duplication with other ongoing sectoral work, such as the prevention of corruption (GRECO). The GT-GPN also agreed that the Bureau should discuss this sectoral review, and instructed the Secretariat to prepare an initial questionnaire to gather information from member states.

10. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the GT-GPN will take place on 24-25 September 2026.

APPENDIX I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS / MEMBRES

CHAIR / PRESIDENT

Mr Alfonso Carlos GARCIA ROMERO, Sous-directeur Général des Relations Européennes et Internationales, Ministère de la Politique Territoriale et de la Mémoire Démocratique

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

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA / BOSNIE-HERZEGOVINE

Mr Nedžib DELIĆ, Head of Operational Unit for Public Administration Reform Coordinator's Office

Ms Aldijana OMERAGIĆ, Expert Advisor for Sector Reforms, Public Administration Reform Coordinator's Office

CZECHIA / TCHEQUIE

Mr Jakub JAŇURA, Head of the Unit for Coordination of Public Administration and International Relations, Department for Strategic Development and Coordination of Public Administration, Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic

GREECE / GRECE

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

Ms Reggina VASILATOU, Head of the Directorate of Organisation and Functioning of Local Government

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

Mr Antonis PSARAKIS, expert within the Structures, Procedures and Archives Directorate

Ms Argyro MERKOURI, expert within the Coordination Service

LATVIA / LETTONIE

Mr Viesturs RAZUMOVSKIS, Director of Local Governments Department, Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia

LITHUANIA / LITUANIE

Mr Paulius SKARDŽIUS, Senior Adviser, Public Administration and Local Government Policy Group, Ministry of the Interior

MALTA / MALTE

Ms Renee LAIVIERA, Malta's Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality

NETHERLANDS / PAYS-BAS

Apologised for absence / Excusée

PORTUGAL

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

SLOVAK REPUBLIC / REPUBLIQUE SLOVAQUE

Ms Zuzana VIZVÁRYOVÁ, General State Advisor, Modernization and Coordination of Public Administration Unit; Department of Support Activities, Coordination and Modernization Public Administration; Public Administration Section

UNITED KINGDOM / ROYAUME-UNI

Ms Kirsty BROWN, Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

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

Mr Niall SHEERIN, Deputy Head of the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance

**ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT / ORGANISATION DE
COOPERATION ET DE DEVELOPPEMENT ECONOMIQUES (OECD)**

Ms Isabelle CHATRY, Head of Unit, Decentralisation, Subnational Finance and Infrastructure, Regional Development and Multi-Level Governance Division, OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, regions and cities

OBSERVERS / OBSERVATEURS**OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP (OGP)**

Mr Jose Maria MARIN, Policy and Partnerships

PAX ROMANA

Ms Begoña OCIO

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

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Committee of Experts on Intercultural Inclusion / Comité d'experts sur l'inclusion interculturelle (ADI-INT)

Ms Karoline FERNÁNDEZ DE LA HOZ ZEITLE, Chair of the Committee

Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion / Comité directeur sur l'anti-discrimination, la diversité et l'inclusion (CDADI)

Ms Cristina MILAGRE, Policy Adviser to CDADI / Conseillère en politiques auprès du CDADI
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INTERPRETERS / INTERPRETES

Ms Chloe CHENETIER
Mr Jean-Jacques PEDUSSAUD
Mr Luke TILDEN

APPENDIX II

AGENDA

Monday, 16 February (9.30-17.30)		
1.	Opening of the meeting by the Secretariat	
2.	Adoption of the agenda	[GT-GPN(2026)OJ1]
3.	Information and discussion on the terms of reference, working methods and timetable	[CDDEM(2025)21] [GT-GPN(2026)1]
4.	Tour de table	
5.	Elections	
6.	Exchange with Karoline FERNÁNDEZ DE LA HOZ ZEITLE, Chair of the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on Intercultural Inclusion (ADI-INT) on the Committee's experience on multi-level governance for intercultural integration.	[CM/Rec(2022)10]
7.	Exchange with Isabelle CHATRY, Head of Unit, OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions & Cities.	
8.	Discussion on the preparation of the first draft of the recommendation on multi-level governance.	[CDDEM(2025)22] [GT-GPN(2026)2]
Tuesday, 17 February (9.30-17.30)		
9.	Continuation of item 8	
10.	Next steps	
11.	Any other business	
12.	Date of the next meeting	