

Resilient Europe through deliberative democracy: cities and regions in action!



Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
of the Council of Europe

THE CONGRESS



LE CONGRÈS

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resilient Europe through deliberative democracy: cities and regions in action!

Report

*The opinions expressed in this work are
the responsibility of the author(s) and
do not necessarily reflect the official
policy of the Council of Europe.*

The reproduction of extracts (up to 500 words) is authorised, except for commercial purposes, as long as the integrity of the text is preserved, the excerpt is not used out of context, does not provide incomplete information or does not otherwise mislead the reader as to the nature, scope or content of the text. The source text must always be acknowledged as follows: “© Council of Europe, year of the publication”. All other requests concerning the reproduction/translation of all or part of the document should be addressed to the Publications and Visual Identity Division, Council of Europe (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex) or publishing@coe.int.

Cover design and layout: Publications
and Visual Identity Division
(DPIV), Council of Europe

This publication has not been copy-edited by the DPIV Editorial Unit to correct typographical and grammatical errors.

© Council of Europe, July 2026
Printed at the Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex

Rapporteur: Damir Kapidžić

Graphic recording: Coline Graphics

The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1. The New Democratic Pact for Europe	6
1.2. Actions by the Council of Europe and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to advance deliberative democracy	6
2. RESILIENT EUROPE THROUGH DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY: CONFERENCE OVERVIEW	9
2.1. Insights from expert and political exchanges	10
2.2. Emerging directions for the Council of Europe support to deliberative democracy	17
3. CONCLUSIONS	23
APPENDIX I - AGENDA OF THE CONFERENCE	25
APPENDIX II - LINKS TO USEFUL RESOURCES	29

1. Introduction

A democracy in which citizens participate only through voting is too minimalist and fragile. Contemporary democratic authorities therefore tend to promote and organise many forms of non-electoral participation by residents. The 2009 Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government formalised this approach by stating that the right to participate in the affairs of local authority should be secured for everyone. Deliberative processes strengthen democracy, reinvigorate representative institutions, and are a genuine endeavour that complements more traditional forms of citizen participation. In this spirit, and in line with the [Reykjavík Principles of Democracy](#), the Council of Europe recommends that all member states embed deliberative democracy in decision making, thereby contributing to innovative and inclusive democratic participation of all groups of residents, with no one left behind.

Within the framework of the [New Democratic Pact for Europe](#), the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#) of the Council of Europe organised the [conference](#) “Resilient Europe through deliberative democracy: cities and regions in action!” on 26 November 2025 in Strasbourg (France). The event gathered 131 representatives from local and central authorities, academia, and civil society organisations. During the conference, the participants explored current challenges related to deliberative processes at the local level and shared ideas with the Council of Europe on innovating democracy locally. The results of the discussions will inform the Congress’ contribution towards the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

This report provides an overview of the outcomes of these discussions and collects recommendations on future pathways for supporting deliberative processes at local and regional level.

1. 1. The New Democratic Pact for Europe

Democracy in Europe, as elsewhere in the world, is under threat of sustained erosion through societal polarisation and declining trust in public institutions. The problem is manifold and is driven by disinformation, shrinking civic spaces, and the rise of anti-democratic forces globally. It is further compounded by increasing economic inequality, rapid technological advances such as AI, and multiple crises, from climate change to war in Ukraine and the Middle East. The challenges to democracy are transnational and this requires a collective response.

The Council of Europe's [New Democratic Pact for Europe](#) is a comprehensive response that reframes democracy as a continuously evolving commitment rather than a static fact. The broad aim of the Pact is to strengthen our democratic institutions and practices for the challenges of the 21st century. The Pact rests on three interlinked pillars. The first, learning and practising democracy, aims to develop formal and informal education initiatives that promote civic engagement and critical thinking, especially amongst youth. Protecting democracy, the second pillar, aims to defend our democratic institutions by tackling corruption, safeguarding media freedom, countering electoral interference, and managing disinformation. Finally, innovating for democracy aims to advance democratic processes also by incorporating deliberative and participatory democracy to strengthen existing democratic frameworks.

Through a strategic and political process, based on the principles agreed at the 2023 Reykjavík Summit, the Pact aims for a broad dialogue between governments, civil society organisations and their citizens, individual member states will develop national democratic action plans tailored to domestic challenges and priorities. By opening structured spaces for consultation and exchange, the Pact seeks to rebuild democratic ownership and legitimacy at multiple levels. It aims to make use of collective action, deliberative democracy, and technological innovation to strengthen democracy in members states and collectively. The role of citizens is emphasised by acknowledging that democratic resilience depends on participation, trust, and inclusion.

1.2. Actions by the Council of Europe and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to advance deliberative democracy

The work of the Council of Europe and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in the field of deliberative democracy can be summed up in three points, related to setting principles, supporting practice and building capacity.

When it comes to setting principles, the Council of Europe has adopted the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy that emphasise elements such as freedom of expression, assembly and association, independent institutions, impartial and effective judiciaries, the fight against corruption and democratic participation of civil society and of young people as key for democracy. In 2022, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe issued a [report](#) and [recommendation](#) on the use of deliberative methods at local and regional level as a way to improve policy outcomes and enhance trust in decision making. Further, the Council of Europe set the first-ever international standard in the area of deliberative democracy by adopting the Committee of Ministers Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2023\)6](#).

Practice was directly supported through the organisation of several deliberative processes, amongst which five completed and three planned citizens' assemblies. The Citizens' Assembly of [Mostar in 2021](#), Mostar and Banja Luka in [2024](#) (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the citizens assemblies in [Zviahel](#) and [Slavutych](#) in 2024 (Ukraine) have set a high standard for deliberative processes at the local level and showcased the possibility of deliberative democracy in disrupted democracies.

Finally, on capacity building, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities completed a comprehensive training program in the South-East Europe, developed an e-learning course and published a [guidebook](#) for local authorities on how to organise deliberative processes at the local level.

2. Resilient Europe through deliberative democracy: conference overview

The conference “*Resilient Europe through deliberative democracy: cities and regions in action!*” was held on 26 November 2025 in Strasbourg, France. It brought together local policymakers, practitioners, and scholars to contribute to discussions around the New Democratic Pact for Europe by examining how deliberative democracy can strengthen local and regional governance systems in times of uncertainty. Europe is facing multiple crises that impact governance at the local level, such as polarisation, declining trust, disinformation, war, the climate crisis, and social and economic inequality.

By showcasing several recent cases of structured citizens’ deliberation from European municipalities and regions, the event explored possibilities for deliberation to enhance representative democracy and rebuild trust in decision making. The programme linked such examples to conceptual innovations in deliberative democracy that aim to improve their impact and scalability. Through keynote interventions, panel discussions, and collaborative conversations, the conference identified pressing needs, key obstacles, new directions, and examples of how democratic innovation can support more resilient, inclusive and legitimate democratic governance across Europe.

The conference convened 131 high-level officials, local leaders, international experts, and practitioners. Speakers included senior representatives of the Council of Europe, national delegations, and the Municipality of Strasbourg, followed by keynote contributions from leading figures in the field of deliberative democracy in Europe. Panel discussions brought together mayors, city council presidents, senior municipal advisors, and directors of democratic initiatives from Spain, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lithuania, and Germany, as well as representatives of the Council of Europe, European Commission, and OECD.

To define new solutions and responses to challenges for deliberative democracy, the participants of the conference were consulted and provided collective input through an online platform set up during the event. Through online questionnaires throughout the conference, participants contributed by sharing their understanding of deliberative democracy, its challenges and their recommendations for future support in this field.

2.1. Insights from expert and political exchanges

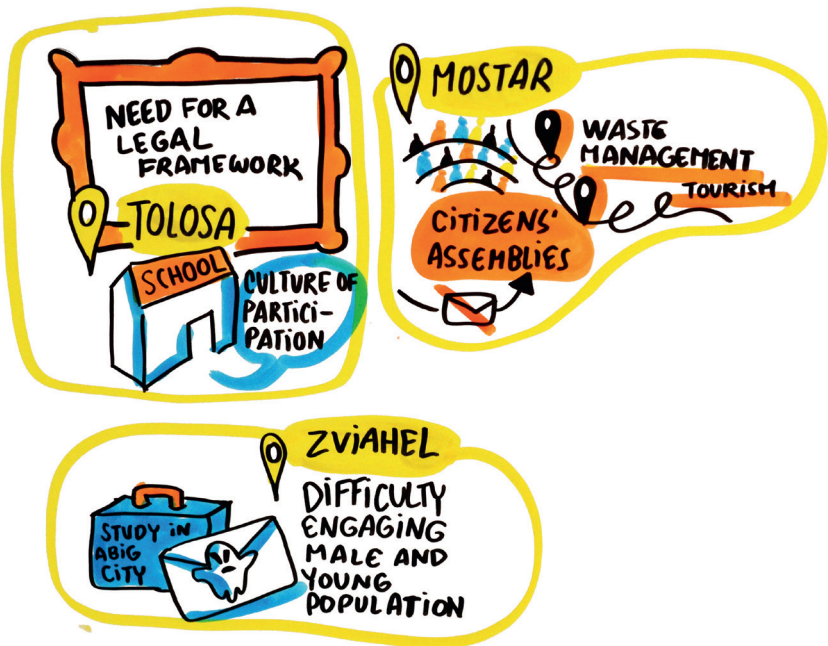
The keynotes, panels, and discussions with experts and policy makers were framed along the following points:

- ▶ **A renewed democratic pact is needed** to respond to growing pressures on democratic institutions at local and national levels.
- ▶ **Local authorities can drive democratic renewal** due to their proximity to citizens and their capacity to foster resilient and inclusive governance.
- ▶ **Democracy is increasingly challenged** by foreign interference, declining public trust, and rising authoritarian tendencies, requiring the revitalisation of democratic practices that place citizens at the centre of decision-making.
- ▶ **Deliberative democracy strengthens and complements representative systems** by rebuilding trust and enabling more resilient, informed, and better prepared societies.
- ▶ **Deliberative democracy can function as a third pillar of governance**, particularly at the local level, where ongoing learning supports citizen involvement in complex and sensitive policy issues.



Can deliberative democracy help overcome today's crises?

Deliberative democracy is now in a new phase of maturity, with the first major wave of assemblies offering robust lessons in moving forward. These are captured through three core contributions: tangible policy impact, strengthened democratic trust, and improved mutual understanding between citizens and institutions. However, traditional representative institutions can unintentionally undermine citizens' assemblies by playing it too safe when choosing topics for citizens to address, by failing to follow up on recommendations, and by under-resourcing deliberative processes. It is therefore important to **select meaningful and difficult topics**, ensuring **clear pathways for implementation**, and providing **adequate time and resources**. The Ostbelgien model serves as a key example of how permanent, rules-based structures can embed deliberation into democratic systems and demonstrate institutional commitment.



There are several insights on why municipalities adopted deliberative processes under difficult circumstances, and what outcomes they observed. The discussion reinforced deliberative democracy as a credible approach when addressing real dilemmas through a well-resourced process. Examples such as a tram extension in Strasbourg (France), city cleanliness and waste management in Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and permanent citizens' assemblies such as in Tolosa (Spain) serve as evidence that deliberation strengthens representative democracy when communication is transparent. Open questions remain on issues around inclusion, measuring impact, legal frameworks, and choosing the right topics, with implementation of recommendations being emphasised as the clearest indicator of success and trust.

This topic demonstrated that deliberative democracy strengthens resilience by enabling citizens and institutions to cover difficult issues together. Impact hinges on selecting meaningful topics, a visible follow-up, and sustained institutional commitment. Citizens' assemblies thrive when they are supported by civic infrastructure, adequate resources, and flexible procedures that adapt to context such as crisis conditions. Discussions confirmed that **deliberation complements representative democracy, offering a structured way to rebuild trust, enhance policy quality, and anchor democratic renewal through citizen engagement.**

The most important elements characterising deliberative processes were identified around 7 topics:

1. A clear and **well-defined topic** and a question that is precise, relevant, and feasible within the available time, resources, and mandate.
2. **Representative and fair selection of participants** through random selection mechanisms designed to reflect inclusivity and citizen's diversity.
3. Strong political support through a **clear mandate** and genuine backing from authorities.
4. Professional process **design and facilitation** to impartially support the deliberative process.
5. **Balanced information and expert support** to provide guidance and oversight throughout all stages.
6. **Adequate resources** financial, human, and organisational and logistics to ensure smooth implementation.
7. An **emphasis on communication**, awareness raising, and citizen engagement that can build trust before, during and after the assembly.

What is the future of deliberative democracy?

The future of deliberative democracy needs to focus on rebuilding trust. This requires moving beyond purely rational argumentation to incorporate emotions and collective making of meaning through forms of authentic storytelling. **Citizens' assemblies can create trust** precisely because they enable respectful listening, a shared experience, and a diversity of perspectives. Trust must therefore have a central place at the heart of democratic renewal. This realisation needs to be shared by elected officials who may fear losing authority, despite evidence that deliberation strengthens representative institutions. Within this we must not forget the **importance of standards**, such as those developed by the Council of Europe and the OECD, which are necessary to embed deliberation into stable democratic structures, while investing more in deliberation-ready citizens of all ages.



Examples from Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Vilnius (Lithuania), and Germany showed how deliberative democracy offers a response to complex policy challenges. Sarajevo's process was driven by the need to develop joint solutions on climate adaptation across overlapping administrative boundaries within a single functional urban area that was at the frontline of wartime divisions and where trust remains low. In Vilnius, the city's citizens' assembly on urban mobility had to overcome both internal administrative resistance and external stakeholder scepticism, especially from civil society organisations and active citizens. The challenge here was how trust can be built amongst citizens. Assemblies in Baden-Württemberg (Germany) have built public trust as they have enabled politicians to confront difficult issues. More permanent institutionalisation of deliberation as seen in Germany, requires political commitment and dedicated budgets to create momentum. Across cases, deliberation can be seen as a way to share power, promote inclusion, and improve administrative practices, not through major reforms but through a learning-by-doing process and iterative adaptation.

Open questions remain about **legal frameworks** for one-off and especially institutionalised deliberation, as well as media influence, and inclusion. Clear but flexible regulations are able to support deliberation if they don't constrain innovation and adaptation. Concerns about how **social media** can distort the processes can be alleviated by emphasising respectful disagreement and shielding deliberating members from lobbying pressure. When considering the need to broaden participation, it's key not to undermine the random selection process, and to maintain full transparency to enhance trust.

The future of deliberative democracy must consider ways to deepen emotional and civic connections. This goes hand in hand with strengthening information integrity and adjusting to polarised media environments. Democracy can be made more resilient by enabling shared decision-making on complex issues. And by modernising administrative cultures, governance institutions can do their part in rebuilding trust between them and citizens. Citizens' assemblies are more than a decision-making tool and they can be a long-term investment in democratic resilience by cultivating citizens capable of participating meaningfully between elections.

The most pressing challenges to the future of deliberative democracy were summarised in six categories:

1. **Low trust and legitimacy problems** where there is a general lack of trust from citizens towards democratic processes.

2. **Lack of political and financial support** when decision-makers resist deliberative processes in fear of negative voices or dismiss them as costly public engagement.
3. **Low awareness and understanding** among authorities at different levels and the general public with no understanding how citizens' assemblies complement representative democracy work.
4. **Representation and inclusion challenges** where a lack of real societal and economic diversity threatens the fairness of deliberative democracy.
5. **Challenges of implementation** where deliberative process can create a perception of overpromising and under-delivering policy solutions, largely due to lack of procedural transparency or committed follow-up.
6. **Broader overlapping contextual challenges** that affect today's societies and political arenas, such as rising political polarisation, changing media and social media influences, the rise of authoritarianism, increasing climate pressures, and AI integration.

The role of international organisations in supporting democratic innovation at local level

Democratic innovation is a response to a deep crisis of confidence in democracy. We have witnessed that deliberation works: now the challenge is about how to make it systemic, sustainable, and connected rather than a series of fragmented on-off processes. There are four essential missions for international organisations that begin with **legitimising** democratic transformation through clear standards, **connecting** innovators across countries to establish mutual learning, **funding** long-term democratic infrastructure through a fixed percentage of public budgets. Finally, by establishing an **international observation mechanism** we can assess the quality of deliberative processes and provide the public with a label to guarantee trust and legitimacy. International organisations must shift from guardians to gardeners of deliberative democracy and cultivate environments where deliberation can flourish.

Currently, international organisations give significant support for democratic innovation at the local level, but this support can be made more meaningful. Only by emphasising deliberation that is real, influential, and clearly linked to decision-making is possible to strengthen democracy. This can be supported through platforms for co-operation and continued work on defining standards. The European Union's "Democracy Shield" can be an integral part of this approach as it promotes co-creation and whole-of-society approaches across the European Union and at national levels. At the same time there must be recognition of the complexity of local governance, where diverse actors

require environments that allow for experimentation. International organisations can provide a platform to address the need for skills and expertise, including a strengthening of administrative capacity to follow-up on deliberative processes. Institutionalising deliberation requires the collaboration of everyone involved and that international organisations can provide support through multi-level coordination and expertise.



Open questions centred on how to maintain high standards to ensure political impact. The need for clearer public communication and stronger links to decision-making processes plays a key role. Several challenges were identified, amongst which high costs, inconsistent implementation and local administrative capacities emerged as main obstacles to scaling.

Democratic innovation will only succeed when it is embedded in local institutional practices and becomes part of long-term policy planning. It needs to be supported by clear internationally recognised standards, adequate and sustained resources, along with multi-level co-ordination, all of which remain key challenges. By investing in durable civic infrastructures and ensuring comprehensive follow-up, it is possible to build resilient democracies. **International organisations can play a crucial enabling role** to strengthen and scale democratic innovations by facilitating learning, coordinating amongst practitioners and experts, and ensuring quality.

Possible solutions proposed to address these pressing challenges include:

1. Develop **legislative frameworks** and **clear guidelines** to embed deliberative decisions into national and local legislation while promoting deliberative processes among politicians.
2. Ensure ongoing, timely, and sustainable **funding** for municipalities and civil society organisations working on implementing assemblies.
3. **Invest in cultivating “deliberation-ready” citizens** across all age groups through public awareness campaigns and strategic promotion of deliberation through civil society and educational institutions.
4. Provide **structured training** for local officials, decision-makers, and participants through accessible platforms and learning opportunities at national and regional levels.
5. Build trust among citizens through ensuring transparency, clear communication, and openness to sharing information.
6. Ensure **diverse participation** by emphasising better outreach, fair sampling, and lottery-based selection methods.
7. Design deliberative processes to **maximise inclusion**, with space for voices beyond those physically present, by using digital tools and other mechanisms. Be transparent about methodological choices in this stage and select topics that are relevant and manageable within the time frame of the assembly.
8. Encourage continuous practice and **mutual learning** from local, national, and international best practices, until deliberation becomes a routine part of political institutions and political culture.

2.2. Emerging directions for the Council of Europe support to deliberative democracy

With the aim to identify how successful and impactful citizens’ assemblies can be supported, the participants of the conference were invited to reflect on the Council of Europe’s evolving role in supporting citizens’ deliberation at local level. This included an online voting exercise to identify priorities amongst actions, where each participant had a single vote. The results of these consultations are presented along three thematic areas: technical assistance, policy solutions and innovative working methods.

Technical support

Actions under this thematic area aim to support deliberative processes and citizens' assemblies through enabling and ensuring that resources are present. They provide the groundwork to help cultivate *deliberation-ready* citizens and build deliberative infrastructure as key components of the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Action 1: Providing funding and financial support

Financial support was the action most strongly called for by most participants. It gathered 45% overall support, far outpacing all other actions. It was most frequently mentioned by local and regional authorities, followed by civil society, organisations, independent experts, and youth delegates. Funding and financial support can be provided directly through grants to local authorities, or through specific budget allocations. Funding for deliberative processes can be allocated as a fixed percentage of national or regional electoral budgets and thus tied to electoral cycles. Another possibility are annual public calls to support local and regional authorities with finances, expertise, and staff resources. Micro-grants for deliberative democracy pilots and first-time assemblies can help spread the practices to new countries and region. A pool fund with contributions from EU institutions, national governments and philanthropy can be envisaged. This action requires close co-operation of the Council of Europe with national, regional and local authorities, to share guidelines and best practices to secure, timely, adequate, and consistent budgets for the deliberative processes. Targeted contributions by the Council of Europe for select deliberative processes at the local level can be used to foster innovation and build democratic resilience where it is most needed.

Action 2: Building capacity and training

Providing more capacity building and expertise was supported by 20% of participants, the second highest-rated action. This action saw a large support from local and regional authorities and members of international organisations. Participants shared good experiences from the capacity building and trainings organised by the Council of Europe. One participant highlighted the simulation of a citizens' assembly, held over several days in Bosnia and Herzegovina with municipal officials as participants, as it managed to build capacity and provide learning to local administration. The Council of Europe should continue providing access to mentorship, online courses, expert exchanges, offering guidelines and handbooks, and certification programmes for trainers. It can go even further and build a "Council of Europe-wide" training curriculum with modules on design, facilitation, recruitment, evaluation,

and ethics. The Council of Europe can also offer scholarships for trainers to observe assemblies in other regions. For completed trainings, a recognition certification model for facilitators and experts can be developed. In this regard, it can explore avenues to work with the European Commission to further scale capacity building based on existing programmes.

Action 3: Offering technical assistance in implementation

During specific steps and implementation of citizens assemblies, participants noted the need for specialised technical assistance. Only a small percentage of participants (4%) selected this action as their main one. The aim is to create processes with integrity that can be viewed as legitimate. This covers some areas such as recruitment, the random selection of assembly members, to strengthen representativeness and ensure inclusivity. Another specialised area is facilitation and design of daily agendas. Such technical assistance could be offered by the Council of Europe during crucial phases of preparation, implementation, and follow up, both according to needs of local authorities and best practices for deliberative processes. The establishment of a Council of Europe helpdesk that could provide on demand support can be an option, relying on a roster of experts, available for short missions to local authorities.

Policy solutions

These actions aim to support deliberative processes and citizens' assemblies by advocating for better and more inclusive decision-making, including changes to legal frameworks. This includes ensuring integration of deliberative democracy within existing decision-making by elected representatives as one key means to create more resilient democracies.

Action 4: Initiate a review of legal frameworks

Several participants stressed the need to review legal frameworks to strengthen the legitimacy of deliberative processes by embedding them into existing regulations or developing new ones. The aim is to enhance the long-term viability of deliberative processes. This action was supported by 9% of participants, the third most supported action. A review of legal frameworks could be conducted in cooperation with member states and would largely focus on national and subnational legal frameworks. A legal review and of supernatural legislation at the European Union level can be explored in order to identify gaps for integrating deliberative approaches, in cooperation with the European Union institutions. In this sense, the Council of Europe can provide expertise through identifying best practices, developing questionnaires and templates

on how to conduct such reviews, and promoting inclusion of public deliberation and legal frameworks.

Action 5: Develop international standards and monitoring mechanisms

Participants emphasised three different actions that can be combined together under the heading of standards and monitoring mechanisms. The first, supported by 8% as the fourth highest supported action overall, called for the development of a *European label* for deliberative democracy implementers, either as an annual award cycle or a merit-based label. Based on the Council of Europe's international standard, such a label can provide recognition and reward for cities and regions, while encouraging others to replicate successful deliberative processes. Comparable models exist, such as the "European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award" (DG JUST) at the European Commission. Such a label can showcase top-ranked cities and regions, provide visibility for democratic innovations, and increase scaling of deliberation. The second action under this heading calls for the creation of a monitoring body, *the European Observatory for Deliberative Democracy*, to review and validate the deliberative processes. The form and nature of this body is not defined, but it can publish annual monitoring reports or provide audits for assemblies upon request to certify high-quality assemblies. It can be a "house of ideas, practices and systems" to advocate for high standards, or a more permanent Venice Commission-style body to advise European institutions and local governments. Such an entity, through its work, would build trust, legitimacy, and accountability among implementers of deliberative processes. It can be a key component to ensure that the deliberative democracy contributes to democratic resilience under the New Democratic Pact for Europe. The third action under this heading calls for the development of a *European Charter of public services*, which could serve as a guide outlining best practices, standards, or citizens' rights related to deliberative processes. The effectiveness of such a charter would depend on its legal basis as a non-binding document would need to have strong, international support, and recognition to produce real impact. The second and third actions under this heading were not prioritised.

Action 6: Assist with political advocacy and institutional support

Participants identified assistance in advocacy efforts towards local authorities as a relevant action. Although this action was not prioritised, it recognises the disparity in power between civil society on the one hand and local authorities on the other. Suggestions include included training political officials on the value and impact of deliberation and providing access by facilitating meetings

between stakeholders and local authorities and European officials. Creation of tailored advocacy kit with evidence case studies and messaging, in addition to multi-authority workshops designed to build momentum and joint political commitment, would also contribute to this action.

Innovative working methods

Finally, actions under this third thematic area support deliberative processes and citizens' assemblies through innovation, adaptation and developing international standards. By emphasising mutual learning and best practices, along with creation of internationally recognised labels for best performers, and guides on best practices, these actions will allow scaling of impactful deliberative democracy within the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Action 7: Networking and peer-to-peer learning

Two specific actions are combined under this heading. The first focuses on promoting impact learnings and organising study visits, which received 4% overall support from participants. The emphasis is on the need to share concrete results and data from other assemblies through documented success stories. Best practices can be a key to encouraging learning and experimentation. The Council of Europe can assist in creating a database of high impact case studies and facilitating study visits and exchange missions between local authorities. The benefits go beyond learning and emulation and contribute to strengthening ties between European local authorities as a key component of democratic resilience. The second action under this heading calls for the networking and facilitation of exchange through a community of practice, although it was not prioritised. Specifically, participants asked for the establishment of an online platform connecting assembly practitioners across Europe. This would avoid duplication and maintain innovation without creating inefficiencies. Annual deliberative democracy summit could provide opportunity for cross municipality cooperation projects to emerge.

Action 8: Developing guidance on challenging aspects of deliberation

Even though it was not prioritised, this action provided significant food for thought and debate. Participants discussed about the need for specific expert guidance on topics such as involving people in situation of vulnerability, ensuring safe and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence in deliberative processes, and working with citizen feedback before, during and after assemblies. As similar work is underway in the European Commission, the Council of Europe can

ensure that standards of deliberation are taken into account during development of such guidance.

Action 9: Support visibility

Participants expressed the importance of increasing visibility of deliberate processes across Europe and through various means. Even though this action was not prioritised, the suggestions should be considered when designing future trainings, guidebooks and capacity building projects. The development of a European communication toolkit on deliberative democracy can be a good first step to ensure consistency in the terminology used to communicate on deliberative processes. The Council of Europe can fund cross regional media campaigns, and social media storytelling projects that would bring deliberative democracy to the attention of the wider public.

3. Conclusions

Democratic resilience can only be built based on **mutual respect**. This includes respect between policymakers and citizens, between and amongst local authorities and towards their citizens, amongst politicians, and most importantly respect among citizens themselves. By focusing on listening to each other, deliberation is inherently well positioned to enhance resilience through mutual respect. By focusing on increasing respect, we can **move away from polarising debates and build stronger more resilient societies**.

Inclusion and inclusiveness in policymaking leads to increased trust. This can be addressed through careful design of deliberative processes based on best practices. By designing for legitimacy, it is possible to address issues such as inclusiveness in the selection of participants, broad expertise and divergent views among topical experts, commitment and follow up from policy makers, and much more. Well designed and inclusive processes build trust in democracy. The question given to deliberating citizens is key. Deliberative processes need to address big issues, and therefore the question needs to be a dilemma, both concrete and controversial at the same time. To address this question, it is important to ensure that the people deliberating are representative of the entire population. Follow-up can happen at different levels of government. It can also happen by mixing types of democratic processes where deliberative, direct, and representative democracy, combined to create a stronger policy decision.

Deliberate democracy at the local level can significantly contribute to the New Democratic Pact for Europe. This starts with impact and the need to measure the impact that deliberative processes have on democratic systems in general. Deliberative democracy is a complementary part of the system, and it should reinforce the core of democracies, which are representative institutions and the electoral process. We need to explore ways to measure this impact, whether through observing electoral turnout and voting behaviour, or measuring cohesion between assembly members, as well as among the general public.

Deliberative democracy has matured through implementation and evolving practice. Successful individual deliberative processes have demonstrated that they can create impact and build trust. Attention must now turn to the next phase of development, notably the challenges of **scaling and long-term impact**. Achieving this requires sustained investment in the civic infrastructure that supports deliberation. This includes skills development, the provision of regional or national deliberative support services, improved access to funding and knowledge resources for implementation, and stronger connections between experts and practitioners through platforms that foster mutual learning. In addition, there is a need to develop widely recognised standards and labels for high-quality deliberative processes that meet robust criteria. Above all, strengthening deliberative democracy depends on continued investment in citizens who are prepared and empowered to engage in deliberation.

Labelling and verification of processes alongside respect for standards and guidelines, such as those adopted by the Council of Europe, can help give prominence to deliberative processes that build trust and strengthen democratic engagement. In the future, such a labelling and certification process might lead to funding opportunities that would support the best processes and the scaling of deliberation opportunities in the interests of integrity.



Appendix I - Agenda of the conference

“Resilient Europe through
deliberative democracy: cities and
regions in action!” 26 November
2025, Strasbourg (France)

09:00 – 09:30 Opening session

- ▶ **Konstantinos Koukas**, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and rapporteur on the New Democratic Pact for Europe
- ▶ **Daniela Cujbă**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Moldova to the Council of Europe
- ▶ **Véronique Bertholle**, Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg, France
- ▶ **Mathieu Mori**, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

09:30 – 11:00 Democracy under pressure: can deliberative democracy help overcome today's crises?

Citizens' deliberations have gained prominence in European cities and regions, committed to addressing the multiple challenges faced by our societies. When democracy is threatened by polarisation, war, disinformation, mistrust in politics, climate crisis, inequalities, and urban-rural divide, is deliberative democracy building trust in politics and public decision, thereby reinforcing representative democracy?

Keynote speech: **Yves Dejaeghere**, Executive Director of the Federation for Innovation in Democracy – Europe, Belgium

Panel discussion:

- ▶ **Angel Martinez de Rituerto Arregui**, Mayor of Tolosa, Spain
- ▶ **Oksana Hvozdenko**, Secretary of the City Council, Zviahel, Ukraine
- ▶ **Dani Rahimić**, President of the City Council of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Open discussion with participants

11:20 – 12:50 **The future of deliberative democracy: new directions and challenges**

From its theoretical foundation in the 1980s to widespread practice in the 2020s, deliberative democracy has evolved from an academic concept into a practical and stimulating approach for inclusive public engagement and enhanced policymaking. Looking forward, what are the developments in public deliberation, the potential benefits, including for local governance and communities, and the challenges ahead?

Keynote speech: **Jane Suiter**, Professor of Political Communication, Dublin City University, Ireland

Panel discussion:

- ▶ **Mirela Džehverović**, Deputy Mayor of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ▶ **Beatričė Umbrasaitė**, Advisor to the Chief Architect of the city of Vilnius, Lithuania
- ▶ **Dr. Carsten Berg**, Director of the ECI Campaign, European Citizens' Initiative e.V., Germany

Open discussion with participants

13:00 – 13:30 **Reception at the Lobby of the Committee of Ministers**

The reception is hosted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Permanent Representation of Germany on the occasion of the closure of the project "Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe".

14:45 – 16:00 Supporting democratic innovation at local level: the role of international organisations

The Council of Europe, as guardian of democracy, rule of law, and human rights; the European Commission, primary executive branch of the European Union; the OECD, as a global policy forum: together, these organisations embody multilevel governance. As international actors, they share the responsibility for democratic innovations. How can they further support deliberative democracy and ensure that the citizens' deliberation make a difference?

Keynote speech: **Jonathan Moskovic**, European University Institute, Belgium

Panel discussion:

- ▶ **Matjaz Gruden**, Director for Democracy, Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe
- ▶ **Daniel Fleischer-Ambrus**, Team Leader – Democracy, Anti-Corruption, Union Citizenship and Free Movement, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission
- ▶ **Alexis Durand**, Policy Analyst, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Open discussion with participants

16:00 – 17:00 What's next for deliberative democracy in Europe? A collective conversation

As democracy faces new challenges, with the New Democratic Pact the Council of Europe seeks to define new solutions and responses. By exchanging views and ideas, this session will offer a space for the participants to reflect on the Council of Europe's evolving role in supporting member states and citizens and on how to reinforce citizens' deliberation at local level.

Moderated by **Emanuela Pisanó**, Council of Europe international consultant and **Marietta Balázs**, Council of Europe international consultant

17:00 – 17:15 Closing session

Closing remarks by:

- ▶ **Damir Kapidžić**, Rapporteur of the conference “Resilient Europe through deliberative democracy: cities and regions in action!”
- ▶ **Claudia Luciani**, Director of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Moderation of the event by **Sally Bailey-Ravet**, Head of Department Interpreting, Travel, Events and Multimedia of the Council of Europe

Appendix II - Links to useful resources

- ▶ [Website](#) of the New Democratic Pact for Europe
- ▶ [Report](#) “Beyond elections: The use of deliberative methods in European municipalities and regions” (2022), by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
- ▶ [Recommendation](#) of the Committee of Ministers to Council of Europe member States on deliberative democracy (2023)
- ▶ [Webpage](#) of the conference “Resilient Europe through deliberative democracy: cities and regions in action!” 26 November 2025, Strasbourg (France)
- ▶ [Thematic webpage](#) on deliberative democracy on the website of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
- ▶ Links to the Guide “*How to organise a deliberative process at local level?*”, published by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
 - [English](#)
 - [Albanian](#)
 - [Bosnian](#)
 - [Macedonian](#)
 - [Serbian](#)
 - [Ukrainian](#)



This initiative is a contribution towards the
New Democratic Pact for Europe

PREMS 039626

ENG

www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member States, including all members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 46 member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees, it brings together 612 elected officials representing more than 130 000 local and regional authorities.

THE CONGRESS



LE CONGRÈS

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE