



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR JUSTICE AND CONSUMERS

Directorate C – Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy
Unit C.4 – Democracy, Anti-Corruption, Union Citizenship and Free Movement

MINUTES

Working Group of the European Cooperation Network on Elections

on Safety in Politics

26 November 2025

Online

The meeting of the European Cooperation Network on Elections (ECNE) working group on safety in politics took place on 26 November 2025.

Chairing the meeting COM welcomed the participants and explained that this meeting will kick-off the work of this working group.

Upcoming: The next working group meeting is scheduled for 29 January 2026. The meeting will focus on collecting best practice on awareness-raising and voluntary commitments, exchange best practice on data-collection and on understanding priorities concerning prevention.

Minutes

Introduction to the work on safety in politics

COM welcomed participants to the first meeting of the Working Group on Safety in Politics within the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections (ECNE). COM underlined that safety in politics is one of the key priorities of the European Democracy Shield aimed to better ensure the safety of political candidates and elected representatives. COM emphasises the need for a safe space for political participation as part of the key priorities of the European Democracy Shield, highlighting that the focus is on trust in public engagement and institutions, safeguarding democratic representation and ultimately the very foundation of democracy itself. COM will adopt a Recommendation, develop a Guide of best practices in the Member States with the help of this working group, and develop practical support measures and voluntary commitments and ethical standards in this field. Particular attention will be given to women and other groups at heightened risk of discrimination. COM will also hold focus groups with a wide range of stakeholders on the topic of safety in politics (including political parties, relevant membership organisations, NGOs, youth and women's organisations, academics and researchers) which will be open for the working group members to participate in.

COM presented issues at stake as reported in the Member States, noting the common concerns on the rising threats and undue pressure in political life, including polarisation on

topical problems. COM further reported about the work already done in the area on safety in politics, including in previous ECNE sessions. COM presented relevant existing EU instruments and practices in the Member States, upon which the Working Group will build upon. The exchange which followed demonstrated the priorities considered by the Member States to direct this work strand.

DK emphasised that the main concern at local level was harassment and online threats, including commenting on social media posts and targeting of family members. Offline threats include, e.g., vandalism of election posters.

NL explained that since 2014, when it started monitoring, there was an increase in violence against local politicians. NL noted that the impact was high on representation, particularly for women and individuals with a migrant background deterring potential candidates from to run for office. Offline incidents such as disruption or demonstration at local council meetings need to be considered as well. NL noted its support for the ECNE focus groups and best-practice exchanges, with a particular interest in local council and online platform threat management.

PT explained that while the risks in this area are at present considered low, it is important to be prepared and vigilant.

CZ reported about recent elections to the lower house of Parliament and stressed that in the course of the election campaign, as well as after the elections, an increase of hate speech particularly targeting women in politics was observed.

DE focused on cybersecurity and resilience for election processes, candidates and parties, especially in online media and communication systems.

MT pointed to parallel online and offline threats, affecting politicians, campaign staff and political parties, with smaller parties particularly vulnerable. They also noted online harassment, threats, cyber stalking, privacy invasion and threats, weaponization of fake news through manipulated images and fake narratives as pertinent challenges. The digital space has become a major source of vulnerability, particularly for women and electoral officials. Strengthening media literacy is essential, alongside the work of civil society organisations and local NGOs that promote digital safety, empowerment, and digital skills, contributing to greater representation and meaningful participation. Measures to enhance participation as political candidates, including among younger people, should be considered.

FI note that there is no specific national legislation, but authorities advise candidates to coordinate with the police and follow cybersecurity guidance. A key challenge for election officials is limited experience and a lack of data on the phenomenon. Media reports indicate that women politicians, in particular, are disproportionately exposed to hateful content.

CY stated that no increased risks have been identified so far, but concerns have been raised about social media platforms, particularly regarding risks faced by women. Other election-

related issues reported include the size of ballot papers and the way candidates' names are displayed on ballots. CY reported that there has been a reduction in candidate participation. Whilst recruiting candidates, including among younger people does not pose a challenge there is a marked decline in voter confidence.

HU noted that safety in politics does not fall within the remit of the national election office, currently participating as an observer in this working group.

LT noted that safety in politics is not systematically monitored, with particular concerns relating to online disinformation. There are also worries about declining political participation and public trust. Further research is needed and an EU Recommendation was expressly welcomed.

ES highlighted those online challenges, including cyberattacks against political parties and data theft, can significantly influence voting behaviour. During elections, federal and local authorities cooperate closely. Additional risks identified include unequal opportunities in the exercise of political rights.

HR stressed that officials in state positions and political candidates enjoy a high level of protection. No major challenges related to safety in politics have been reported, although a few isolated incidents have occurred. In the area of counterterrorism, HR highlighted challenges related to disinformation and has assumed responsibility for addressing hybrid threats and foreign interference. A dedicated department for online counterterrorism has been established. During the most recent election in HR, there was a rise in disinformation, including political manipulation, doxing, and hate speech, with disproportionate impacts on women and migrants.

PT highlighted the interplay between safety in politics, a healthy political environment, and broader geopolitical challenges, alongside concerns about online threats such as disinformation, conspiracy theories, and digital manipulation.

Working methods

COM explained the process of the development of the Guide of best practices in the Member States. COM invited Member States to indicate their priority topics for upcoming meetings and to provide feedback on the focus groups. JUST also asked Member States to share their views on the intended beneficiaries of any voluntary commitments. A Q&A with Member States followed.