## MINUTES

## 21st Meeting of the European cooperation network on elections

## 21 February 2024

## Hybrid (Brussels and online)

**1. Welcome by the Commission. Update on the 2021 Democracy Package proposals on political advertising and electoral rights.**

**COM** welcomed the participants and recapitulated the most recent policy developments and the topics covered during the previous ECNE meeting in December 2023.

The **Belgian Presidency of the Council** presented its policy priorities focusing on the work of the Working Party on General Affairs (GAG).

**2. Preparations for the Elections to the European Parliament**

*2.1 Recommendation on inclusive and resilient elections*

**COM** presented the key elements of the recommendation on inclusive and resilient elections published in December 2023 and the importance of the recommendation for the upcoming EP elections.

**DE** welcomed the recommendation and presented its recent efforts to enhance the inclusiveness of elections in Germany.

**HR** also welcomed the recommendation and reported on how the Croatian authorities plan to implement it.

**EE** welcomed the recommendation and reported about its efforts to further raise awareness on voting rights for persons with disabilities.

*2.2 Protecting information environment around elections including from disinformation.*

**COM** reminded the participants of the key challenges for elections with regard to the protection of the information environment. The Commission invited Member States to share insights into their communication activities in order to engage with citizens on this point.

The **European Digital Media Observatory** (EDMO) presented its fact-checking activities and its publications. EDMO will conduct a preliminary risk assessment with regard to the upcoming elections to the European Parliament. Closer to the elections, the task force will focus on a daily work to debunk and counter disinformation in order to inform the wider public.

**COM** presented the relevant elements on IT in the Recommendation on resilient and inclusive elections. COM also reported on the work under the Digital Services Act (DSA) which fully entered into force on February 17. During this year, a key priority is the mitigation of systemic risks for electoral processes. The current state of play on the Code of Conduct on Disinformation was also presented, including the working group on elections that has been established.

*2.3 Supporting voter turnout*

**EP** gave an overview of the institutional campaign for the elections to the European Parliament in June 2024. The main claim of the campaign is 'use your vote'. A broader advertising campaign will be launched closer to the elections to the European Parliament.

**COM** presented the work done to reach out to mobile EU citizens.

*2.4 Cyber security of elections*

**COM** informed about recent initiatives to strengthen the resilience of elections with regard to cybersecurity, in particular in the context of the NIS cooperation group and the Commission's recommendation on elections. It was announced that there will be an ECNE-NIS joint meeting in March. The NIS Cooperation Group is also working on updating the Compendium on the cybersecurity of elections.

*2.5 Election observation*

**OSCE/ODIHR** completed its needs assessment mission concerning the elections to the European Parliament and indicated that it will soon publish its report.

**BE, IE** and **HU** explained how election observation works in their respective national frameworks.

**3. Exchange on recent developments and best practices in electoral matters**

**EEAS** provided an update on the work of the Rapid Alert System (RAS), a tool for sharing information on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI). It supports capacity building and cooperation with Member States.

Regarding the national developments,

**IE** presented the role of its Election Commission in the context of two referendums being currently organised.

**LT** gave an overview of the main stages of the organisation of the upcoming presidential elections (12 May 2024).

**BE** reported on its preparations for and the challenges regarding regional, federal and European elections (June 2024) and local elections (October 2024).

**FI** reported on the successful conduct of the presidential elections (February 2024).

**PT** will organise early parliamentary elections. In this context it gave a comprehensive overview of available voting possibilities, communication campaigns, training, and election observation.

**SI** shared information on legislative changes to lift legislative barriers from voting of persons with disabilities and other improvements.

### 4. Commission post-election report

**COM** briefly presented the questionnaire to be prepared for the post-election report to be issued by the Commission as announced in the Recommendation on inclusive and resilient elections and invited Member States to provide input. The report should be published about a year after the elections to the European Parliament. This should allow to take into account the national analyses.

### 5. Work streams on campaign funding and on awareness raising on electoral integrity

**COM** reported back from a new working method of ECNE, i.e. online thematic sessions during the pre-election period. Two sessions took place so far, one on free, fair and resilient elections and free, another one on fair and inclusive elections.

**DK** proposed to invite candidate countries to join the ECNE meetings, considering that they would benefit from participation. **EE** and **FI** supported the idea.

**COM** took note of the request and mentioned possible options, subject to further confirmation.

### 6. Session chaired by Estonia on resilient ICT systems in elections

**EE** presented a case study of a hypothetical country where e-voting is used and reflected on different risk scenarios. EE will send a questionnaire on this topic to Member States. EE also reported on its own ICT solutions for e-voting.

### 7. Transparency of Political Advertising

**COM** provided state of play of the regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising and on provisions that will entry into force ahead of elections to the European Parliament

### 8. European Political Parties

**COM** presented the regulation which applies to European Political Parties (Regulation 1141/2014). It informed about the state of play of the interinstitutional negotiation on its recast.

The **Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations** presented the role of the Authority. It also informed about its work with regard to the EP elections.

### 9. AOB and closing remarks

**FI** reported on the meeting of the Joint mechanism for electoral resilience in Helsinki on 11/12 December 2023. Representatives from CZ, EE, RO and FI participated. The topics were disinformation, foreign interference and elections.

**EE** considered the exchange in Finland to be very valuable because of the multitude of perspectives.