

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 27 March 2025

GT-P(2025)3

**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 3rd MEETING

(Online via Zoom, 6-7 March 2025)

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

The CDDEM's Working Group on Parameters for the Application and Implementation of the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy (GT-P) held its 3rd meeting online on 6-7 March 2025 (via Zoom), chaired by Mr Edwin Lefebvre (Belgium).

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. Mr Lefebvre briefly reviewed the work done so far by the GT-P in its first two meetings held in Strasbourg and online on 23-24 September and on 9-10 December 2024, as well as at the 2nd plenary meeting of the CDDEM held on 29-30 October 2024, where the draft Parameters were reviewed by the Committee.

The agenda was adopted as it appears in Appendix II.

2. Discussion of the Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy and other relevant Council of Europe standards

The GT-P discussed a new version of the draft Parameters produced by the Secretariat, which includes an introduction framing the Parameters in terms of general principles for its interpretation and future application (see section 2.1). The new version also includes changes in the presentation of the Parameters as goal-oriented with underlying indicator-style sub-parameters (2.2). These changes are meant to prepare the grounds for a future assessment framework to facilitate the operationalisation of the Parameters based on a common yet flexible methodology (2.3). The new version also incorporates the feedback received by the Secretariat during its consultations with other Council of Europe units and entities, among them the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Congress), the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (MONEYVAL), the Department for the Execution of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, and the Education Department.

Independent expert member of the GT-P, Mr Richard Youngs (Carnegie Europe/ European Democracy Hub), was asked to make an introduction to frame the discussion in terms of the current state of democracy (support) across the globe, notably in light of events currently unfolding in the United States and in Europe. Mr Youngs stressed the need for a stronger European effort in democracy promotion considering Russia's aggression against democratic Ukraine – risking spillovers in case of the defeat of Ukraine. He also made a point of the United States' "retreat from democracy"¹ and the resulting emboldening of anti-democratic alliances internationally. In this regard, he highlighted the importance of the work of the GT-P/ CDDEM and the draft Parameters. In his remarks, Mr Youngs concluded that the current refocussing on matters of defence and security should not put concerns for democracy, human rights and the rule of law on the sideline. Rather, the latter should be seen as integral parts of a European security strategy and approach in the face of threats and challenges. Rising efforts to build democratic resilience internationally, Mr Youngs stated, can be galvanised by the CDDEM in the drafting of the Parameters.

Following the introduction, Ms Seema Shah (Head of Democracy Assessment at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)), independent expert member of the GT-P, pointed out that the connection between long-term security and democracy (democratic security) ought to be addressed in the introductory elements of the Parameters.

¹ Youngs R. (2025, February 26), "European Reactions to the U.S. Retreat From Democracy", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://tinyurl.com/da7kj4cd> (last acc.: 9 March 2025).

2.1 Discussion of the introductory elements

As mandated by the GT-P in its previous meeting, the Secretariat had produced, with the support of Mr Youngs, a draft introduction to the document. The Secretariat briefly presented the overview of this new draft introduction, which is to frame the Parameters in terms of democratic backsliding and ensuing resilience-building and the solutions proposed with the Parameters.

Participants agreed that it needed further development and clarifications, notably, the concepts of “democratic backsliding” and “democratic resilience” to help member states and other future users of the Parameters to build their efforts on a shared, clear and practical understanding of underlying concepts and realities underpinning the Parameters.

2.2 Discussion of the draft Parameters

The participants next discussed the revised draft Parameters, reviewing each section in turn. Members expressed satisfaction with the overall structure and content of the new document. The text was slightly rephrased or altered in some places, following wording suggestions by individual members. The PACE suggested including a parameter or indicator on the legitimate grounds and allowable circumstances for postponing elections during emergency situations or under martial law and on states’ rights to restrict, and obligations when restricting, political participation under specific circumstances. The PACE further suggested rearranging the order of indicators under individual parameters to follow the logic from the most basic and universal to the most specific, which will be done once the GT-P reaches an agreement on the substance of the document.

The GT-P held discussions on elements currently covered with the Parameters, such as the necessity of multi-perspective history education for democracy, or the need for inclusivity and coverage of all persons in vulnerable situations, while at the same time avoiding long and overburdened lists of affected groups or individuals. The Secretariat noted that it would further work on the sections in question (namely ‘Diversity, equality and inclusion’).

The participant from the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) expressed the wish to further differentiate between youth/ young people and children in the text. A potential split of the section in question was discussed. The Secretariat will invite wording suggestions from the CCJ and the Children’s Rights Division.

Several members pointed out that the language of the document needed harmonisation. The Secretariat noted this need and is undertaking to implement relevant changes during the next revision.

2.3 Presentation of possible assessment frameworks for the operationalisation of the Parameters

The Secretariat, with the support of Ms Shah from International IDEA, developed a number of possible models for building an assessment framework to operationalise the Parameters. Although the Parameters have an intrinsic value as a list of core standards of and requirements for a political system to function as a democracy, their actual implementation is key to advance the goal of applying Reykjavik Principles for Democracy. A shared framework will also allow member states to share good practices and experiences on the basis of assessments accomplished using a reasonably similar process.

Ms Shah presented potential models: (1) a “qualitative minimum” framework, comprising the development of a brief and general qualitative questionnaire based on the Parameters; (2) a “call and response” option, combining an initial qualitative assessment and a participatory element, where members from civil society, academia, or think tanks can participate, thus opening a dialogue between the state and its citizenry; to (3) a “qualitative maximum” option, which would include more broad public participation, e.g., in the form of a citizens jury and/ or a national validation conference bringing together a wide variety of stakeholders.

Ms Shah cautioned against choosing an option that would exclude any significant participatory element, arguing that citizen and broader civil society participation would provide legitimacy to the exercise. In addition, the exercise in itself would provide member states with a tool for engaging in debate and in democratic renewal with their citizens, as well as insight into citizens' perspective on the working of democracy in their society.

Participants exchanged views and discussed the different options. Some members expressed concern that a maximalist option would not be viable, for instance for those member states lacking the necessary resources; others highlighted the need to have civil society participate in any form of assessment chosen. In the same vein, Ms Shah and Mr Youngs agreed that an innovative element of the Parameters and their assessment framework would be the inclusion of the citizens' perspective, which could be a good corrective in the face of potentially only expert/government assessments. Whether citizens could provide a reliable assessment was less important than the opportunity to express their perception and experience of democracy itself.

During the discussion, several arguments were made for different options, ranging from concern that including citizens'/ civil society perspectives might "bias" the measurement of democracy as carried out by the state to the idea that the Council of Europe could be mandated with cross-national, joint assessment of democracy in member states. There was also a reflection of whether member states could be provided with a toolbox containing options for assessment, instead of deploying one commonly agreed upon framework. Ms Shah cautioned against too much variety in the tools offered and chosen, but highlighted the fact that within each proposed model, there is a potential for flexibility.

The Secretariat concluded with practical examples of the Council of Europe's human rights approach as applied to the Parameters and highlighted its central role as guiding principles for the interpretation and operationalisation of the Parameters.

3. Next steps

Members will send any further comments and questions to the Secretariat by 28 March 2025. The Secretariat was instructed to circulate the revised draft among the CDDEM members by the end of April, in preparation for the upcoming CDDEM plenary session on 26-27 May where the Parameters will be further discussed.

4. Any other business

Questions arose about the Secretary General's New Democratic Pact. The Secretariat shared with the GT-P the available general information and encouraged members to participate in the upcoming CDDEM plenary meeting where the Secretary General is scheduled to intervene.

5. Date of the next meeting

The 4th meeting of the GT-P is scheduled for 13-14 October 2025, to be held in Strasbourg.

APPENDIX I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS / MEMBRES

CHAIR / PRESIDENT

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

AUSTRIA / AUTRICHE

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

GERMANY / ALLEMAGNE

Mr Christian ALDENHOFF, Policy Officer, Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, Division H III 1 "Resilient Democracy and Prevention of Extremism"

GREECE / GRECE

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

Ms Argyro MERKOURI, expert within the Coordination Service

LITHUANIA / LITUANIE

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

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

NORWAY / NORVEGE

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

SPAIN / ESPAGNE

Mr Ignacio Gil OSÉS (Spain), Senior Advisor, International Relations Unit, Ministry of Territorial Policy and Democratic Memory

SWEDEN / SUEDE

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

SWITZERLAND / SUISSE

Mr Michel BESSON, Département fédéral de justice et police, Office fédéral de la justice, Chef de l'Unité projets législatifs II

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

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 Division, 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, Deputy Head of the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance

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

Mr Gerhard ERMISCHER, Chair of the INGOs Conference

Mr Roy VIRAH-SAWMY, European Platform for Democracy

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

Mr Maurizio CUTTIN, Vice-Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE ON LEGAL CO-OPERATION / COMITÉ EUROPÉEN DE COOPERATION JURIDIQUE (CDCJ)

Ms Julie DEVYS, European Committee on Legal Co-operation

STEERING COMMITTEE ON ANTI-DISCRIMINATION, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION / COMITE DIRECTEUR SUR L'ANTI-DISCRIMINATION, LA DIVERSITE ET L'INCLUSION (CDADI)

Ms Charlotte GILMARTIN, Co-Secretary of the CDADI

GROUP OF STATES AGAINST CORRUPTION / GROUPE D'ETATS CONTRE LA CORRUPTION (GRECO)

Ms Victoria CHERNIYCHUK, Senior legal adviser

EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW (VENICE COMMISSION) / COMMISSION EUROPEENNE POUR LA DEMOCRATIE PAR LE DROIT (COMMISSION DE VENISE)

Mr Adria RODRIGUEZ-PEREZ, Division II, Opinions and Reports

SECRETARIAT

CDDEM SECRETARIAT / 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

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 et des libertés démocratiques

INDEPENDENT EXPERTS / EXPERTS INDEPENDANTS

Ms Seema SHAH, Head of Democracy Assessment (DA) at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Stockholm, Sweden

Mr Richard YOUNGS, Senior Fellow, Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program, Carnegie Europe, Belgium; European Democracy Hub (EDH); Professor of international relations, University of Warwick, United Kingdom

INTERPRETERS / INTERPRETES

Ms Clarissa WORDSDALE

Ms Gillian WAKENHUT

Ms Christine TRAPP-GILL

APPENDIX II

AGENDA

1.	Opening of the meeting	
2.	Adoption of the agenda	[GT-P(2025)OJ1]
3.	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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examination of the revised draft Parameters - Discussion of the introductory elements - Presentation of methodologies for the assessment of the Parameters 	 [GT-P(2025)1] [GT-P(2025)2]
4.	Next steps	
5.	Any other business	
6.	Date of the next meeting	