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The New Democratic Pact: Ambition, Fragmentation, and the Path to Coherence

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Europe's democratic foundations are under growing pressure, challenged externally by Russia's war of aggression and internally by declining trust, rising public frustration, and the spread of anti-system actors. As the Council of Europe warned, "*Europe's democratic environment and democratic institutions are in mutually reinforcing decline.*" In response, the organisation has launched the New Democratic Pact—a political reset first mandated at the Reykjavík Summit in 2023 and designed to transform the Reykjavík Principles of Democracy into a comprehensive, organisation-wide agenda. For the first time in years, the Council of Europe is acting ahead of the European Union, seeking both to strengthen democratic resilience and to renew its own institutional visibility. The Pact thus emerges as a dual project: a substantive reform effort addressing structural democratic vulnerabilities, and a strategic rebranding initiative aimed at repositioning the Council as Europe's leading democracy institution.

I. Introduction

Over the past 75 years, European states have built a democratic system grounded in security, stability, and the protection of fundamental rights. These core values were codified in the European Convention on Human Rights, signed by 46 states, and entrusted to the Council of Europe as the institution responsible for safeguarding them.

Widely recognised for its human rights mandate, the Council of Europe gradually receded from public attention as fundamental rights became broadly institutionalised across Europe. Its visibility was further diluted by frequent confusion with other European bodies—such as the European Council or the Council of the European Union—and by the European Union’s growing capacity to address complex political and legal challenges through its own institutional mechanisms.

Yet, today, the Council’s relevance is resurfacing. Europe’s democratic foundations are under renewed pressure: externally through Russia’s war of aggression, and internally through rising public frustration, declining trust, and the growing influence of populist and anti-system actors. These developments have exposed structural vulnerabilities in Europe’s democratic environment. In its 2021 Annual Report, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe warned that “Europe’s democratic environment and democratic institutions are in mutually reinforcing decline.”¹ It is against this backdrop that the idea of a New Democratic Pact (NDP) began to take shape. By the time of the 2025 Annual Report, the call for renewal had become explicit: “we cannot meet today’s challenges with yesterday’s playbook. And we must never forget that democracy is our first line of defence. What Europe needs is a reset: a New Democratic Pact for Europe.”²

The political mandate for this reset was formally established at the Reykjavík Summit on 16–17 May 2023³, where Heads of State and Government tasked the Council of Europe with transforming the newly adopted *Reykjavík Principles of Democracy* into a comprehensive, organisation-wide democracy agenda. The New Democratic Pact thus emerged as the Council’s response to a deteriorating democratic landscape and as a commitment to redefine and strengthen democratic governance across Europe, leading to its institutional anchoring in 2025–2026 through the involvement of the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM), the Congress of Local and

¹ Council of Europe (2021): *State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law: A democratic renewal for Europe*. Council of Europe, p. 5.

² Council of Europe (2025): *Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe: Report of the Secretary General*. Council of Europe, p. 6.

³ Council of Europe (2023): *Reykjavík Declaration – United around our values*. Council of Europe.

Regional Authorities, and the newly created Special Committee on the new Democratic Pact of the parliamentary Assembly of the Council (PACE). Conceived as a comprehensive initiative to rethink and strengthen democracy across all dimensions, the Pact aims to enhance democratic resilience in an era of profound uncertainty.

What makes this initiative particularly notable is its origin. In fact, for the first time in many years, the Council of Europe is acting ahead of the European Union by launching a forward-looking political project of its own. This creates an opportunity for the Council to reclaim strategic visibility, articulate a renewed mission, and reassert its role as Europe's leading democracy institution.

This report examines the following central question: to what extent is the New Democratic Pact a substantive reform project and conversely to what extent is it a strategic rebranding effort designed to sharpen the Council of Europe's institutional profile? The aim of the report is to explore how the Pact simultaneously addresses structural democratic challenges while repositioning the Council within Europe's evolving governance landscape.

II. Institutional Architecture of the Pact

The New Democratic Pact must be understood as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a fixed set of rules. Its institutional architecture reflects this approach: it is designed as “a collective, inclusive and complex process”⁴, grounded in the principle of multi-level governance⁵, in which responsibilities are distributed across the bodies of the Council of Europe. This structure combines political deliberation, technical standard-setting, and formal decision-making within a sequenced reform process.

The NDP follows a clearly defined trajectory. It was politically launched at the Reykjavik Summit in 2023, it is currently being shaped through an inclusive consultation phase running until the end of 2026, and is expected to be operationalised from 2027 onwards. The overarching objective is to enable a flexible response to democratic challenges while progressively developing common standards and instruments. Within this framework, institutional roles are differentiated but

⁴ Council of Europe (2025): *Roadmap Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe: Building a resilient, inclusive and agile democracy*. Council of Europe, p. 3.

⁵ Council of Europe (n.d.): *Stronger democracy through multilevel governance*.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/stronger-democracy-through-multilevel-governance>

interdependent. According to the Council of Europe, the consultation phase runs until the end of 2026 and is intended to “shape the work that follows”.⁶ From 2027 onwards, it is assumed that the focus shifts to implementation. Taken together, the institutional architecture of the NDP forms a structured reform cycle: political agenda-setting (2023–2024), development of tools and standards (2025–2026), and implementation (from 2027 onwards). At the same time, the system remains adaptive and evolving, reflecting the process-oriented nature of the Pact.

Member states are expected to develop national democratic renewal plans based on the Reykjavík Parameters, while bodies such as the CDDEM, PACE, and the Congress support peer learning, monitoring, and the diffusion of new standards. Since there are a number of bodies and working groups involved in the New Democratic Pact, a brief overview is provided here:

- The **Committee of Ministers** functions as the central decision-making authority. It adopts recommendations, endorses standards, and provides the political authority necessary for their implementation. Its role is particularly visible at the stage of formal validation, where it adopts outputs prepared by technical bodies and integrates them into the Council of Europe’s normative framework.

- The **European Committee on Democracy and Governance** constitutes the technical and normative core of the Pact and acts as its central operational engine. It is responsible for developing the concrete standards, methodologies, and tools underpinning the NDP. Following its November 2025 plenary, the CDDEM received a mandate to deliver key outputs for 2026–2027, including guidance on the application of the Reykjavík Parameters, instruments for inclusive electoral participation, and mechanisms to strengthen multi-level governance.⁷ Two specialised working groups structure this work and are in charge of working closely with the PACE and the Congress.⁸
 - The Working Group on the Reykjavik Parameters of Democracy (GT-P2) develops the methodology and framework for the Reykjavík Parameters and prepares

⁶ Council of Europe (2025): *Roadmap Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe: Building a resilient, inclusive and agile democracy*. Council of Europe, p. 10.

⁷ Council of Europe (2023): *Reykjavik Declaration – United around our values*. Council of Europe, p. 9.

⁸ Council of Europe (n.d.): *Council of Europe democracy experts set their workplan for 2026–2027*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/steering-committee-on-democracy/-/council-of-europe-democracy-experts-set-their-workplan-for-2026-2027>

guidelines on electoral participation, operating under a detailed schedule with draft outputs planned for April, June, and October, and final adoption in December 2026.⁹

- In parallel, the Working Group on multilevel governance (GT-GPN) prepares a new Recommendation on multi-level governance. Through these processes, the CDDEM translates political objectives into operational standards.¹⁰

- **The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe** performs a primarily deliberative and political function. Through its institutional structure and the working methods, the Parliamentary Assembly can contribute by providing “innovative proposals, grounded on debate and exchanges”¹¹. Following the drafting of the Reykjavik Standards, an ad hoc committee was initially established, which was replaced in January 2026 by a Special Committee of the New Democratic Pact, working “on the same matter”¹². According to the Council’s understanding, the Committee is “the Assembly’s central coordinating body for the New Democratic Pact for Europe”¹³ and is seen as a platform for reflection and foresight and providing the Assembly’s input to the Pact through advancing inter-parliamentary dialogue on the Pact’s tools and objectives and promoting the Pact within national parliaments and across various national forums.

- **The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities** ensures the local and regional dimension of the Pact and plays a key role in operationalising the principle of multi-level governance. By mobilising local and regional networks and integrating territorial perspectives, it contributes to linking European-level initiatives with national and subnational democratic practices.

⁹ Council of Europe (2026): *Report of the 1st meeting of the Working Group on the Reykjavik Parameters of Democracy – Framework and methodology for their application (GT-P2(2026)5)*. Council of Europe.

¹⁰ Council of Europe. (2026). *Report of the 1st meeting of the Working Group on Multi-Level Governance (GT-GPN(2026)3)*. Council of Europe.

¹¹ Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly. (n.d.): *Special Committee on the New Democratic Pact (AS-PACT)*. <https://pace.coe.int/en/pages/committee-33/AS-PACT>

¹² Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly. (n.d.): *Special Committee on the New Democratic Pact (AS-PACT)*. <https://pace.coe.int/en/pages/committee-33/AS-PACT>

¹³ Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly. (n.d.): *Special Committee on the New Democratic Pact (AS-PACT)*. <https://pace.coe.int/en/pages/committee-33/AS-PACT>

During the ongoing consultation and pilot phase (2024–2026), all Council of Europe bodies—including the Secretary General and Secretariat, the Committee of Ministers, PACE, the Congress, and the Convention bodies—are actively mobilising their networks and expertise. Their contributions are primarily political and consultative, taking the form of debates, hearings, and thematic conferences that are explicitly framed as inputs into the Pact. This phase is characterised by broad participation and iterative interaction across institutional levels. At this stage, a structural tension becomes visible: while the Pact is explicitly grounded in the principle of multi-level governance, the multiplicity of actors and parallel consultation processes creates challenges for effective coordination. The coexistence of numerous forums, timelines, and mandates risks fragmentation and overlapping responsibilities, raising questions about the coherence of the overall process and the integration of inputs into a unified framework.

III: Empirical Observations: A Process in Formation and an Uneven Institutional Landscape

ASSEDEL’s empirical observations, gathered during the April 2026 Pace session, reveal a significant asymmetry in the institutional readiness of the actors involved in the New Democratic Pact. In fact, background conversations with several members of the Special Committee, including a Vice-Chair, showed that the Committee remains in an early phase of institutional consolidation. While members were able to articulate their personal motivations for joining the Committee, no clearly defined thematic priorities have been formulated, a methodological approach for addressing the Pact’s broad mandate, an internal division of responsibilities, or a clear understanding of how the Committee’s role fits into the broader governance architecture of the Pact. This lack of clarity is particularly striking given that the Special Committee formally succeeds the earlier ad hoc committee, which suggested that a certain degree of conceptual and procedural continuity would already be in place. Instead, the Committee appears to be engaged in foundational identity-building at a moment when the Pact’s conceptualization phase is already underway. The temporal constraints further intensify this concern: the Committee has a two-year mandate, while the conceptual phase is expected to conclude by the end of 2026, with implementation beginning in 2027. Without visible structures, the Committee risks being unable

to deliver substantive input within this compressed timeframe. Although internal planning may exist, its absence from external communication limits the ability of civil society, explicitly identified as an essential partner in the Pact, to engage meaningfully in the process.

A contrasting picture emerges from ASSEDEL's interactions with other Council of Europe bodies, which appear significantly more advanced in their conceptual and operational contributions. In an interview with Stewart Dickson, Rapporteur on the Protection of Local Elections, ASSEDEL gained insight into the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities' concrete engagement with the Pact¹⁴. The Congress has already taken substantive steps, including its call on the Committee of Ministers to close the protection gap in the European Charter of Local Self-Government. At present, only national parliamentary elections are protected under Article 3 of Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights, leaving local and regional elections without equivalent safeguards and therefore vulnerable to manipulation by hostile actors. Dickson emphasized that this gap represents a tangible democratic vulnerability and that the Congress, through its long-standing monitoring mechanisms, is well positioned to function as an early-warning system for democratic backsliding at the local level. Its established role in facilitating the exchange of best practices among local and regional authorities further strengthens its relevance for the Pact's implementation phase.

Additional insights emerged during a training session with the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDDEM) representative co-secretary Marta Becerra.¹⁵ She provided an overview of the implementation processes expected to begin in 2027 and contextualized the Council of Europe's evolving engagement with democracy. While the Council is traditionally associated with human rights protection, democracy has long been part of its mandate; what has changed, according to Becerra, is the context. Democratic systems were not previously challenged to the same extent they are today, which has broadened the conceptual scope of "democracy" within the Council's work. Becerra also expressed uncertainty about whether this shift constitutes a "rebranding," but she did emphasize that a central objective of the Pact is to bring democracy closer to the local level

¹⁴ ASSEDEL (2026): *Council of Europe and the protection of democracy: A talk with Stewart Dickson about the danger of the protection gap for local and regional elections*. <https://assedel.org/council-of-europe-and-the-protection-of-democracy-a-talk-with-stewart-dickson-about-the-danger-of-the-protection-gap-for-local-and-regional-elections/>

¹⁵ ASSEDEL (2026): *A training session with Marta Becerra: Can civil participation rebuild trust in European democracy?* <https://assedel.org/a-training-session-with-marta-becerra-can-civil-participation-rebuild-trust-in-european-democracy/>

- explicitly referencing the role of the Congress in this regard. She also noted that civil society organizations may contribute to working groups by presenting representatives from member states, a procedural detail that directly affects ASSEDEL's potential engagement. Becerra further highlighted the relevance of the Reykjavik Summit (2023), which introduced a self-assessment framework for Member States covering five dimensions of democratic resilience: democratic participation, democratic governance, democratic freedoms and civic space, democratic institutions, and democratic futures. This tool is not intended as a ranking mechanism, but rather as an internal evaluation instrument designed to identify strengths and highlight positive examples, with human rights serving as the foundational layer across all dimensions. According to Becerra, the Council of Europe intends to begin structured dialogues with member states in 2027, marking the transition from conceptualization to implementation.

Taken together, these observations reveal a clear institutional asymmetry: while the Special Committee is still defining its internal structures, mandate, and strategic orientation, other organs, particularly the Congress and the CDDEM, are already operating with established methodologies, concrete contributions, and clear implementation frameworks. This unevenness raises important questions about coordination, coherence, and the overall governance of the New Democratic Pact. It also underscores the need for greater transparency and structural clarity within the Special Committee to ensure that civil society can participate meaningfully and that the Pact develops as a genuinely multi-actor process.

IV. Governance Analysis: Fragmentation and Ambiguity

From ASSEDEL's perspective, the governance architecture of the New Democratic Pact reveals a structural tension between the political ambition of the Council of Europe and the actual organisation of its internal processes. Official documents describe the Special Committee as the Assembly's central coordinating body for the Pact, responsible for reflection, foresight, inter-parliamentary dialogue, and promoting the Pact in national parliaments. The Assembly also highlights its unique capacity to contribute with innovative proposals grounded in political debate across Member States. However, the empirical observations collected during the April 2026 PACE Session show that the Committee is not yet in a position to fulfil this mandate in practice.

ASSEDEL considers this to constitute a first structural weakness. Despite its formally defined role, the Special Committee remains in an early stage of institutional development. Some members were unable to identify clear thematic priorities, a shared methodological approach, or an internal division of responsibilities. And neither was there a common understanding of how the Committee's work fits into the broader governance structure of the Pact. This gap between formal mandate and operational reality results in a fragmented governance landscape: while the parliamentary level is nominally positioned as a coordinating actor, it is not yet structurally capable of exercising this function. In contrast, other Council of Europe bodies showcase a significantly more advanced stage of progress in their work. The CDDEM operates on the basis of a clearly defined mandate and has already established working groups, methodological tools, and an implementation roadmap for 2027¹⁶. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has contributed to concrete proposals, including the call to close the protection gap for local elections, an issue it has monitored for years.¹⁷ These differences create an institutional asymmetry in which the technical and local levels are moving ahead, while the parliamentary level remains structurally undefined. This disconnect weakens the coherence of the Pact's governance model and undermines the idea of a coordinated, multi-actor process.

A second structural issue concerns the temporal alignment of mandates and policy cycles. According to the Council of Europe's own roadmap, the conceptualisation phase of the Pact runs until the end of 2026, with implementation beginning in 2027. The CDDEM has already operationalised this timeline. The Special Committee, however, was only established in January 2026 and has a two-year mandate. This means that the Committee's entire lifespan overlaps with a period in which the Pact's conceptual foundations are already being finalised. If the Committee can only begin substantive work once the principles are adopted, likely in 2027, it will have limited time to influence the process and may be reduced to a primarily communicative role. This mismatch between institutional design and policy cycle constitutes a structural governance weakness.

A third governance gap arises from the absence of a shared strategic direction. While the Reykjavik Principles and the Democracy Parameters provide a normative framework, there is no integrated

¹⁶ Council of Europe (n.d.): *Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM)*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/steering-committee-on-democracy>

¹⁷ Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (2026): *Recommendation 543 (2026)*. <https://search.coe.int/congress/fre?i=09125948802b362d>

policy architecture that links the contributions of PACE, the CDDEM, the Congress, and the Committee of Ministers. The Special Committee lacks defined objectives and a common methodological framework, making its role within the Pact ambiguous. Without a shared strategic orientation, the risk is that parallel processes develop without coordination, undermining the Pact's coherence and its ability to function as a unified institutional initiative.

This ambiguity has direct implications for civil society. Although the Pact repeatedly emphasises the importance of NGO participation, the current governance structure does not provide clarity on *how* and *when* NGOs can meaningfully contribute to the project. The Special Committee, formally the body responsible for political dialogue and outreach, cannot yet articulate priorities, consultation mechanisms, or entry points for external actors. The CDDEM and the Congress are more structured, but their processes are primarily technical or local in nature and do not replace the need for a clear parliamentary interface. As a result, NGOs face uncertainty regarding which topics are open for input, which actors are responsible for which thematic areas, and at what stage contributions can influence the process. This institutional ambiguity limits the ability of civil society to participate in a structured and impactful manner, despite the Pact's stated commitment to inclusiveness.

Taken together, these observations reveal a governance architecture marked by fragmented responsibilities, temporal inconsistencies, and a lack of strategic alignment. For ASSEDEL, this constellation represents a significant governance gap that risks weakening the Pact's effectiveness and undermining its promise of democratic renewal. Strengthening the clarity of roles, aligning mandates with policy cycles, and establishing a shared strategic framework will be essential to ensure that the New Democratic Pact can function as a coherent, multi-actor reform process—and that civil society can contribute meaningfully to its development.

V. The New Democratic Pact: Reform, Rebranding, and Renewed Visibility

Building on the empirical observations and governance analysis presented in the previous chapters, the New Democratic Pact emerges not only as a potential reform instrument, but also as a strategic opportunity for the Council of Europe to redefine its role in the European democratic landscape. From ASSEDEL's perspective, Pact's value lies precisely in this dual character: it combines the

foundations of substantive democratic reform with the potential for a positive institutional rebranding that strengthens the Council's visibility, identity, and long-term relevance.

From a perspective of reform, the Pact addresses a concrete and pressing need. The focus on democratic resilience responds to the challenges identified across Europe, including democratic backsliding, foreign interference, and shrinking civic space. The development of standards, tools, and self-assessment mechanisms—particularly those emerging from the Reykjavik Principles and the CDDEM's methodological work—provides a structured basis for strengthening democratic governance. The involvement of multiple governance levels, from the Parliamentary Assembly to the Congress and the CDDEM, reflects an understanding that democratic resilience requires coordinated action across political, technical, and local dimensions. These elements demonstrate that the Pact has the potential to generate substantive institutional innovation.

At the same time, the Pact carries a strong symbolic dimension that should not be underestimated. The terminology of a "New Pact" and the emphasis on "Democracy" signal a renewed institutional identity for the Council of Europe. For years, the Council has been primarily associated with human rights, while its democracy pillar has remained less visible. The Pact offers an opportunity to rebalance this perception and position the Council as a central actor in Europe's democratic agenda—distinct from, and complementary to, the European Union. In this sense, rebranding is not superficial; it is a strategic repositioning that can strengthen the Council's profile, relevance, and public legitimacy.

Moreover, this symbolic dimension opens up broader opportunities for communication and agenda-setting. If the Pact is to succeed, its message must reach beyond the institutional "bubble" of Strasbourg and Brussels. Democracy cannot be strengthened solely through intergovernmental or parliamentary processes: it requires societal engagement, public understanding, and visible political commitment. The Pact therefore offers the Council of Europe a chance to communicate more effectively with citizens, to raise awareness of democratic challenges, and to promote a shared European understanding of democratic values. This is particularly important at a time when public trust in institutions is fragile and democratic norms are increasingly contested.

It must be underlined that the Pact has the potential to improve long-term coordination within the Council of Europe. By bringing together the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress, the CDDEM, and the Committee of Ministers under a shared framework, the Pact could help overcome the institutional fragmentation identified in earlier chapters. If governance structures are clarified and

aligned, the Pact could serve as a platform for sustained cooperation across the Council's different pillars—something that has long been needed but rarely achieved.

For ASSEDEL, these opportunities are significant. Despite the current governance gaps and ambiguities, the Pact represents a meaningful step in the right direction. It signals political will, institutional ambition, and a renewed commitment to democratic values at a time when such signals are urgently needed. Therefore, ASSEDEL views the Pact as an initiative worth supporting—both in its reformist ambitions and in its potential to revitalise the Council of Europe's democratic identity. At the same time, ASSEDEL recognises that these opportunities can only be realised if the governance challenges identified earlier are addressed. Clearer roles, stronger coordination, and transparent engagement mechanisms will be essential to ensure that the Pact's message not only exists on paper but also reaches society and generates real impact.

In this sense, the New Democratic Pact is more than a policy project. It is an opportunity for the Council of Europe to redefine its place in Europe's democratic architecture, to communicate more effectively with citizens, and to strengthen democratic resilience across the continent. ASSEDEL supports this direction and sees in the Pact a promising foundation for renewed institutional energy, visibility, and long-term democratic commitment

VI. Opportunities and Recommendations for the New Democratic Pact

The New Democratic Pact offers the Council of Europe a unique opportunity to strengthen democratic resilience, renew its institutional identity, and communicate more effectively with European societies. Building on the institutional analysis and empirical observations presented in the previous chapters, ASSEDEL identifies five central opportunities and corresponding recommendations that can help the Pact realise its full potential.

1. Strengthening Strategic Coordination Across Governance Levels

The current fragmentation between the Parliamentary Assembly, the CDDEM, the Congress, and the Committee of Ministers risks undermining the coherence of the Pact. A more structured coordination mechanism is needed to integrate political, technical, and local contributions into a unified strategic framework. Such coordination would ensure that

the Pact's outputs are consistent, mutually reinforcing, and aligned with the overall reform cycle.

2. Clarifying the Mandate and Operational Role of the Special Committee

As the Assembly's central coordinating body, the Special Committee plays a crucial role in shaping the political dimension of the Pact. However, its current lack of thematic priorities, working methods, and consultation procedures limits its effectiveness. Clearer operational guidance is essential to enable the Committee to fulfil its mandate and to provide identifiable entry points for civil society engagement.

3. Aligning Institutional Mandates With the Pact's Policy Cycle

The temporal mismatch between the Special Committee's two-year mandate and the Pact's conceptualisation timeline risks reducing the Committee's impact to a largely symbolic role. Adjusting or extending the mandate would ensure that the parliamentary dimension can contribute meaningfully to both the conceptual and implementation phases, thereby strengthening the Pact's overall governance architecture.

4. Establishing Clear and Accessible Entry Points for Civil Society

Although the Pact emphasises the importance of NGO participation, the current governance structure does not specify how civil society can engage. Transparent and predictable consultation channels—such as thematic hearings, structured calls for input, or participation in working groups—are necessary to ensure that civil society expertise is integrated into the Pact's development and implementation. This would reinforce the Pact's commitment to inclusiveness and multi-actor governance.

5. Developing a Public-Facing Communication Strategy Beyond Institutional Circles

For the Pact to succeed, its message must reach beyond the institutional spheres of Strasbourg and Brussels. A proactive communication strategy is needed to translate the Pact's principles into accessible narratives, engage citizens directly, and highlight positive democratic practices. This includes communicating more assertively about democratic backsliding and emphasising that the Pact is designed for the benefit of citizens, not only

institutions. Effective communication is essential to build societal support, enhance the Council of Europe's visibility, and ensure that the Pact's democratic message resonates across Europe.

VII. Conclusion

The analysis presented in this report has shown that the New Democratic Pact is characterised by a fundamental tension between ambition and implementation. While the Pact aspires to renew democratic governance in Europe, its current institutional configuration reveals ambiguity, fragmentation, and uneven institutional readiness. These findings confirm the central thesis introduced at the outset: the Pact is not yet a fully formed reform instrument, but rather a process in formation whose success will depend on how effectively its governance structures are consolidated.

The empirical observations demonstrate that the Special Committee, despite its prominent political mandate, remains in an early phase of internal consolidation. Its lack of defined priorities, working methods, and coordination mechanisms stands in contrast to the more advanced operational readiness of the CDDEM and the Congress. This institutional asymmetry creates uncertainty about how the Pact's various components will interact and how inputs from different governance levels will be integrated into a coherent whole. The governance analysis further highlighted that the Pact's multi-level architecture, while conceptually promising, currently suffers from overlapping mandates, parallel consultation processes, and insufficient strategic alignment.

At the same time, the Pact offers significant opportunities. It has the potential to strengthen democratic resilience, enhance the Council of Europe's visibility, and serve as a platform for renewed agenda-setting on democracy. Its symbolic dimension, far from being a weakness, can help reposition the Council as a central actor in Europe's democratic landscape, provided that communication reaches beyond institutional circles and engages citizens directly. The Pact can thus become both a reform instrument and a positive rebranding initiative that revitalises the Council's identity and public relevance.

Ultimately, the findings of this report point to a clear conclusion: the success of the New Democratic Pact will depend less on its normative aspirations than on its institutional coherence. Normative goals as democratic resilience, participation and civic space are necessary but not

sufficient. What will determine the Pact's long-term impact is whether the Council of Europe can align mandates, clarify roles, strengthen coordination, and establish transparent mechanisms for civil society engagement. If these governance challenges are addressed, the Pact can evolve into a credible and effective instrument for democratic renewal. If not, it risks remaining a symbolic initiative with limited operational reach.

ASSEDEL supports the New Democratic Pact precisely because it recognises both its potential and its challenges. The Pact represents a timely and necessary step toward reinforcing democratic values in Europe: ensuring its success now requires institutional clarity, strategic coordination, and a commitment to meaningful multi-actor participation.