



## MINUTES

### Eleventh Meeting of the European Cooperation Network on Elections

22 October 2021

The eleventh meeting of the European cooperation network on elections took place on 22 October 2021, chaired by Irena Moozova, Director for Equality and Union citizenship in the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST).

#### **1. Update on the implementation of the European Democracy Action Plan and the EU Citizenship Report 2020**

The Commission provided an update on the current state of play with regard to the European Democracy Action Plan and the EU Citizenship Report 2020. The Commission referred to the ongoing work on the proposal to update Directives 93/109/ EC and 94/80/EC on electoral rights of mobile EU citizens as well as a proposal for legislation on paid political advertising and funding of European political parties to facilitate transparency and oversight. The Commission explained that the results of the public consultations held showed an overall agreement on the need for action in these areas.

On the invitation of the Commission, Member States presented the latest developments of their electoral framework. **LV** used for the first time, in recently held local elections, an electronic voting register in connection to the possibility to vote at any polling station in the municipality. In **NL** an overhaul of the electoral law, which includes voting assistance arrangements, is underway.

The Commission announced that the joint mechanism for electoral resilience, a tool to support Member States in capacity building for election process resilience to various threats, will be available soon. It will work through joint expert teams and expert exchanges between Member States. Joint expert teams will address larger needs and include experts from several Member States covering several domains of expertise. Expert exchanges are small exchanges of up to four experts from two Member States on a specific type of threat and for a short duration. Meetings and exchanges can start as of the beginning of 2022. Short reports on the outcome of the discussions will be shared with the network.

**SI** shared its plans to develop a unified information system to facilitate the work of different electoral bodies and to provide for greater security and transparency, ahead of the elections to the national assembly, presidential elections and local elections that will take

place next year. NL showed interest in such a unified information system and agreed with SI to discuss bilaterally thereof.

SI also expressed interest in receiving expertise on the judicial protection of the right to vote, to use in preparation of new electoral legislation.

Furthermore, the Commission presented an outline of the work on a package of legislative and non-legislative measures regarding strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP), which are intended to intimidate, censor and silence critics by burdening them with the cost of legal defence. An ongoing public consultation on this topic will run until 10 January 2022.

## **2. Introductory presentation of the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations followed by an exchange of views**

Pascal Schonard, director of Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations (APPF), presented the APPF, which is active since 2017 and has registration, control and sanction competencies. APPF verifies if European political parties meet the criteria for registration (including being present in at least 7 Member States through national political parties) and access to EU funding. Most of APPF's work is monitoring that political parties spend EU funding in compliance with regulations. In case of a breach, the authority may impose sanctions. APPF's registry provides for transparency regarding parties' statutes, donations and contributions.

In 2019, a new verification procedure was introduced to protect the integrity of the European Parliament elections. This procedure prevents European political parties from taking advantage of infringements of data protection rules by a natural or legal person. It requires that national data protection authorities of the Member States inform APPF about any decision finding an infringement of data protection rules.

APPF currently cooperates bilaterally with Member States, but it would welcome a forum for multilateral exchanges.

## **3. Lessons learned in the implementation of projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of their national election networks**

**FI** and **SE** explained the implementation of their respective projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of their national election networks.

**FI** presented its Election Pool Project, which aims at strengthening preparedness and coordination in the administration to tackle election interference in all forms. Its objectives include e.g. gathering relevant information from regional and local authorities to create a platform ("pool of expertise"), as well as testing and disseminating good practices while enhancing cooperation between Member States. Representatives from FI, EE, DK, LT and LV have held an online discussion in the context of the project with representatives from social media platforms, to share experiences and build partnerships to deal with election interference. In addition, online meetings with other Member States' election authorities have been organised as part of the project. The project works well and it has contributed

to capacity building. Commitment from all actors involved is still a challenge and more training on possible risks and scenarios is required.

**SE** presented its project to evaluate, assess and establish a permanent national election cooperation network whose aim is primarily to protect the conduct of elections. The network also works to coordinate information to the public, provides training on elections to different national agencies (such as security forces), and identifies needs to recommend changes in legislation. The project has shown the importance of well-functioning coordination among authorities to tackle election interference. It has also shown the importance of training public employees on election related matters as elections do not take place very often and it can happen that for every new election there is new staff.

#### **4. RTD on Horizon programme democracy cluster**

The Commission (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (RTD)) explained the various funding opportunities that the Horizon Europe programme offers for research in topics related to democracy and democratic governance. These opportunities include, on the one hand, funding related to the so-called “second cluster” of the second pillar of the programme, related to culture, creativity and inclusive society and, on the other hand, funding managed by the European Research Council. Funding related to the “second cluster” is intended for transnational consortia (of at least three EEA Member States and/or associated countries) including academic researchers, think tanks, non-governmental organisations, public bodies and media actors, which may apply to a call for proposals. Regarding funding from the European Research Centre, the scientific community (from only one or several EEA Member States) is the one that proposes a specific project. Forthcoming Horizon Europe funding opportunities include a series of calls for proposals already published, two of which are particularly interesting for the network: “Representative democracy in flux” and “Future of democracy and civic participation”.

#### **5. New Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy**

The Joint Research Centre presented the newly created Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy, which started its activities on 6 October 2021. The aim of the new competence centre is to mainstream participatory and deliberative practices across the European Commission services. For that, it will use the same digital platform that is being used in the Conference on the Future of Europe. The competence centre relies on five pillars: guidance to policy makers, capacity building, knowledge repository, research and innovation in the democratic process and networking of participants.

#### **6. Closing remarks**

Director Mozoova closed the meeting and thanked all the participants and speakers for joining. The next meeting of the network is planned for January 2022. Member States are invited to volunteer for hosting workshops and seminars on e-voting and election accessibility for citizens with disabilities.