



MINUTES

First visit of a joint expert team under the mechanism on election resilience

16-20 May 2022

The first visit of a joint expert team under the mechanism on election resilience, organised in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections, brought to Bucharest experts from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, between 16 and 20 May 2022.

The agenda of the visit spanned a variety of topics such as new technologies and cybersecurity in elections, countering electoral threats and protection of electoral infrastructure, and oversight of online political advertising. Whilst the main purpose of the visit was to look at the issues at stake in the preparation of the next Romanian elections, it was also a good occasion for the Permanent Electoral Authority to showcase its good electoral practices, notably on the use of information systems in elections and the monitoring of political financing.

During the first three days of the visit, discussions concentrated on information systems used in various aspects of the electoral cycle and in the monitoring of political financing, which included a specific focus on the identification of the right balance between the right to the protection of personal data and the need for transparency required by the public interest. Experts provided presentations of their national electoral information systems, including electoral registers and voter portals, and expounded on their functionalities, which would also facilitate the provision of electoral information to voters. The provision of such information would entail, besides practical information on how and where to vote at a certain electoral process, information about past elections which would enable voters to check how previous instances, where they exercised their right to vote were registered by election authorities.

Experts also considered potential improvements of election information systems that would provide real time updates of the voter turnout and election results, as means of increasing transparency and trust in elections.

Discussion naturally moved on to ways of securing more possibilities for voters to express their choices, such as postal voting, e-voting and advance voting, identifying the advantages of each voting method, but also to the difficulties that might arise in their implementation. Electoral practices of other countries would not be easy to replicate, as national contexts would also have to be taken into due account.

Experts agreed that protection of voters against manipulation while also promoting their participation could be achieved by increasing the transparency of electoral procedures and the strictness of their regulation, particularly in the domain of political financing.

The last two days of the visit focused on the oversight of political financing, the use of public subsidies, various bans, or restrictions on the sources of financing and or expenditure along with associated sanctions. The discussions also highlighted role of information systems in the

supervision of political advertising and financing, including in ensuring cooperation with fiscal authorities and independent auditors.

The Commission intervened in the discussions held during the last day of the visit to learn of the discussions and the outcomes. The Commission emphasised the importance of such expert exchanges in the development and dissemination of best practices across the Member States and thanked the Romanian authorities for hosting the first meeting.

Participants expressed satisfaction for the opportunity to learn about each other's' electoral systems and to analyse the similarities and differences between the Romanian, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian electoral systems. Romanian experts noted that whilst the issues discussed during the meeting were far from being exhausted, the information collected in the exchange would feed into the future revisions of the Romanian electoral legal framework and electoral information systems.