



Illustration:  
*The Effects of Good Government*  
by A. Lorenzetti - Sala dei Nove  
Siena, Italy (1339)

# PRP

## PEER REVIEW PROCESS

MEMBER STATES HELPING EACH OTHER DELIVERING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE REFORMS

**TOOLKIT** Secretariat  
Memorandum  
Prepared by the  
Democratic Governance  
Division, DG Democracy

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Council of Europe  
Committee on Democracy  
and Governance (CDDG)  
Centre of Expertise for Good  
Governance (CEGG)



CENTRE OF EXPERTISE  
FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE







## **INTRODUCTION**

The Peer Review process has been developed and adapted by the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance (CEGG)<sup>1</sup> to provide assistance and advice to member States preparing, adopting or implementing reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and good governance at all levels of government. A Peer Review is essentially an intergovernmental exercise enabling colleagues from other European governments who have conducted similar reforms and legislative changes to offer information; exchange experience and best practices; and provide friendly advice to the requesting authority.

This document provides a short description of the process, updated in light of feedback from some twenty Peer Reviews conducted in ten Council of Europe member states between 2013 and 2022.

According to its terms of reference 2022-2025, the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) is instructed to: *"...provide information on domestic legislation, policy and practice in the area of democracy and governance to member States so requesting, including through peer reviews and the rapid response service (RRS)."*

The Centre of Expertise for Good Governance, in cooperation with the CDDG, has been organising peer reviews for a number of years and, in light of this experience, has improved the concept of the exercise, as it appears below. The CEGG, through its close links to the CDDG, is responsible for planning and, where appropriate, the organisation and implementation of peer reviews. The Secretariat of the Democratic Governance Division organises the work of both CEGG and CDDG.

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<sup>1</sup> The Centre of Expertise was established in 2006 as the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform. In 2017, it became known as the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance (CEGG), a name change that reflected the evolution of its areas of intervention to support good governance at all levels of government with an emphasis on promotion of the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance.

# **Council of Europe Peer Review: member States helping each other**

## **Description and methodology**

### **Preconditions**

The authorities of member State X have expressed their wish to embark on a process of reform or modernisation, which, for example, might look to address:

- i) the allocation of functions and/or financial resources between different levels of government;
- ii) the intergovernmental relationships between central, regional and/or local authorities;
- iii) territorial or inter-municipal co-operation reforms;
- iv) institutional reforms of a specific area of central administration;
- v) revision of administrative procedures and practice in public administration or civil service reforms;
- vi) emerging challenges such as harnessing the benefits of digital transformation on democracy and governance.

Such an ambitious task needs a clear and shared political vision, a coherent strategy design, and a well-thought out implementation work programme. The vision and strategy will, of course, be largely based on domestic debates and expertise and careful preparatory work done at expert and political level and including the involvement of local stakeholders.

However, in the context of a reform process, a (governmental) authority of State X may see advantage in inviting government experts from other member States to contribute to a more comprehensive analysis of the preparatory work, reports, and recommendations already undertaken.

An external review by impartial third parties with specific expertise, but also experience, in conducting similar reforms can offer valuable insights and highlight potential pitfalls to be avoided in pursuing such reform or modernisation processes.

## Added-value

The Council of Europe (CoE) is the only international organisation which can gather representatives of selected Governments of 46 member States for this type of exercise. The CoE is a leader in good democratic governance, with a well-established network of experts and partners in Europe and beyond, and decades of accumulated experience in making international policy.

The technical assistance programmes of the CEGG form an integral part of the unique strategic triangle of standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation: the development of legally binding standards is linked with their monitoring by independent mechanisms and supplemented by technical co-operation to facilitate their implementation. By blending expert advice, technical and capacity development assistance and making recourse to political leverage, the CoE ensures increased effectiveness and a holistic approach to the support being provided by the Organisation. In previous activities implemented in the framework of the intergovernmental sector, the CoE has established an excellent network of stakeholders and co-operates effectively with the national authorities and other relevant organisations in the field of good democratic governance.

The CoE has developed a common basis for co-operation in the field of good democratic governance across Europe and sometimes beyond, with a unique set of standards such as the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance, and formal recommendations of its Committee of Ministers. These legal instruments address decentralisation and multi-level governance reforms on topics such as institutional capacities, democratic accountability, local financing; elections, including the use of ICTs and e-voting; participatory and deliberative democracy.

The [European Committee on Democracy and Governance \(CDDG\)](#) is the Council of Europe intergovernmental forum where representatives of the member States meet to develop the European standards described above (conventions and Committee of Ministers recommendations); share and collect examples of good practice; prepare reports and guidelines for further action; and to exchange and follow up on the state of democratic governance in Europe. Members of the CDDG work together to strengthen democratic institutions at all levels across Europe. They cooperate very closely with the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance (CEGG), which implements assistance projects and develops toolkits to help member states apply the European standards in practice.

## **Main steps**

A governmental authority (henceforth "requesting authority") of member State X addresses a request for a peer review to the Secretariat of the Democratic Governance Division of the CoE. The host authority would like CDDG peers to advise on specific aspects of the reform process in State X. It foresees, for example, an ambitious Action Plan for public administration reforms and seeks to benefit from the experience already garnered by other member States having recently adopted similar plans.

The requesting authority will identify critical issues to be addressed by the Peers in the context of their review. With help from the requesting authority, the CoE Secretariat will prepare a list of background documents and information to be shared with the Peers in advance of the visit to help give a clear picture of the current situation and the expectations of the requesting State before the formal visit.

The Peer Review visit will normally take 2-4 days and, in addition to meetings with government representatives involved in preparing and implementing the proposed reforms, the Peers will also meet with several other relevant stakeholders from central and local level, civil society, representatives of other international organisations, local and international experts, etc.. These meetings are confidential and held under the Chatham House rules (information provided can be used but not attributed to any individual or organisation). The objectives of these discussions are: to give the Peers a broader understanding of the issues at stake; offer them the opportunity to share experience from the reform process in their own state; and to prepare suggestions for improvements to the legislation or action plan under preparation, reflecting both European standards and the specificities of the situation in member State X.

The Peer Review Team will give confidential oral feedback to the requesting authority at the end of its visit. Following the visit the Peers will prepare a short report, including specific examples from experiences in their own State and containing friendly advice / recommendations that the requesting authority may wish to take into consideration in the course of the reform process. Publication of the report remains a decision of the beneficiary (requesting authority).

In the course of the Peer Review, attention will be drawn to transversal policies of the Council of Europe to ensure that all envisaged legislative reforms take into account the gender dimension and seek to foster equal opportunities.

## Process

A Peer Review can only be carried out following a request by an authority of a member State addressed to the Secretariat of the Democratic Governance Division. The requesting authority should demonstrate it understands the potential benefits of such an activity and commit to supporting the effective implementation of the process.

The Peer Review process usually consists of the following steps:

### 1. Initiating the process

The host authority **expresses its interest** in and commitment to hosting a Peer Review; identifies 1-3 key issues to be reviewed; submits a formal request to the Secretariat of the Democratic Governance Division of the CoE.

### 2. Peer Review team composition

The Secretariat of the CEGG and the CDDG, in consultation with the requesting authority, helps to put together a team of several **peers from relevant member States** with appropriate knowledge and experience of the topics and issues of concern to the host State. One or two **independent experts** with experience of the specific legal / administrative context in the requesting State will also join the team.

### 3. Co-ordination, logistics and costs

The Secretariat appoints a **Project Manager** responsible for ensuring organisational support and overall co-ordination. The Project Manager works with the partners to make **logistical** arrangements (programme, accommodation, meals, transport and administrative support for the Peer Team for the duration of the visit, etc.).

**Costs** of preparation and participation of the Peer Review Team (and Project Manager) are normally borne by the Council of Europe. The host authority may bear the costs of organising visits, meetings and local transport, as appropriate, as well as interpretation to/from one of the official languages of the Council of Europe and the language(s) of the host State. In some cases, these costs can be covered by a specific project.



#### **4. Preparation for the visit**

The Peers, in agreement with the requesting authority, establish a list of authorities and stakeholders to meet and agree dates for the visit. The Project Manager, assisted by the requesting authority, gathers background documents relevant to the Peer Review (e.g. basic statistics, information on local government system and structures, recent experts' reports and analysis on issues at stake, etc.). Each member of the Peer Review Team should receive a set of these documents sufficiently in advance of the visit to the host State. This will enable the members to be well prepared and have a clearer understanding of the issues at stake.

**Two weeks before** the visit, the programme for the Peer Review visit should be agreed between the Project Manager and the partners. It should include individual discussions with key stakeholders (policy- and decision-makers within the Government and Parliament; senior staff); representatives from (the associations of) local authorities; partners from the Donors' community<sup>2</sup>; think tanks and other external partners.

A (confidential) initial online meeting and discussion between members of the Peer Review Team will help clarify the mission, the situation, the request and identify any missing information, which the project manager will be tasked to collect in co-operation with the host authority.

#### **5. Visit**

The Peer Review Team gathers in the host state for a visit that will usually last for **2 to 4 days. At the beginning**, the Peers will hold an agenda-setting meeting with the host authority, which will further explain its needs, situation and requests.

The Peer Review Team will then proceed to **hold confidential (Chatham House rule-based) discussions with the various stakeholders** identified in the preparatory phase. These discussions can be guided by a prepared set of questions. The aim of the discussions should be to build up a picture of the present situation (to complement the evidence gained from relevant documents) and of the views of key stakeholders on the aims, targets, path and pace of the reform, as well as on possible triggers and potential dangers/threats.

**At the end of the visit**, the Peer Review Team will hold a debriefing session to discuss its preliminary findings. The preliminary findings should then be presented orally to the host authorities.

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<sup>2</sup> In host States where individual donor States or national/international Agencies are also active in support of reforms.

The nature of the discussions during a Peer Review, and the richness of the exchanges between Peers and the various interlocutors in the host State (and among the Peers themselves) are a clear example of the added-value of intergovernmental cooperation through the Council of Europe.

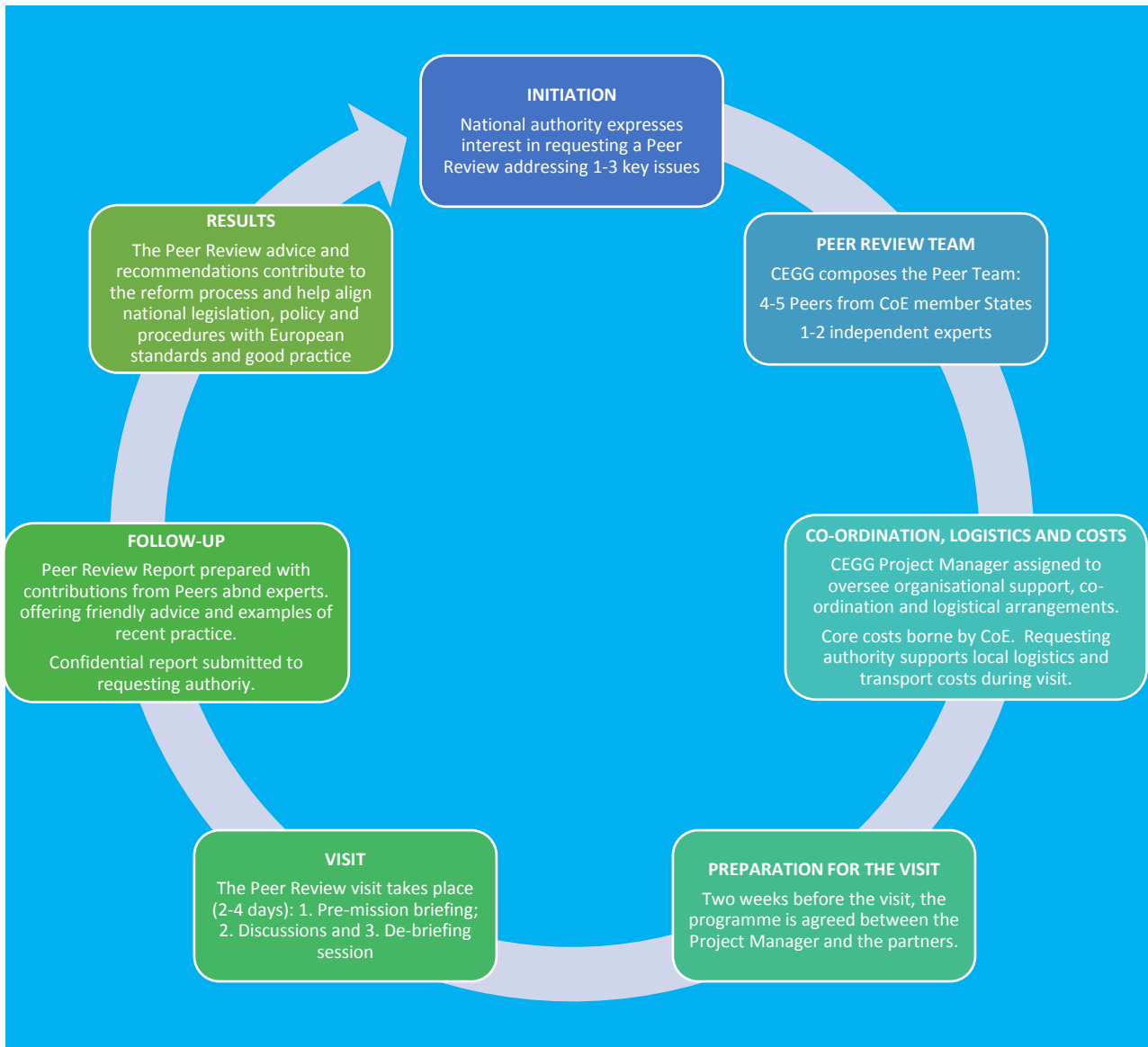
## **6. Follow-up**

Within two weeks following the visit, the Peers and independent experts submit their written comments, findings and recommendations to the Project Manager. The Project Manager prepares a **confidential draft report** with conclusions and recommendations, and shares it with the Peer Team and the authorities. On the basis of the comments received from the authority and the Reviewers, the Project Manager finalises the report and sends it to the Peer Review Team and the partners within one month after the peer review. **Publication** of the report remains a decision for the authorities of the host state, though it is to be hoped that the conclusions and policy recommendations would be shared with the CDDG members.

## **7. Results**

The Peer Review findings and recommendations can serve as a **roadmap** in improving the reform process and aligning national legislation, policy and practice with European standards and best practices.

## Peer Review Process



## EXAMPLES OF THE PEER REVIEWS ORGANISED FROM 2013-2022

### Overview:

YEAR	NUMBER	STATE	TOPIC
2013	1	Albania	Territorial and administrative reform
2014	3	Armenia	Financial equalisation
		Malta	Local government reform
		Moldova	Competencies of local authorities
2015	2	Albania	National spacial planning instrument
		Ukraine	Municipal consolidation
2016	3	Armenia	Inter-community unions
		Greece	Distribution of competences between the State and Local Authorities
		Ukraine	Sectorial decentralisation
2017	2	Slovenia	Strategy on Development of Local Self-Government until 2020
		Ukraine	Reform of the training system for local civil servants
2019	4	Greece	Civil protection
		Lithuania	Regional development
		Slovakia	Internal audit and supervision of local authorities
		Ukraine	Metropolitan governance
2021	2	Armenia	Fiscal autonomy and fiscal capacity of local authorities
		Slovakia	Amalgamation and territorial consolidation
2022	2	Slovakia	Strengthening the status of cities and municipalities
		Serbia	Human resources development

Website

Centre of Expertise for Good Governance  
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/good-governance/centre-of-expertise>

