EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

(To be filled in and uploaded as deliverable in the Portal Grant Management System, at the due date foreseen in the system.

⚠️ *Please provide one sheet per event (one event = one workpackage = one lump sum).*

PROJECT	
Participant:	[3] – The European University Institute, (EUI)
PIC number:	999902385
Project name and acronym:	Democratic Odyssey — ODYSSEY

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	Event no. 13
Event name:	Feedback Session Analysis
Type:	Online conference
In situ/online:	*Online*
Location:	Online
Date(s):	May 7th 2025
Website(s) (if any):	https://euroalter.com/democratic-odyssey-online-feedback-session/
Participants	
Female:	256
Male:	231
Non-binary:	20
From country 1 [Greece]:	27
From country 2 [Ireland]:	12
From country 3 [Italy]:	39
From country 4 [Germany]	295
From country 5 [Bosnia and Herzegovina]	2
From country 6 [Malta]	1
From country 7 [Slovenia]	4
From Country 8 [Bulgaria]	2
From country 9 [France]	12

From country 10 [Cyprus]	3		
From country 11 [Spain]	16		
From country 12 [Romania]	4		
From country 13 [Latvia]	3		
From country 14 [Hungary]	5		
From country 15 [Czech Republic]	3		
From country 16 [Portugal]	5		
From country 17 [Croatia]	4		
From country 18 [Austria]	24		
From country 19 [Slovakia]	4		
From country 20 [The Netherlands]	6		
From country 21 [Poland]	9		
From country 22 [Sweden]	9		
From country 23 [Estonia]	2		
From country 24 [Finland]	7		
From country 25 [Belgium]	9		
Total number of participants:	507	From total number of countries:	25

Description

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

SUMMARY REPORT
ON ITERATIVE FEEDBACK TO THE 2024/25 PILOT ASSEMBLY

N.B. this report is also available on the Democratic Odyssey's participatory digital platform in 24 languages (click here).

Introduction

By spring 2025, the Democratic Odyssey's 2024/25 Pilot Assembly grew to 300 members. This followed our recruitment criteria for a European travelling Assembly, with members also coming from the three different cities the Assembly was hosted by. The Feedback session further bolstered

knowledge transfers on the first draft recommendations, initially prepared during the 21-23 February 2025 in Florence and the follow-up Assembly meeting (members-only and online) where participants were asked to continue translating the output into a Citizen Charter. After the Feedback session, the Assembly Members were asked to voluntarily join a Drafting Committee, where they would hold the responsibility of (i) reflecting on the feedback received; and (ii) feeding tentative proposals into the main Citizen Charter, ultimately to be reviewed in the last *in situ* meeting in Vienna by the Assembly.

Overall, the Pilot Assembly received feedback throughout the whole process, both (i) on the digital platform; and (ii) in online sessions designed for public debate around the Assembly's progress updates (e.g. starting with the 26 November 2024 event). This summary report firstly introduces the Democratic Odyssey's understanding of expertise and experience, as well as how these were integrated through a carefully designed series of moments where they would play an integral part of the deliberation. Secondly, the report summarises the feedback received by a panoply of individuals and stakeholders, as well as a note on where and how this was built on in the deliberative process.

'Expertise vs experience' in deliberative processes

The Democratic Odyssey's design for a permanent Peoples' Assembly for Europe builds on the belief that collective intelligence is a critically missing piece in imagining new democratic practices that are fit-for-purpose. Enabling collective intelligence is key to convening an impactful, legitimate and pluralistic process where political priorities are discussed holistically. For this reason, the Democratic Odyssey tackled the question of designing an ideal-type Assembly with a keen eye to exploring the various facets of discursive representation. In other words, ensuring that the descriptive representation of participants, randomly selected to represent Europe in statistical terms, equated to a much larger set of views at the deliberation table. For instance, as already presented in the Athens 2024 Full Report, the "From the I to the We" activity was specifically designed to recognise different views and acknowledge one another, through arts-based deliberative techniques that marked a shift from individual-anecdotal to collective-analytical. This directly embodies the *ethos* of ensuring discursive pluralistic thinking in a way that does not automatically trumps diversity and the anecdotal experiences of minority groups, but rather opens up to a more radical and discursive practice of mutual recognition – one anchored in the idea of 'life as expertise'. In our view, striking such balance for the whole Pilot was critical from the start. It allowed us to reach the stage of formal feedback in a way that there would be a consolidated understanding of the group dynamics that create knowledge within the sortitioned Assembly Members. Meanwhile, that there would also be clarify over what the role of said feedback would be, and how to relate to it coming from a place of collective authority and authorship vis-à-vis the draft recommendations.

Additionally, the Democratic Odyssey looks at the issue of complementarity in epistemic discourse, with a high degree of care in designing outreach moments that could substantively connect the Assembly with the general public. We call it the question of 'porousness', which speaks to the concern that deliberative assemblies (or "mini-publics") are convened without a clear connection with the policymakers' pressing political issues, civil society's push for prosocial change, academic contributions on a longer-term vision and lay citizens' default positions regarding issue salience.

While the Assembly's deliberative focus is predominantly on long-term solutions, it is equally true that ambitious recommendations could and should lay out a pathway for structural change. This requires the pooling of information regarding the current state-of-the-art solutions and how to think critically about these. For this reason, dialogue with analysts, institutional representatives and civil society on the state-of-play is key.

Before we lay out the range of feedback received, however, a few additional clarifications are needed from a methodological standpoint. In this Pilot Assembly, the Democratic Odyssey Consortium represents what it advocates the EU institutions' role could be, were the assembly to become a permanent policy-making body in the EU. Therefore, while the ideal-type assembly would include direct feedback by the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council, the Consortium has set up proxies by inviting representatives of said institutions to feed the debate.

More generally, we understand discursive representation as the space where pluralist, citizen input (experience) meets with analyst knowledge (expertise), representing and expanding on what is already in the public discourse while ultimately generating new forms of crowdsourced expertise.
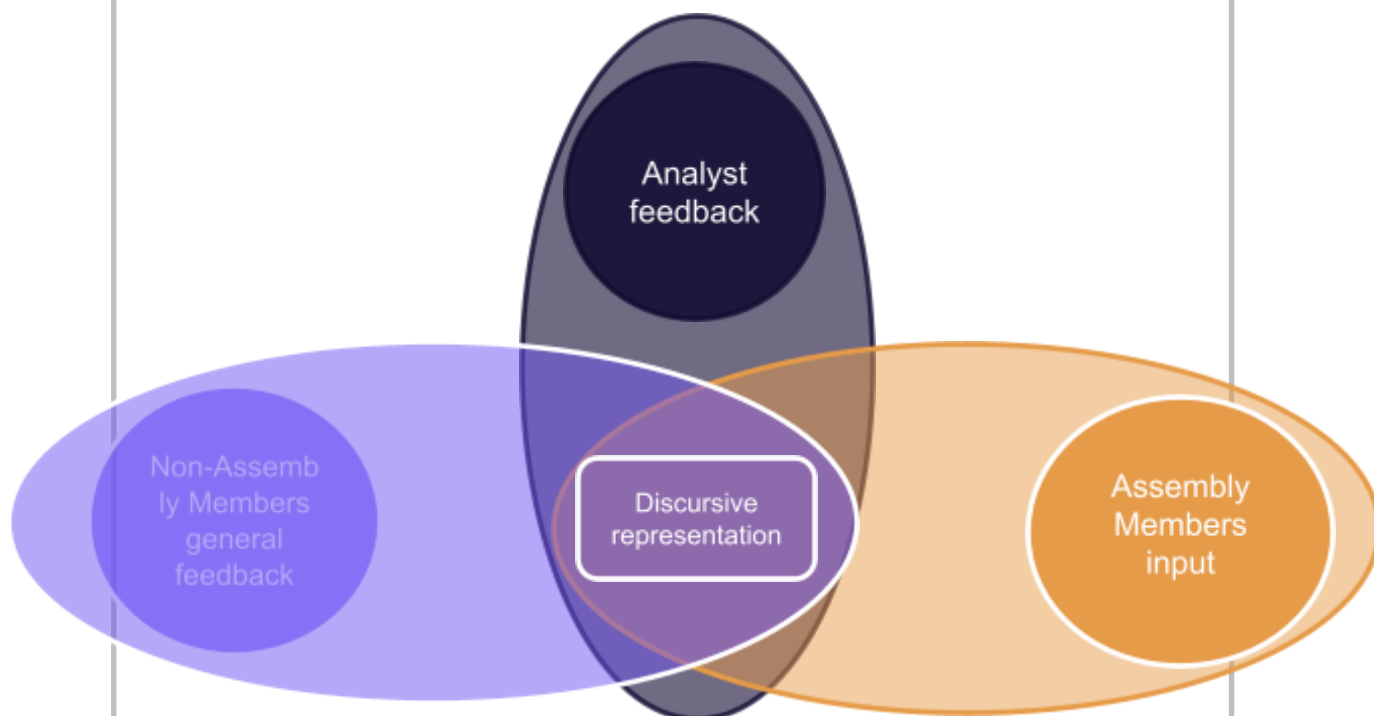

Fig.1: The experience-expertise multistakeholder complementarity

In Fig.1, we see how we propose that the mosaic of discursive representation could look like in a Europe-wide assembly. Notably, the collective intelligence of Assembly Members does not simply imply they are exclusively capable of sharing their lived experience in a somewhat systematised way. Rather, we argue that through carefully designed facilitation approaches, the epistemic depth could increase by turning it into crowdsourced, analytical expertise. This transformative process is only possible by activating the disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise of professionals from academia, think-tanks, the policy-making world, civil society; and their expertise in navigating the more practical dimensions of how to tackle crisis policy.

In the Democratic Odyssey assembly, the empirical evidence of collective intelligence translates into a practical question of fulfilling its potential. As such, it informs our methodology and design for a permanent Peoples' Assembly for Europe.

The feedback report

While analysts were present at all previous *in situ* assembly moments, as well as dedicated sessions in November and February to provide inputs into the topic of the Assembly, the feebdack session featured inputs by three experts: Brando Benifei, Member of the European Parliament, Alexandrina Najmowicz, Secretary General of the European Civic Forum and Richard Youngs from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Each brought their own experience and expertise in analysing the recommendations and the process thus far.

N.B. During the session, the Democratic Odyssey Consortium provided a document open to live feedback, for the general public attending the session to interact with the Assembly Members on the substance of recommendations. The extensive feedback received in this live document, both during the session and asynchronously, was later worked on by the Drafting Committee.

Brando Benifei highlighted the Democratic Odyssey (hereinafter DO) as a meaningful continuation of the Conference on the Future of Europe. He praised the DO's clear, structured and actionable recommendations, which place genuine citizen participation at the core. Benifei contrasted the DO's approach with tokenistic participation, arguing that the recommendations move beyond formality to activate real democratic processes and foster transparency. He emphasised the need to institutionalise some of the conclusive proposals, which would foster a more meaningful connection between EU institutions and the broader public. In his view, Democratic Odyssey offers a valuable contribution to tackling the EU's legitimacy crisis by strengthening authentic participatory mechanisms and advancing the

legacy of CoFE. Brando Benifei particularly endorsed the draft recommendation on "Not everything has been invented yet", concerning the call for a permanent, rotating and transnational assembly in Europe. This proposal was further developed in Vienna, in the Citizen Charter's pathway "10. Not everything has been invented yet".

Alexandrina Najmowicz focused on the crucial role of civil society organizations and non-governmental organisations with regards to the recommendations, seeing the Democratic Odyssey proposals as a vehicle to restore trust in democracy by offering solutions, accountability, and inclusion. She highlighted that the draft recommendations align strongly with the goals of CSOs and NGOs, especially around transparency, shared decision-making, and civic participation. Drawing on experiences from the Conference on the Future of Europe, she noted that CSOs and trade unions were often sidelined and stressed that all civic actors must have a place in the democratic process. Ms. Najmowicz urged caution around the language of shared responsibility in the recommendations, which she argued is sometimes used by institutions to shift blame for systemic challenges like climate change, employment, and health. Instead, she called for a focus on legitimacy, strong policies, and collective action. She emphasized the need to differentiate between actors working for the common good and those lobbying for private interests**, also making** a powerful call for citizens and civic actors to reclaim democratic legitimacy in ways that truly impact people's everyday lives. Ms. Najmowicz also praised the proposed approach to mainstreaming societies of care, which lays the foundations for the Citizen Charter's pathway "8. Care is at the heart of democracy".

Following his interventions from our feedback session in November, **Richard Youngs** praised the Assembly's work in addressing the topic of how to manage crises more democratically. Nevertehless, he also spoke to the salience of asking what the ongoing geopolitical trends meant for the recommendations. He outlined four key points the Assembly members could discuss as they worked towards proposed solutions ("Steps" in the Citizen Charter) in Vienna:

1. Systemic Crises: Europe faces increasingly complex challenges, from geopolitical shifts like Trump's influence to deeper systemic issues threatening the European project itself. He discussed how the recommendations and further institutionalisation of the DO Pilot Assembly would be effective toward widening the security conversation to what Europe's role should be, as a political and security project. Inter alia, this was reflected in the Citizen Charter's pathway or pathway "8. Care is at the heart of democracy", calling for more transparency and better communication between institutions and citizens, or "9. Harness Technology, unleash collective intelligence", which calls for better antitrust regulation vis-à-vis big tech giants.

2. Security and Participation: the EU is solely focusing on security and autonomy at this stage. Excluding citizens from the conversation risks major public backlash. The DO Assembly could propose mechanisms

to ensure democratic deliberation is also key in security policy. This *ethos* is imbued in all Charter's pathways, as they all tackle the democratisation of crisis management and anticipation, but most notably in "3. "Nothing About Us Without Us".

3. Mass Mobilization and Climate: Richard Young then highlighted the current "greenlash", i.e. a backlash against the climate agenda. In the last 5 years there have been many climate assemblies, however this citizen science approach has not contributed to major shifts in the general debate about climate change. DO could offer a space for inclusive, innovative climate debate, reaching even skeptical audiences, and connecting the assembly to broader democratic mobilization. The Citizen Charter's pathway "2. Our Money, our Choice!", "3. Nothing About Us Without Us", "4. Educate to Anticipate", "5. Collectivity and self-organization are our power" and "8. Care is at the heart of democracy" particularly reflect this need for deliberation as a process mainstreaming evidence-based decision-making.

4. AI and Digital Policy: While the EU has excelled in regulating AI and digital technologies, the participatory dimension to establishing a vision for technological process has lagged behind. The DO could help reintroduce citizen involvement in shaping Europe's digital future, ensuring democratic input on tech policy. The Citizen Charter's pathway 9 is particularly focused on how to 'Harness Technology, unleash collective intelligence'.

The digital platform debates – a summary

The Democratic Odyssey's DECIDIM-powered digital platform provides a space for analysis and exchange with the general public, also matching some of the feedback by analysts regarding the need to have the deliberative process of the Assembly connect with broader audiences. We present below a summarization of the digital platform debates, as presented to Assembly Members during the feedback period (February-May 2025).
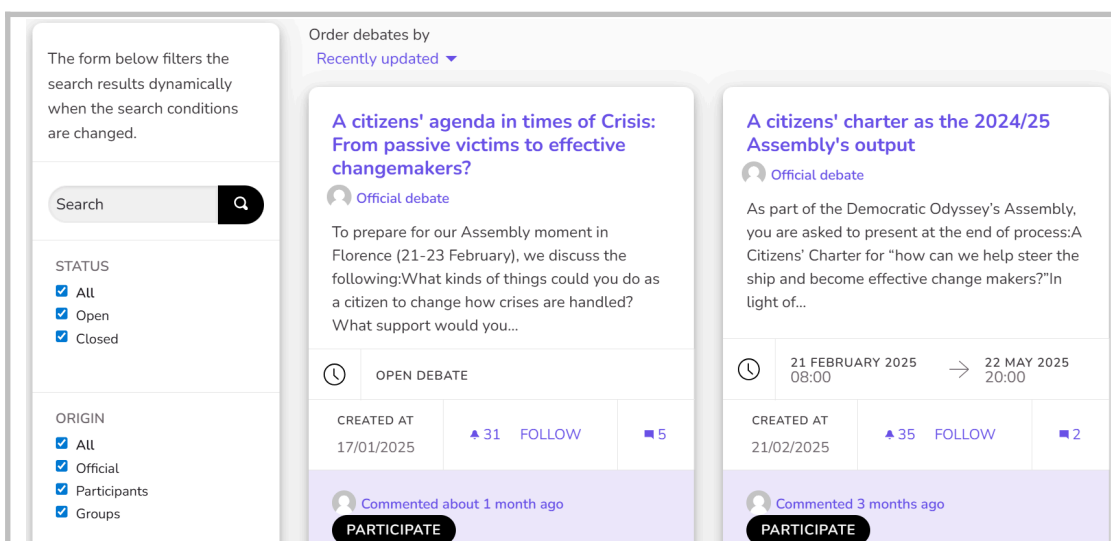
Fig.3 The digital platform's "Debates" space

Please note this is an automated summarisation of the online debates that took place on the digital platform of the Democratic Odyssey project between November 2024 and January 2025. Through the OpenAI software, we deploy the use of Artificial Intelligence, in full knowledge of its opportunities and limitations. These also include the risk of so-called "AI hallucinations". In other words, this document is for the reader to get a sense of the debates without needing to scroll through all the comments, but it remains an imperfect summarization of the diversity of contributions shared on the digital platform, in reverse chronological order.

Therefore, we encourage you to treat this summary exclusively as an interesting and practical way of consulting the debates and – hopefully – making more accessible all that was discussed in our digital platform, so that no comment is left behind.

We argue that in the future, a permanent Peoples' Assembly for Europe could use such tools to make it easier for assembly members, the general public, academia, civil society and other stakeholders to easily catch up with the majority of the debates generated within the Assembly process.

Debate 3 – January 2025

 The question asked

A citizens' charter as the 2024/25 Assembly's output
A Citizens' Charter for "how can we help steer the ship and become effective change makers?"
In light of this, we would like to ask:
- what is a Citizens' Charter, in your view?
- Is it anticipatory (anticipating crises) or reactive?
- Is it an emergency kit in times of crises, that governments and the EU can activate?
- Does it provide a prescription for how we protect democracy from crises?
- Or is it an appeal, a call to action?
- Which actors should it target?
- Does it pragmatically call on citizens engagement in times of crises?

- Is it a binding contract with policy-makers, businesses, civil society actors and others? Who does it address?
- Does it talk about different levels of governance (European, national, local)?

Please share your opinions as to what would the Citizens' Charter look like in your view - the Assembly will be asked to take it in and build on it throughout the Assembly process, all the way to the final session in Vienna (23-25 May 2025).

  🖵 *Summarisation of the replies on the digital platform*

The debate around the Citizens' Charter reveals diverse views on its role in empowering citizens and guiding democratic action in times of crisis. Participants generally agree that the Charter should serve both anticipatory and reactive purposes, supporting citizens and institutions in preparing for and responding to crises effectively.

1. **Anticipatory and Reactive Roles**: The Charter is viewed as essential for building resilience, enabling proactive preparedness for crises such as ecological collapse, social fragmentation, or technological monopolies. While it should focus primarily on prevention, it must also be reactive, offering clear guidance when crises arise. This dual role is seen as necessary for both anticipating future challenges and addressing immediate democratic concerns.
2. **A Framework for Resilience, Not Just an Emergency Kit**: Rather than being solely an emergency response tool, the Charter should act as a broader framework for *resilience*. Participants suggest that it should provide scaffolding for societal systems, ensuring readiness for unexpected events and crises. It is seen as a model for how societies can respond preemptively to avoid crises or mitigate their impacts.
3. **Appeal to Action and Institutional Accountability**: The Charter is not just a set of guidelines but a *call to action*. It should mobilize citizens to act during crises, whether through civic engagement, public protest, or advocacy for systemic change. Alongside this, it demands *institutional accountability*, pushing governments, businesses, and civil society to act responsibly during crises and uphold democratic principles.
4. **Broad Engagement of Actors**: A key point of consensus is that the Charter must target multiple actors, including the *EU*, *national governments*, *local municipalities*, *civil society*, and *the private sector*. Effective change requires collective action across sectors, and citizens must be actively involved in governance, particularly during crises.
5. **Multi-level Governance**: The Charter should engage with governance at different levels: *European*, *national*, and *local*. However, it should be adapted to each level's specific context to ensure practical action and impact. A focus on clear, tailored actions at each level will make the Charter more effective in fostering change.

Overall, the Citizens' Charter should be a dynamic tool that empowers citizens, ensures institutional accountability, and strengthens democracy, both during and beyond crises. Its flexibility and broad engagement can guide collective action and drive long-term change.

Debate 2 – January 2025

 The question asked

A citizens' agenda in times of Crisis: From passive victims to effective changemakers?
What kinds of things could you do as a citizen to change how crises are handled? What support would you need for the things you want to do, either before or during crises?

 Summarisation of the replies on the digital platform

A Citizens' Agenda in Times of Crisis: From Passive Victims to Effective Changemakers?
The conversation reveals a strong shared desire to move from reactive citizenship to proactive, empowered engagement – especially in the face of recurring crises and democratic erosion. Participants reflect on both the individual and systemic dimensions of change, highlighting a variety of pathways through which citizens could play a more effective role.

Key Themes Emerging from the Discussion:
1. Everyday European Citizenship and Local Infrastructure There is a call for sustained, grassroots engagement with European democracy, not just during crises but as part of everyday life. One proposal includes the creation of *European Citizens' Houses* in local communities—spaces that provide access to information, support for civic initiatives, training, and direct channels to European institutions. This reflects a belief that change begins *locally*, and that citizens need both *knowledge and tools* to act.
2. Democracy as Fragile—or Even Failing A sense of urgency and disillusionment with the current state of democracy is apparent. While some speak of democracy as fragile and in need of strengthening, others go further, describing it as nearly absent. This range underscores a common concern: democratic institutions, as currently structured, are not sufficiently responsive to citizens' voices—particularly during crises.
3. Rethinking Representation and Participation Participants question how genuinely the will of the people is expressed through existing representative systems. There are calls for more *direct forms of citizen input*, such as the ability for European citizens to propose legislation. Others advocate for *certified, democratic alternatives to current social networks*, to support responsible information-sharing and citizen dialogue, especially as misinformation and elite control threaten the public sphere.
4. Rebalancing Public Discourse There is also concern about the dominance of political elites and the need to rebalance public

dialogue. Suggestions include giving more space to *scientific voices*, improving media transparency, and promoting *responsible, citizen-led information channels*. This reflects a broader ambition: to create a political culture in which citizens are not only informed but also *trusted and empowered* contributors.

Overall Direction for Future Recommendations:
The discussion points toward the need for:
- Permanent civic infrastructure that empowers citizens locally and connects them to the European level;
- Institutional reforms that create meaningful opportunities for citizen-led proposals and decision-making;
- Democratic renewal through transparency, accountability, and pluralistic public discourse.

The overarching message is clear: citizens are ready and willing to act—but they need structures, rights, and recognition to do so effectively.

Debate 1 – November 2024

   The question asked

What of Athens? What next?
Which conversations did Athens bring about the most? What was discussed as an Assembly and what does this tell us about this collective journey? We ask you to reflect on the Full Report (External link) from the DO first Assembly meeting in Athens, particularly to ask you what you think we should collectively continue to discuss ahead of our next Florence meeting!

   Summarisation of the replies on the digital platform

Reflections from Athens: Key Themes and Questions for the Journey Ahead
The first meeting of the Assembly in Athens sparked a wide-ranging and dynamic set of reflections centered around the theme of crisis and the role of democratic participation. A strong shared concern emerged about how societies confront and respond to crises—whether they are ongoing, foreseeable, or unexpected—and how citizens can be meaningfully involved in shaping those responses.

Participants reflected on the need to better define when and how citizens' assemblies should be convened, suggesting that different types of crises may require different approaches and levels of engagement. There was also an emphasis on learning from past crises: not just reacting to emergencies, but also drawing lessons to inform future action and institutional accountability.

Another major theme was the state of democracy itself. Many expressed a deep sense of frustration with political systems that appear disconnected from citizens' real concerns, coupled with a strong desire to reclaim democratic agency. The assembly was seen as a space where this

disconnection could begin to be addressed, by fostering inclusive dialogue and collective decision-making. While some expressed skepticism about whether these efforts would lead to concrete change—particularly in influencing political institutions—there was also a current of cautious optimism. The assembly process was seen as a potential starting point for broader transformation, if it can build momentum and remain connected to both local and European levels of governance.

Finally, participants acknowledged the emotional dimension of the experience—both the hope and determination it inspired, as well as the doubts and challenges that lie ahead. This emotional resonance points to a shared commitment to continuing the journey, and to ensuring that future meetings deepen the sense of collective purpose and impact.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).