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Written Statement by Council of Europe

Agenda item 3: Ensuring effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through leadership, action and means, (d) Development of principles of effective governance

Good Governance: European Principles

The Council of Europe (CoE) is the largest and oldest political organisation in Europe which aims to bring countries closer together by promoting human rights, democracy, and rule of law. Its experience and expertise in the areas of democracy and governance, and in particular, in developing the common vision of good governance in Europe, could be very useful to the UN as it begins developing its own “principles of effective governance”.

In this respect, the CoE’s European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) and the Centre of Expertise propose a close cooperation with the relevant UN bodies, such as CEPA and DESA. Below is brief information on the Principles of Good Governance in Europe.

The Strategy

The Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (47 member states) on 26 March 2008. It aims at promoting action and policies that establish or improve good governance, in particular at local level, but these can also be implemented at other – central or regional - levels of government.

The Strategy is a **practical instrument** for improving governance at local level, it compliments the European Charter for Local Democracy which is a legal tool for ensuring local democracy. It can be used to generate **synergies between all stakeholders**- local, regional, national or European. It defines 12 European **principles of good governance** at local level, which represent a **common European vision** of good governance. It also ensures an implementation mechanism (through benchmarking), as well as exchange and learning from best practice.

Website: http://www.coe.int/t/dgap/localdemocracy/Strategy_Innovation/default_en.asp

12 Principles

The 12 Principles represent the fundamental values of European democracy and requirements for good democratic governance. By reference to the 12 principles, local authorities from all CoE member States can improve their governance on a continual basis. Public services provided by local authorities are usually financed by local residents through local taxes. In return, the citizens expect their local authority to respond to their expectations, to be effective, accountable, transparent and responsive.

The 12 principles of Good Governance are:

Principle 1 - Representation and Participation, Fair Conduct of Elections

- Elections are conducted freely and fairly, according to international standards and national legislation, and without any fraud.
- Citizens are at the centre of public activity and they are involved in clearly defined ways in public life at local level.
- All men and women can have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate bodies that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on the freedoms of expression, assembly and association.
- All voices, including those of the less privileged and most vulnerable, are heard and taken into account in decision-making, including over the allocation of resources.
- There is always an honest attempt to mediate between various legitimate interests and to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the whole community and on how this can be achieved.
- Decisions are taken according to the will of the many, while the rights and legitimate interests of the few are respected.

Principle 2 - Responsiveness

- Objectives, rules, structures, and procedures are adapted to the legitimate expectations and needs of citizens.
- Public services are delivered, and requests and complaints are responded to within a reasonable timeframe.

Principle 3 - Efficiency and Effectiveness

- Results meet the agreed objectives.
- Best possible use is made of the resources available.
- Performance management systems make it possible to evaluate and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of services.
- Audits are carried out at regular intervals to assess and improve performance.

Principle 4 - Openness and Transparency

- Decisions are taken and enforced in accordance with rules and regulations.
- There is public access to all information which is not classified for well-specified reasons as provided for by law (such as the protection of privacy or ensuring the fairness of procurement procedures).
- Information on decisions, implementation of policies and results is made available to the public in such a way as to enable it to effectively follow and contribute to the work of the local authority.

Principle 5 - Rule of Law

- The local authorities abide by the law and judicial decisions.

- Rules and regulations are adopted in accordance with procedures provided for by law and are enforced impartially.

Principle 6 - Ethical Conduct

- The public good is placed before individual interests.
- There are effective measures to prevent and combat all forms of corruption.
- Conflicts of interest are declared in a timely manner and persons involved must abstain from taking part in relevant decisions.

Principle 7 - Competence and Capacity

- The professional skills of those who deliver governance are continuously maintained and strengthened in order to improve their output and impact.
- Public officials are motivated to continuously improve their performance.
- Practical methods and procedures are created and used in order to transform skills into capacity and to produce better results.

Principle 8 - Innovation and Openness to Change

- New and efficient solutions to problems are sought and advantage is taken of modern methods of service provision.
- There is readiness to pilot and experiment new programmes and to learn from the experience of others.
- A climate favourable to change is created in the interest of achieving better results.

Principle 9 - Sustainability and Long-term Orientation

- The needs of future generations are taken into account in current policies.
- The sustainability of the community is constantly taken into account.
- Decisions strive to internalise all costs and not to transfer problems and tensions, be they environmental, structural, financial, economic or social, to future generations.
- There is a broad and long-term perspective on the future of the local community along with a sense of what is needed for such development.
- There is an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which this perspective is grounded.

Principle 10 - Sound Financial Management

- Charges do not exceed the cost of services provided and do not reduce demand excessively, particularly in the case of important public services.
- Prudence is observed in financial management, including in the contracting and use of loans, in the estimation of resources, revenues and reserves, and in the use of exceptional revenue.
- Multi-annual budget plans are prepared, with consultation of the public.
- Risks are properly estimated and managed, including by the publication of consolidated accounts and, in the case of public-private partnerships, by sharing the risks realistically.

- The local authority takes part in arrangements for inter-municipal solidarity, fair sharing of burdens and benefits and reduction of risks (equalisation systems, inter-municipal co-operation, mutualisation of risks...).

Principle 11 - Human rights, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion

- Within the local authority's sphere of influence, human rights are respected, protected and implemented, and discrimination on any grounds is combated.
- Cultural diversity is treated as an asset, and continuous efforts are made to ensure that all have a stake in the local community, identify with it and do not feel excluded.
- Social cohesion and the integration of disadvantaged areas are promoted.
- Access to essential services is preserved, in particular for the most disadvantaged sections of the population.

Principle 12 - Accountability

- All decision-makers, collective and individual, take responsibility for their decisions.
- Decisions are reported on, explained and can be sanctioned.
- There are effective remedies against maladministration and against actions of local authorities which infringe civil rights.

The Benchmark

Benchmarking of the 12 Principles of innovation and good governance allows to identify municipalities which are the closest to respecting all (or most) of the principles, and therefore are eligible for receiving the ELoGE –European Label of Governance' Excellence. Any association or institution which has relevant authority and capacity, may apply for the ELoGE accreditation at the Council of Europe, in order to be able to award the Label.

The benchmark provides the following information:

- a. A description of the Good Governance Principle and a list of the activities that would typically help a municipality to deliver that Principle;
- b. A self-assessment section where municipalities are asked to identify their level of maturity for that Principle.

In addition, the surveys for citizens and municipal employees can be included into the Benchmark:

<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2961826&SecMode=1&DocId=2349620&Usage=2>

The European Label of Governance Excellence (**ELoGE**) can be delivered to European municipalities which achieve a certain standard of governance quality by national (or regional) bodies accredited by the Council of Europe's European platform. This standard of governance shall be ascertained against the Benchmark.

ELoGE is symbolised by a crystal dodecahedron engraved with the twelve European principles of good democratic governance, the Council of Europe logo and the date of the award.

The European Committee on Democracy and Governance (**CDDG**) is the intergovernmental body of the Council of Europe where member states can exchange information and best practice about the initiatives they may take with a view to promoting the implementation of the principles around which the Strategy is built.

The European Platform is the body established by the CDDG that delivers the accreditation to the national platforms or bodies authorised to grant the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE).

The Centre of Expertise is an operational unit within the Council of Europe which implements projects to assist member states preparing and implementing governance/decentralisation reforms, and building capacities of local/regional/and central authorities in the area of good governance. The Centre also develops capacity-building tools, training materials, and benchmarks: <http://www.coe.int/t/dgap/localdemocracy/>