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Civil society and the Parliamentary Assembly: towards greater transparency and engagement

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 2287 (2024)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully examined Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 2287 \(2024\)](#) "Civil society and the Parliamentary Assembly: towards greater transparency and engagement" and has forwarded it to the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM) for information and possible comments.
2. The Committee of Ministers welcomes the Parliamentary Assembly's intention of reviewing and further reinforcing its own outreach to civil society organisations and national human rights institutions, with the view of ensuring meaningful and transparent engagement with these groups.
3. The Committee of Ministers reaffirms its commitment to the ongoing process of strengthening effective and meaningful engagement with civil society within the Council of Europe, based on several decisions of the Committee of Ministers taken at its ministerial sessions in Helsinki ([CM/Del/Dec\(2019\)129/2_0](#)) and Turin ([CM/Del/Dec\(2022\)132/3ci](#)). As rightly referred to in the Assembly recommendation, the process has been given further impetus by the Reykjavik Declaration and the Road map on the Council of Europe's Engagement with Civil Society 2024-2027 ([SG/Inf\(2023\)28](#)). In December 2023, the Committee of Ministers instructed the Secretariat to pursue the follow-up of this road map, to improve information and communication on the Organisation's activities, enhance knowledge and capacity building on the work and standards of the Council of Europe and strengthen the institutional framework for civil society engagement.
4. As also referred to by the Assembly in paragraph 4 of its Recommendation, in 2024 an [implementation plan](#) for the road map was developed and a preliminary mapping exercise conducted to take stock of current practices and experiences within the Organisation in working with civil society, to discuss challenges and to share innovative approaches. In 2025, a set of practical guidelines on civil society engagement will be prepared to continue supporting the sharing of knowledge and cross-fertilisation of practices. The goal is to achieve a more transparent, meaningful, visible and coherent engagement with civil society across the Organisation which, at the same time, contributes to the Council of Europe's renewed commitment to revitalise democracy and meets civil society's demands.
5. More recently, the Committee of Ministers, at its 134th Ministerial Session (Luxembourg, 13-14 May 2025), recalled its commitment to the full implementation of the Road map on the Civil society engagement with the Council of Europe 2024-2027, including in relation to the development of a calendar with participation and consultation opportunities for civil society, with a view to ensure a meaningful and mutually beneficial engagement with civil society, including human rights defenders.
6. The Committee of Ministers would also inform the Assembly that with a view to improving civil society's access to information, an updated version of the handbook "Working with the Council of Europe: a practical guide for civil society" has been prepared, which provides a synthetic overview of the Council of Europe's

1. Adopted at the 1532nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (18 June 2025).



activities and the opportunities for civil society involvement in the respective areas of work. The Civil Society Portal, a website providing a single point of entry to the Organisation, will also be updated in the course of the year to correlate with the updated Handbook.

7. A further contribution to the Organisation's efforts in this regard is the Guidance Note on civil society participation in the intergovernmental work of the Council of Europe prepared by the CDDEM. The Guidance Note lays down general principles to streamline and strengthen civil society participation through improved access to information, transparency, inclusiveness, but also removal of obstacles to participate. This document should be viewed as a first step in the process concerning intergovernmental committees and subordinate bodies; however, it can serve as an inspiration for other sectors to introduce or further develop their own frameworks for civil society participation.

8. Regarding the future work to implement the Road map on the Council of Europe's Engagement with Civil Society, the Committee of Ministers takes note of the Parliamentary Assembly's initiative to develop a single, harmonised code of conduct for engagement with civil society and interest groups and considers this an important idea to be explored further. In this context, it underlines the importance of ensuring that any future framework laying down rules of conduct for actors seeking to influence and/or participate in the policy and decision-making processes of the Council of Europe institutions takes due account of the different nature of different activities, including the distinction between advocacy for the public good and the representation of private or commercial interests. A well calibrated approach to transparency and accountability can help to maintain openness while supporting meaningful and safe engagement with civil society.

9. With regard to transparency, it should also be noted that at its 134th Ministerial Session (Luxembourg, 13-14 May 2025), the Committee of Ministers adopted a Transparency Framework of the Council of Europe that reads as follows (see [CM\(2025\)53-final](#)):

"The Council of Europe values its 75 years-long documentary heritage and historical knowledge, preserved and made accessible, with the interests of future generations in mind. The Reykjavík Declaration has set the Council of Europe on a path of increased transparency and co-operation with all its stakeholders and with strengthened visibility and sufficient resources. The transparency framework for the Organisation's intergovernmental and other deliberations is designed to take into account the opportunities and challenges of new and emerging technologies. The Council of Europe Transparency Framework embodies our commitment to fostering good governance, democracy and pluralism, through transparency and accountability. We recognise that transparency of public authorities is fundamental to building trust, combating corruption, and empowering citizens to actively engage in matters of public interest. Our mission is to ensure that the Council of Europe operates with transparency, allowing for open access to information. We believe that access to official documents provides not only crucial support for fundamental human rights but also constitutes a cornerstone of democracy, enabling individuals to fully exercise their rights and hold authorities accountable. The Council of Europe is committed to ensuring public access to documents and to consider further transparency of its statutory bodies while safeguarding privacy rights, legitimate interests of member States and the security of the Organisation. Further consideration should be given to Resolution [Res\(2000\)2](#) and Resolution [Res\(2001\)6](#) which, together with specific implementation guidelines set by procedural decisions and rules, remain the basis of the Council of Europe's information strategy and rules on access to documents. The Committee of Ministers undertakes to make public a register of documents."

10. Finally, the Council of Europe is also actively working to enhance the protection and promotion of civil society space in its member States. Acknowledging the transformed legal, political, socio-economic, and technological landscape, the Committee of Ministers has tasked the CDDEM with updating Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2007\)14](#) on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe taking into account a Feasibility Study adopted by the CDDEM Plenary (29-30 October 2024). The committee will finalise its work by the end of 2025 and present a draft recommendation to the Committee of Ministers for possible adoption.