

MINUTES

Fourteenth Meeting of the European Cooperation Network on Elections

21 September 2022

The fourteenth meeting of the European cooperation network on elections (ECNE) took place on 21 September 2022 and was chaired by Irena Moozova, Director for Equality and European Citizenship in the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST).

1. Welcome by Director Moozova.

Director Moozova welcomed the participants on behalf of the European Commission (COM).

2. Update on the legislative proposals regarding political advertising and electoral rights and other non-legislative proposals from the 2021 Democracy Package.

COM provided a brief update on the state of play regarding the proposal on the transparency and targeting of political advertising and the proposals to update the Council Directives on the electoral rights of mobile EU citizens. Concerning non-legislative initiatives, COM mentioned funding to promote democratic initiatives and participation of mobile citizens as part of Multi Annual Financial Framework (MFF) structure under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV).

3. Report on the use of the mechanism on electoral resilience.

COM briefly reiterated the scope of the Joint Mechanism for Electoral Resilience and indicated that the mechanism has been used for exchanges at expert level between Member States to make democracy stronger and more resilient. COM invited RO to present their use of this mechanism highlighting that it is the first use since the mechanism is existing. RO explained that the concrete and practical exchanges held under the mechanism will be useful in preparing the next national elections. LT intervened to mention the upcoming meeting using the mechanism in October.

4. Exchange of recent developments and best practices in electoral matters.

Several Member States intervened to present recent developments and best practices adopted to ensure transparent elections, increase participation and mitigate the challenges posed by the pandemic.

CZ introduced recent developments in elections, including the use of ICT, and announced upcoming municipal elections, elections to the Senate and presidential elections in January 2023. Special voting arrangements for voters with COVID-19 disease will not be used this year. An online application for an absentee voting card using the electronic identity will be piloted at the Senate elections. The card enables voting outside the constituency in which the voter is registered. CZ also added that the ministry of the interior has currently submitted a new legislative proposal to the government. The aim of the proposal is to unify and modernize the procedural and technical aspects of the elections in the CZ. This law will strengthen the computerization of elections.

DK introduced new assistive tools for persons with disabilities in their June 2022 referendum - a template for the visually impaired, including a magnifying glass and clear "yes" and "no" markers for the visually impaired.

SI revealed that due to COVID-19, alternative voting methods were developed, including early voting, voting at the polling stations outside the place of residence, voting from abroad by post or at the consular representative office. There is also a possibility to vote at home for sick and disabled persons. SI emphasized that at the end of August 2022 the SI ministry organized a conference for representatives of municipal election commissions to prepare them for the local elections. Training sessions were also organized for the secretaries of the electoral bodies to familiarize them with the new unified information system for supporting elections and referendums.

DE indicated that a working group based on the national cooperation network on elections and subsuming security authorities has been functioning intermittently since the last European Parliament elections in 2019.

SK intervened to explain the challenges ahead of the local and regional elections that will be held for the first time on the same day. This requires two different electoral commissions and has needed amendments to the electoral law. The concurrent elections also pose challenges to the voting process as it adds complications to the ballot casting and could result in some confusion for voters. The ballots for the different elections will be separated by colour. A new law has been prepared for COVID-19 practices, including alternative modes of voting for quarantined voters, such as mobile voting.

AT indicated importance of COVID-19-related electoral practices, such as postal voting. Authorities have adopted, among other practices, health measures and risk management measures. **AT** also explained the need to create a call centre providing information to voters about the electoral procedures, described the development of an e-learning tool for poll workers and mentioned the implications on elections of its new law of not differentiating between genders.

LV explained its open list electoral system where voters can either mark their preferred candidates with a plus or delete the ones they dislike. In terms of election management, the main focus of this year is on voter registration: the fundamental principle is that everyone must be able to vote at any polling station without any notice in advance. A similar principle is used in **NL**. Traditionally, the principle of "one person - one vote" was tested by putting an ink stamp on a paper internal passport. After the introduction of plastic identification cards, this possibility ceased to exist. Thus, it has been decided to create an online voter register.

5. Session on preparation for the 2024 European Parliament elections. Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation, joint cybersecurity tabletop exercise and other activities in the pipeline.

COM presented the new code of practice with double the number of signatories and more efficient implementation at the level of both EU and Member States. **COM** presented the past and future work on the joint cybersecurity tabletop exercise.

6. Session on election accessibility for persons with disabilities.

The European Disability Forum (**EDF**) introduced its advocacy and policy work on rights of persons with disabilities at EU level. Afterwards, **EDF** presented its 2022 Human Rights report as well as its mission to successfully implement the UN Convention on the right of persons with disabilities (UNCRPD).

COM referred the announcement, under the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, to create a guide of good electoral practices addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities, which will be prepared in close collaboration with Member States.

7. Reporting from the subgroup/joint expert team on the preparation of a competition of e-voting practices. **COM** provided an update on the work of the subgroup to prepare a compendium of e-voting practices.

8. AOB and closing remarks. Brazilian Superior Electoral Court presented measures taken in Brazil to fight disinformation in elections. They work very closely with the main platforms to make sure they have policies in place to fight disinformation. Brazil uses e-voting machines in elections.