

Strasbourg, 25 October 2024

GT-P(2024)2

**STEERING COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY
(CDDEM)**

**WORKING GROUP ON PARAMETERS FOR THE APPLICATION AND
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REYKJAVÍK PRINCIPLES FOR DEMOCRACY
(GT-P)**

**REPORT OF THE 1st MEETING
(Online meeting, 23 September 2024)**

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

The CDDEM Working Group on Parameters for the Application and Implementation of the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy (GT-P) held its 1st meeting on 23 September 2024 (online via Zoom – 09:30-17:30).¹ The meeting was facilitated by the CDDEM Secretariat (Secretary Ms Urška Umek) with the approval of the GT-P, pending the election of CDDEM Chair, Vice-Chair, Bureau, and select working group members whose expenses will be covered by the Council of Europe.²

1. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

The Secretariat 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. Information from the Secretariat and discussion on the terms of reference, working methods and time-table

The Secretariat outlined the task of the GT-P, as per the Working Group's Terms of Reference (CDDEM(2024)6) adopted at the 1st plenary meeting of the CDDEM:

	Deadline ▼
Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles [hereinafter "RPDs"] and other relevant Council of Europe standards to promote, protect and strengthen democracy throughout the member States [hereinafter the "Parameters"]	31/12/2025

Ms Irena Guidikova, Head of the Department of Democratic Institutions and Freedoms, framed the discussion by highlighting the high expectations for the work of the CDDEM following the [Council of Europe Summit in Reykjavík](#) (2023), and in particular for the Parameters to be developed by the GT-P. Ms Guidikova recalled that the Council of Europe works on the basis of the interdependence of the "fundamental, interdependent and inalienable principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, as enshrined in the Statute of the Council of Europe and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms". In this context, she recalled the continuing need for an effective definition of democracy and the establishment of a comprehensive system to safeguard its core elements.

Regarding the Council of Europe's expectations of the Parameters, Ms. Guidikova stressed the need to produce a document with a clear practical value, which could be used to support and strengthen democracy in a tangible way and to contribute to a common understanding of democracy and the risks it faces.

The Secretariat had based the first draft of the Parameters on existing Council of Europe standards and had not added anything of substance that could not be derived from those standards. The drafting of the working document raised a number of issues which the members of the GT-P and the CDDEM were likely to address in the subsequent stages of the development of the Parameters, in particular the following:

- how closely the CDDEM should follow the RPDs and to what extent it should also take into account the other relevant Council of Europe standards not covered by the RPDs, which standards and how they should be integrated into the text;
- that all relevant key dimensions and concepts or concerns related to democracy should be identified, on the basis of which appropriate parameters would be developed;
- that inclusiveness in the development process should be a key concern of CDDEM/the GT-P, inviting other stakeholders within the Council of Europe, or outside as appropriate, to help frame the debate and structure the outcome;

¹ The agenda initially foresaw two days for the meeting. As all agenda-points had already been sufficiently covered, however, the meeting was closed after the conclusion of the first day.

² The Council of Europe will cover travel and subsistence expenses for experts from seven member states, selected based on expertise, geographical representation, gender balance, and the inclusion of various legal systems. Other member states can designate representatives at their own expense.

- that consideration should be given from the outset to the possible methodology for assessing compliance and implementation of the Parameters;
- the level of abstraction at which the parameters should be drafted - parameters that are too abstract will be difficult to assess, and parameters that are too concrete will be difficult to navigate and assess due to their complexity;
- the interrelated and overlapping nature of the RPDs with the elements that make up the Council's acquis on democracy, which necessitates a careful approach for the Parameters to appropriately reflect the Organisation's standards yet have a distinct character of their own;
- that the inseparable interplay between the three pillars of the Council of Europe - democracy, human rights and the rule of law - is likely to be addressed, while for the time being the draft parameters mostly reflect core assumptions about democracy;
- and that there are some identifiable areas or dimensions of democracy which could fruitfully be included in a comprehensive list of democracy parameters, and perhaps must be included, but for which the Council of Europe does not yet have standard-setting texts.

3. Tour de table

The GT-P members engaged in a short tour de table and introduced themselves. Representatives of member states highlighted the priorities of their respective governments as well as their expectations for the work of the Working Group. Members were invited to reflect on their preferences and ideas for the intended use, format and potential implementation-strategy of the Parameters.

Several members observed that it was key to strike the appropriate balance between “encompassing” and “measurable”, making sure that the resulting instrument would be user-friendly, eminently usable, and practically relevant. Some members also highlighted the need to ensure that the resulting Parameters should deliver for each specific state. One member pointed to the need for ensuring that the Parameters effectively frame policy makers’ choices and decisions in the future, surviving also changes in governments and their priorities. Voter and citizen apathy was mentioned as one of the challenges to be effectively addressed by the instrument. The need for an inclusive approach was also raised by some members. Some members mentioned that they had good practices to share, which they offered to do in the future stages of the GT-P’s work.

4. Discussion of the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles and other relevant Council of Europe standards to promote, protect, and strengthen democracy throughout the member States

The GT-P considered the text of the draft Parameters prepared by the Secretariat ([GT-P\(2024\)1](#)), reviewed the proposed structure, analysed the concepts and individual Parameters included, commented on whether the substance of the text was consistent with the spirit and letter of the RPDs, and decided on the next steps to be taken.

In terms of structure, there was agreement that the outline chosen by the Secretariat generally captured the spirit and content of the RPDs and other relevant standards by categorising related concepts and elements under four broad headings. The grouping of RPDs into categories was done to facilitate the work of the GT-P. Some changes were suggested, such as separating the cluster on "Democratic participation and civil society" to emphasise the importance of elections and democratic participation as a key element of democracy. Some members mentioned the need for an inclusive approach to democratic processes, mentioning community engagement and the engagement of other sectors based on open government and transparency. The need for youth engagement - explicitly provided for in the RPDs - was another aspect supported by GT-P members. Some also pointed to the need to include specific references to vulnerable and/or marginalised groups, and to adequately integrate the rights of persons with disabilities into the parameters. Following up on a commitment made in the Reykjavík Declaration, it was stressed that intersectional perspectives should be adequately taken into account in the development of the parameters.

One member raised the issue of the document's underlying definition of democracy, arguing that the proposed working definition might be too broad and all-encompassing and that the concept might need to be narrowed down. In particular, provisions on economic (in)equality and cultural heritage were seen as potentially stretching the concept beyond what is workable. However, another member pointed out the importance of the link between economic prosperity and democracy.

Several members expressed the need to keep the wording and spirit of the parameters in line with both the RPDs and the existing standards of the Council of Europe, so that they did not imply more or less than what had already been agreed at ministerial level. In this context, the GT-P discussed the meaning and scope of certain concepts, such as "pluralism" or "civil society", particularly in the light of the definitions or elements of definitions contained in the Organisation's existing standards, and in particular those developed by the European Court of Human Rights. Members agreed on the importance of a common understanding of the key concepts used in the document.

The GT-P also emphasised that the parameters should indicate the responsibilities and possible actions required of different stakeholders. In this regard, several members noted the importance of the Parameters clearly reflecting the responsibility of states/public authorities to protect, promote, safeguard and strengthen the elements of democracy covered in the document. The GT-P also discussed the possibility of including further references to good democratic governance and administration - thus further incorporating and referring to the "12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance" as set out in the Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2023\)5](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the Principles of Good Democratic Governance.

Overall, changes in wording, deletions or additions were proposed for specific groups and parameters. Some minor drafting issues were raised, and some members suggested alternative wording. Some members raised other issues for consideration or inclusion, considering that new issues could usefully be addressed under the heading of "Democratic Future". In this context, GT-P members raised the issue of sustainability, particularly in terms of the environment, but also in terms of democratic issues such as resilience and resistance to regression. They also mentioned the need for further consideration of the impact of artificial intelligence and technological development, as well as disinformation and the "digital divide" linked to issues of (social) media literacy. One member suggested that the document should take an optimistic tone about the future of democracy and that a narrative could be developed in this regard.

Finally, Ms Guidikova presented some possible uses of the Parameters and outlined some initial ideas on a possible methodology. Expert reports, surveys, public debates and citizen assemblies could all be envisioned as single or perhaps combined methods for assisting member states to assess the implementation of the Parameters. It was suggested that potential "tipping-points" might be identified through states' self-assessment efforts, by which they could identify crucial risks to their democracies. The GT-P agreed that it was generally too early to discuss the implementation of the document, and that the question of possible uses would be revisited in the later stages of the document's development.

5. Next steps

Following the exchange on the draft parameters, the GT-P members agreed to provide further written comments to the Secretariat. A preliminary revision of the draft text would be made based on the comments received by 8 October 2024, for discussion at the second plenary meeting of the CDDEM on 29-30 October 2024, and a further, more thorough revision of the preliminary text would be made after the second plenary meeting, based on the GT-P comments received by 21 October 2024 and the discussion at the plenary meeting.

GT-P members instructed the Secretariat to prepare an introductory note to the Parameters that would provide the context and rationale for the delineation of the fundamental building blocks of democracy, outline the challenges the document seeks to address, and serve as a roadmap for how the Parameters could best assist member states. The GT-P members also agreed that the Secretariat should consult with other relevant Council of Europe departments and bodies to ensure that they could contribute to the drafting of the sections within their respective mandates and areas of expertise, thereby enhancing the quality of the document.

6. Any other business

None.

7. Date of the next meeting and closing of the meeting

The GT-P agreed that the 2nd meeting should be held in December 2024, if possible. After the Working Group meeting, the Secretariat made some suggestions for possible dates, from which members could choose according to their preferences. It was finally decided to hold the meeting on 9-10 December 2024.

APPENDIX I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS / MEMBRES

AUSTRIA / AUTRICHE

Ms Doris WAGNER, Directrice générale de l'éducation et de l'enseignement professionnel au sein du Ministère fédéral de l'Éducation, des Sciences et de la Recherche

BELGIUM / BELGIQUE

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

Ms Anne-Laure HOGGE, Service public de Wallonie, SPW Intérieur et Action sociale

CYPRUS / CHYPRE

Ms Elena KAREKLA, Commissioner for Administration Officer, Ministry of Interior

DENMARK / DANEMARK

Mr Søren STAUNING, Special Advisor, Governance and International Affairs with regard to Issues of Local Democracy

ESTONIA / ESTONIE

Ms Maarja KASK, Desk officer, rédactrice

FINLAND / FINLANDE

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

GREECE / GRECE

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

Mr Ioannis MATHIOUDAKIS, Head of the Coordination Service

Mr Dimitrios PONTIKAKIS, expert within the Department of Organisation and Functioning of Second Level of Local Government

IRELAND / IRLANDE

Apologised for absence / Excusé

LITHUANIA / LITUANIE

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

MONTENEGRO

Ms Bosiljka VUKOVIC-SIMONOVIC, Head of Division for the Council of Europe,
Department for the OSCE and CoE/DG for Multilateral Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr Mladen ILINCIC, Department for the OSCE and CoE/DG for Multilateral Affairs, Ministry of Foreign
Affairs of Montenegro

NETHERLANDS / PAYS-BAS

Ms Hester MENNES, Policy officer Democracy, Directorate-General Public Administration and
Democratic Rule of Law, Democracy and Governance Department, Ministry of the Interior and
Kingdom Relations

Mr Joost van Doesburg, Policy officer, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations

NORWAY / NORVEGE

Ms Anne-Karin ØDEGAARD, Head of Analysis and Evaluation, Norwegian Ministry of Local
Government and Regional Development, Department of Local Government

PORTUGAL

Ms Tânia MOURATO, Head of Department for Cooperation and Financial Affairs of the General
Directorate of Local Authorities

SPAIN / ESPAGNE

Ms Silvia NEGRO ALOUSQUE, Sous-directrice des Relations Européennes et Internationales du
Ministère de la Politique Territoriale et de la Mémoire Démocratique

SWEDEN / SUEDE

Ms Sofia BLID, Desk officer, Ministry of culture, Division för media and democracy

SWITZERLAND / SUISSE

Ms Sarah VITTOZ, Collaboratrice scientifique, Département fédéral de justice et police DFJP, Office
fédéral de la justice OFJ, Domaine de direction Droit public, Unité Projets législatifs II

UNITED KINGDOM / ROYAUME-UNI

Ms Siobhan SMYTH, Deputy Head of Governance Reform and Democracy Unit, Governance Reform
and Democracy Unit, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Local Government &
Communities Directorate, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, LONDON

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

Mr Cesare COLOMBO, Co-Secretary of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

Ms Ivi-Triin ODRATS, Deputy Head of the Elections Division

**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, Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance / Centre d'expertise sur la gouvernance à multiveaux

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH / CONSEIL CONSULTATIF SUR LA JEUNESSE (CCJ)

Ms Anja JOKIC, member of the Advisory Council on Youth

Mr Marius SCHLAGETER, Policy Advisor

OTHER PARTICIPANTS / AUTRES PARTICIPANTS

EUROPEAN UNION / UNION EUROPEENNE

Mr Robert-Jan UHL, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

SECRETARIAT

SECRETARIAT DU CDDEM / SECRETARIAT DU CDDEM

Ms Urška UMEK, Secretary of the CDDEM / Secrétaire du CDDEM

Mr Alexander VOGT

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 démocratiques et des libertés

Mr Christophe SPECKBACHER, Head of the Civil Society Unit / Chef de l'Unité de la société civile

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

Ms Gisella GORI, Advisor on Strategy and Work Co-ordination, Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity / Conseillère en stratégie et coordination des activités, Direction générale de la démocratie et de la dignité humaine

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

Ms Sophio GELASHVILI, Head of Unit, Legal Co-operation

Ms Julie DEVYS

Ms Anne WEBER, Senior Legal Adviser, Group of States against Corruption | Groupe d'États contre la Corruption – GRECO

INTERPRETERS / INTERPRETES

Mr Didier JUNGLING

Ms Corinne MCGEORGE

Ms Lisa WOJCIECHOWICZ

Mr Nicolas GUITTONNEAU

APPENDIX II

AGENDA

Monday, 23 September (9.30-17.30)		
1.	Opening of the meeting by the Secretariat	
2.	Adoption of the agenda	[GT-P(2024)OJ1]
3.	Information and discussion on the terms of reference, working methods and time-table	[CDDM(2024)6]
4.	Tour de table	
5.	Discussion of the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavik Principles and other relevant Council of Europe standards to promote, protect and strengthen democracy throughout the member States	[GT-P(2024)1]
Tuesday, 24 September (9.30-17.30)		
6.	Continuation of Item 4	
7.	Next steps	
8.	Any other business	
9.	Date of the next meeting	