

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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Working session 1: Democratic Institutions

Contribution by the Council of Europe

Democratic Governance

Responsive, transparent and accountable institutions are the bedrock of democracy. Council of Europe member States are committed to the fundamental principles of political democracy – individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law – and engage in dialogue and action in favour of “the maintenance and further realisation of these ideals and in the interests of economic and social progress”.

In the field of democracy and governance, in 2014 the Committee of Ministers established a **new intergovernmental Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG)** as a forum where member States can exchange information and good practice and engage in constructive partnerships through peer reviews, direct assistance (including so-called Rapid Response Surveys) and the development of new standards.

Thanks to its Charter of Local Self-Government, the Council of Europe has laid the foundations of solid local self-government across Europe. To date, all 47 Council of Europe member States have subscribed to the principles of the Charter, are implementing it and are subject to the regular monitoring by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. In order to promote transparent and responsive local democracy, the Charter was supplemented in 2009¹ by an Additional protocol that fosters citizen participation in public life at local level. The Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2008, encourages member States to implement the twelve principles of good democratic governance through targeted action at local level with the direct involvement of local authorities themselves.

Taking into account the most recent work of the former CDLR committee (replaced by the CDDG) – on the human rights dimension of local governance, the promotion of good

¹ STE 207. <http://www.conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/207.htm>. The following States are parties to the Protocol: Armenia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and Ukraine (as at 31 August 2015).

governance at local level, the impact of measures to counter the financial crisis on local governments and the suppression of the obstacles to transfrontier cooperation – the CDDG contributes to generating new opportunities for promoting good governance and strengthening democratic institutions across Europe.

One of the major fields of action continues to be the design and proper implementation of legislation and policy for **local and regional government reforms**, including in respect of territorial administrative reforms, competencies and resources of local authorities and transfrontier co-operation. However, the CDDG deals more generally with administrative reforms aiming at improving democracy and governance at all government levels.

In 2014 and 2015, the CDDG further paid significant attention to exchanging experience and best practices in the field of modernisation of public administration, including territorial reforms, electronic tools for governance and democracy, as well as to urban governance and large metropolitan areas. Over the course of 2015 and 2016, it further initiated activities to promote the sharing of practices and measures in promoting inclusive societies.

The Council of Europe attaches great importance to the establishment of effective synergetic **partnerships with other international Organisations** and other institutions that are active in member States and pursue objectives similar to those of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe and the OSCE have a framework agreement of co-operation on local and regional democracy, aimed at streamlining and coordinating each Organisation's work on the promotion of sound and democratic decentralisation in south-east European countries. Regular co-ordination meetings with ODHIR and OSCE field missions enable constant assessment of ongoing co-operation, exchange of information on the respective country projects and discussion of emerging issues with a view to identifying opportunities for joint action.

The **Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform** develops and implements programmes aimed at supporting legal reforms and the strengthening of the capacity of local authorities throughout Europe. It co-operates with many national (in particular local government associations, but also ministries) and international stakeholders and maintains working relations with the OSCE.

The OSCE was closely associated with the implementation of legal assistance and capacity building programmes implemented by the Centre in Albania, Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

The Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform puts at the disposal of local authorities a set of tools (from “national training strategies” for local authorities' staff to programmes on local finance, public ethics, performance management, inter-municipal and cross-border co-operation, etc.). The Centre also helps local authorities and their associations to implement programmes based on its tools, ensuring quality control, expertise, supervision and sometimes general management.

A new Tool on “City to City Diplomacy” was prepared in co-operation with the Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia (ISIG), and presented to European municipalities in Gorizia, Italy and in Dubrovnik, Croatia. A full description of the Centre's activities is available in its annual reports (www.coe.int/local, follow Centre of Expertise – Advisory Board).

The Council of Europe continues to encourage the implementation of the **Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level**. It is based on assessments of how local

authorities conduct their affairs with regard to the twelve principles of good governance, the identification of possible changes to be made and measures to be adopted and the establishment of partnerships between central (regional) authorities and local authorities (their associations) with a view to promoting the implementation of the “right” policies at both central (regional) and local levels.

The Strategy has been adopted and is being implemented in two countries where the associated European Label on Governance Excellence is also delivered (Bulgaria and Norway). Several other countries have expressed interest in adopting the Strategy and its principles and are making preparations for it.

The Council of Europe assistance and co-operation programmes as well as the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform are at the disposal of the states (and regions) with a view to delivering legislative assistance, the exchange of information and practice and the provision of capacity-building programmes that suit their needs.

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