



Presidency of Georgia  
Council of Europe  
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**Speech of Irakli GIVASHVILI, Ambassador,  
Permanent Representative of Georgia to the Council of Europe**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all to the online Conference on civil participation in decision-making.

Georgia has selected civil participation in decision-making as one of the priorities of its Presidency of the Committee of Ministers (November 2019 – May 2020) given the importance and relevance of the topic. We consider that increasing the input from civil society and citizens to guide public decisions can be one way of combating the new challenges and negative trends that have been facing our representative democracies.

With the aim of achieving meaningful results under this priority, we have been actively engaged in cooperation with the Directorate General of Democracy (DG II) of the Council of Europe. I wish to express sincere appreciation to the DGII, in particular to Ms Claudia LUCIANI (Director of Human Dignity, Equality and Governance) and to Mr Daniel POPESCU (Head of the Department of Democracy and Governance) for their personal involvement and dedication. Hereby I also wish to acknowledge the successful cooperation between the Department of Democracy and Governance of the Council of Europe and the City of Tbilisi under this very important priority and in the field of civil participation – a project aimed at helping the City of Tbilisi to create a standing platform of consultation, co-operation and co-decision with civil society representatives on important urbanism measures had been launched. It has already achieved significant results and the newly established platform represents an innovative, well-functioning mechanism hugely contributing to the strengthening of civil participation in the decision-making process. I am convinced that this mechanism will continue to play an important role in reinforcement of the participation of citizens in local public life and will grow ever stronger for years to come.

Under the aegis of the Georgian presidency, an International Conference on Civil Participation in Decision-making, organised by the City of Tbilisi and the Council of Europe's Directorate General of Democracy was planned to be held at the Council of Europe's headquarters on 6 March 2020.

The Conference was aimed at identifying useful and innovative experiences of successful civil engagement at local, regional and national level and at highlighting and promoting the unique work of the Council of Europe in the area. The programme of the conference was rich and comprehensive, with the outstanding speakers

representing central, regional and local authorities of the Council of Europe's Member states, Conference of International NGOs, European Committee on Democracy and Governance, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, civil society organisations and experts.

But much to our regret, a few days prior to holding the conference, it had to be postponed due to the restrictions related to COVID-19.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic our daily lives have been notably changed and therefore, we had to explore new ways and innovative means to pursue our activities, so we turned to digital tools. Already planned in-person conferences have been either cancelled or went virtual. Against this background and given the importance of the topic, the Georgian Presidency together with the DG II proposed to maintain the international conference on civil participation in decision-making in the online format on a new date. I would like to express most sincere gratitude to this excellent and innovative approach of the Council of Europe that I strongly believe will prove to be very successful and meet our expectations.

I am confident that the conference as a whole - valuable contributions of the speakers and public and the conclusions of the Georgian Presidency taking into account the debate, will constitute an important milestone for the Council of Europe's work in the area of civil participation and will contribute significantly to the organization's very important future work.

I very much look forward to the thought-provoking presentations and questions and reactions from the public. Once again thank you all for your participation and contribution to this online conference!