COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 28 October 2026 GT-GPN(2026)5

STEERING COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY (CDDEM)

***

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

REPORT OF THE 2nd MEETING

(Online meeting, 24-25 September 2026)

prepared by the Secretariat

The CDDEM Working Group on multi-level governance (GT-GPN) held its second meeting on 24–25 September 2026 in an online format (with the Chair in person and via videoconference on Zoom). The meeting was chaired by Alfonso Carlos GARCÍA ROMERO (Spain).

1. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

The Chair welcomed participants – whose names appear in Appendix I – and thanked the Secretariat and the experts, Cezary Trutkowski and Ioannis Papadopoulos, for their work. The Secretariat clarified that the meeting was being held in online format, with only the Chair and the external consultants present in Strasbourg, due to budgetary constraints of the as CDDEM's budget for 2026.

The agenda was adopted as set out in Appendix II.

2. Examination of the first draft of the recommendation on multi-level governance

The Chair introduced the first draft of the Recommendation on democratic multi-level governance, as prepared by Council of Europe expert Cezary Trutkowski with input from Ioannis Papadopoulos, and described multi-level governance as important to addressing challenges including the consequences of COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, disinformation, climate and demographic change, and artificial intelligence (AI) governance. The chair emphasised the need for co-operation among local, regional and national authorities and express an expectation that the recommendation would offer useful guidance while respecting each member state's constitutional and institutional arrangements.

The experts presented the text of the draft Recommendation (as contained in document GT-GPN(2026)4)), explaining that the first draft followed an outline discussed at the June CDDEM plenary. The draft comprises a preamble, an operative section with recommendations addressed to member states and an appendix containing the scope and definitions, eleven principles, and provisions on the implementation and review of the Recommendation.

The principles in the appendix cover: the foundations of democratic governance (Principles I to III) ; the operation of the multi-level governance system, including division of competencies, subsidiarity, resources, supervision and co-operation (Principles IV to VII); and democratic quality, including democratic accountability, citizen participation, transparency and openness and institutional capacity-building and innovation (Principles VIII to XI).

The draft remains neutral vis-à-vis different constitutional and territorial arrangements, and builds on existing Council of Europe instruments where possible. The Chair invited participants to comment on both individual provisions and/or the document as a whole, noting that the draft was extensive – around 90 points across 11 principles – which could potentially be shortened in a later version if so agreed by the working group.

Regarding the scope of the Recommendation, a further discussion aimed at distinguishing the vertical dimension of multi-level governance from two horizontal dimensions: co-operation between public and other non-public actors, and co-operation among public authorities at the same level. Whereas the vertical dimension is amply covered by the principles contained in the draft text, the horizontal dimension, being generally less formalised in member states, is less comprehensively addressed. The draft makes it clear that it does not re-interpret nor replace the European Charter of Local Self-Government, nor does it cover the supranational dimension of multi-level governance. The Recommendation would does not address either the trans-frontier dimension of co-operation between territorial communities.

GT-GPN members reviewed the draft of the recommendation paragraph by paragraph and provided guidance and wording suggestions, as follows:

Several interventions recommended to review terminology throughout the text in order to mention “local and, where appropriate, regional authorities” (to account for countries without regional level of government), or “subnational authorities” (reflecting varied institutional structures). Other terminology clarifications refer to “constitutional”, “formal” or “legal” organisation of the state, and references to “associations of local and regional authorities, wherever relevant”. The GT-GPN also discussed if it would be more appropriate to replace “central” with “national” authorities. The experts and the Secretariat would revise the draft by checking the linguistic references in Council of Europe and other relevant instruments.

In the preamble it was suggested to add references to further Council of Europe instruments, such as Recommendations CM/Rec(2025)3 on the social, economic and political participation of rural youth, and CM/Rec(2022)6 on protecting youth civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes; as well as to the Guidelines on public ethics, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 March 2020 and the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective (Resolution by the 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, 9 October 2025).

One participant suggested to broaden the scope of disasters and crises mentioned in the preamble, to also include proliferation of disinformation and foreign interference, as well as natural disasters which are not climate related.

Regarding the operative part, one participant mentioned the role of civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders in the review of measures taken to implement the Recommendation (paragraph 5 of the operative part). This addition may be included in the revised draft.

The GT-GPN further examined the principles in the Appendix of the Recommendation. In paragraph 7, participants discussed whether to explicitly mention local citizen assemblies as an option for democratic decision-making within the local self-governing tier, noting that these citizen participation mechanisms differ from directly elected deliberative bodies.

Participants agreed to simplify and shorten paragraph 13 and decided to include the principles of institutional loyalty and solidarity, alongside mutual respect between tiers of government. One member suggested to include a reference to interoperability of different tiers of government in paragraph 17 with the aim of enabling equal access to public services regardless of a person’s place of origin/residence or where the service was provided.

In Principle III, a suggestion was made to strengthen the mention of demographic change and access of young people in rural areas to essential services.

The working group agreed to remove paragraph 30 related to climate change as the allocation of competences relating to this policy area rely on the same general principles as to all other areas.

On paragraph 43, members discussed potentially adding a requirement for independent regional or local audit mechanisms, particularly in federal, quasi-federal or asymmetric systems, in addition to the reference to reporting and independent audit already included in paragraph 63.

The discussion in paragraph 51 centred on including a reference to potential disputes between non-neighbouring same-tier authorities over resources, infrastructure and services in the scope of mediation procedures.

To increase clarity in paragraph 62, the GT-GPN agreed to replace the notions of “vertical” and “horizontal accountability” with “democratic” and “inter-institutional accountability”, respectively.

One participant requested to reinforce the role of youth organisations in developing democratic competences among citizens and to include a reference to co-management with young people within Principle IX (paragraphs 64 to 75). In paragraph 69 one member requested to include LGBTI persons and persons with disabilities in the list of groups at heightened risk of discrimination.

A clarification was introduced in paragraph 76 to underline that transparency should serve the purpose of strengthening democratic regimes and not undermining them.

The GT-GPN agreed to shorten the text of the draft Recommendation, wherever feasible, by removing duplications and overly descriptive provisions. The members furthermore briefly discussed potential added value of developing an Explanatory Memorandum. However, a conclusive decision was not adopted, as the current draft already constitutes a self-standing and complete text.

3. Preparation of the implementation review report on Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 on the Principles of Good Democratic Governance

The Secretariat presented the scope of GT-GPN's second deliverable for the 2026-2027 period, the implementation review report on Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 concerning the Principles of Good Democratic Governance.

As instructed by GT-GPN at its 1st meeting and reaffirmed at the 5th CDDEM plenary meeting, the proposed partial review of the Recommendation would focus on the area of good administration (Principles 7, 8 and 9). The agreed process was to begin with a short questionnaire to member states, prepared by the Secretariat, possibly with the support of an independent expert.

The Secretariat outlined possible elements that could be included in the questionnaire:

- Principle 7 — Efficient, effective and sound administration: strategies, action plans, regulations and structures supporting coordination across public administration; performance systems, audits, policy and resource use, and digital infrastructure; and matters such as users' rights, accessibility of administrative offices and civil-service training.
- Principle 8 — Leadership, capability and capacity: leadership vision, proactivity, inclusiveness and innovation; competencies, training needs and strategic plans; and recruitment, training opportunities, remuneration, career prospects, capacity-building programmes and performance appraisals. The Secretariat noted that capability and capacity could be combined in the questionnaire.
- Principle 9 — Responsiveness: dialogue with the public, monitoring of service delivery, complaint mechanisms, satisfaction surveys and evaluation of results.

GT-GPN members agreed that the review could also include current and planned reforms and trends in public administration, including as regards new technologies and demographic change, so that the findings could inform the CDDEM's future work. The working group supported the proposed outline for the review report and recommended keeping the questionnaire concise, noting the time and effort required for member states to prepare detailed responses.

The GT-GPN instructed the Secretariat to prepare a draft questionnaire for CDDEM, to be circulated to GT-GPN members during the month of November, with the completed questionnaire to be sent by the end of the year. Members were invited to send further comments on the implementation review by the end of October, as well as to suggest experts who could assist with drafting the report and to propose any follow-up to the review report and its findings.

4. Next steps

The Chair gave the participants a deadline of **16 October** for written comments on the draft Recommendation on democratic multi-level governance. A revised draft will be circulated to all CDDEM members ahead of its 6th Plenary meeting on 18-20 November 2026. Further revisions following the CDDEM plenary meeting will be examined at the next meeting of GT-GPN in March 2027, followed by a public consultation in summer 2027. The final draft is to be approved by CDDEM's 8th plenary meeting before the end of 2027.

Regarding the implementation review of the Recommendation on the Principles of Good Democratic Governance, a draft questionnaire will be circulated for comments in November and circulation in December 2026.

To conclude the discussion, the Secretariat encouraged members and participants to regularly consult the document link (Mycloud) included in meeting invitations to access the group's working documents.

5. Any other business

Participants raised no other issue.

6. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the GT-GPN will take place on 18-19 March 2027.

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

CYPRUS / CHYPRE

Ms Mikaella PAPANICOLAU

GERMANY / ALLEMAGNE

Ms Constance LERNHART, Head of the Unit "Local Government Tasks, Territorial Structure and Interests in Legislation and Administrative Implementation

GREECE / GRECE

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

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

Ms Argyro MERKOURI, expert within the Coordination Service

Mr Konstantinos KOULOURAS, expert within the Directorate of Organisation and Functioning of Local Government

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

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

NETHERLANDS / PAYS BAS

Ms Annelotte COSTER

PORTUGAL

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

SPAIN / ESPAGNE

Mr José FERNÁNDEZ PÁEZ, Sectoral Area Coordinator, Sub-Directorate General for European and International Relations

Ms Ione TRIGO BALLESTEROS, Programme Director, Sub-Directorate General for European and International Relations

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

Ms Olga BURUIANA, Project teams – Strasbourg office

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

EXPERTS

Mr Cezary TRUTKOWSKI, Chair of the Executive Board, Jerzy Regulski Foundation in Support of Local Democracy, Poland

Prof Ioannis PAPADOPOULOS, Professor Emeritus, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

SECRETARIAT

SECRETARIAT OF THE 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 María ASENSIO VELASCO, Senior Policy Officer / Chargée des politiques senior

Ms Isabelle ETTER, Assistant / Assistante

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

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

Mr Aytek ÇINGITAŞ, Senior Project Officer - Intercultural Inclusion Unit, Co-Secretary - Committee of Experts on Intercultural Inclusion (ADI-INT)

Advisory Council on Youth / Conseil consultatif sur la jeunesse (CCJ)

Mr Marcus MELAU, member of the Advisory Council on Youth

INTERPRETERS / INTERPRETES

Ms Corinne MAGALLON
Ms Pascale MICHLIN
Ms Bettina LUDEWIG QUAINE
Ms Christine GILL

APPENDIX II

AGENDA

Thursday, 24 September (9.30-17.30)		
1.	Opening of the meeting	
2.	Adoption of the agenda	[GT-GPN(2026)OJ2 prov.]
3.	Examination of the first draft of the recommendation on multi-level governance	[GT-GPN(2026)4]
Friday, 25 September (9.30-13.00)		
4.	Continuation of item 3	
5.	Preparation of the implementation review report on Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 on the Principles of Good Democratic Governance	
6.	Next steps	
7.	Any other business	
8.	Date of the next meeting	