

Informal subgroup / joint expert team on the preparation of a compendium of e-voting practices

Meeting of 7 June 2022 - Minutes

Online meeting: TEAMS

1. Opening and administrative points

The draft agenda was adopted without comments.

2. Nature of the meeting

The meeting of the expert group was non-public.

3. List of points discussed

3.1. Opening

The Commission (COM) welcomed participants and briefly presented the agenda for the second meeting of the informal subgroup / joint expert team on the preparation of a compendium of e-voting practices.

3.2. Roundtable on discussion paper on e-voting by Prof. Dr. Robert Krimmer

COM introduced a discussion paper on e-voting prepared by Prof. Dr. Robert Krimmer. COM explained that the intention of the discussion paper is to provide background to support the discussion on the essential elements to consider. Experts were invited to discuss the following points.

- 3.2.1. How could the main forms of e-voting – optical scanners, direct-recording electronic voting machines, Internet voting, and any mixed forms – be covered in the most feasible way?

One Member State commenced a feasibility study to explore this matter. The relevant Member State expert considers it would be useful if the compendium included how Member States have introduced technology in the electoral process respecting international standards. Another Member State expert spoke about a central authority supervised system that collects information on all the candidates and is electronically available in all polling stations.

- 3.2.2. How can a needs-based approach be developed?

One Member State expert referred to voters abroad and voters with disabilities as the two groups most needing e-voting. Another Member State expert acknowledged that there is a lack of analysis on a needs-based approach and that e-voting only increased participation of voters abroad.

- 3.2.3. How can verifiability add to the conduct of elections?

One Member State expert raised issues with verification on smart devices and spoke about a separate registration service whereby ballots could be checked afterwards. The same Member State expert emphasised the need for universal verification of some kind to be built into the system. Another Member State expert elaborated on the processes in selecting independent

auditors, producing universal verification reports as well as individual verification reports whereby an individual can check an individual vote against a hash code.

3.2.4. How can election technologies be introduced responsibly?

One Member State expert advised consulting stakeholders in a feasibility study with responsibility resting with an election management body. Another Member State expert referred to programming systems for voting abroad whereby an email would issue to voters to go to a polling station if their envelope did not arrive in time. The same Member State expert also spoke about developing software for the nomination of political parties, code source platforms and online training. A blockchain solution and QR codes where eligibility to vote could be verified in online registration was discussed. Another Member State expert referred to a step-by-step approach where digitalisation could be introduced on sub-processes and then expanded to more municipalities.

3.2.5. How to ensure transparency in the use of e-voting?

One Member State expert referred to public procurement at software level which anyone can try out afterwards. Member States experts agreed that reliance on auditors and observers is important to ensure transparency.

3.2.6. How can the impact of e-voting be measured, including voter turnout, or the cost in comparison to traditional paper voting?

One Member State expert mentioned research conducted since 2005 which shows that e-voting is gender and age neutral and does not actually increase participation, other than voters abroad. Another Member State expert agreed that it is difficult to measure these costs and standard rules for Member States is needed.

3.2.7. How to ensure that voters with special needs benefit from the introduction of e-voting?

One Member State has consulted disability organisations to develop usable technology, including support for i-tracking and taking into account security issues without favouring e-voting over the traditional ballot.

3.2.8. How can voters living abroad best benefit from the introduction of e-voting? How can voting be enabled on mobile devices?

One Member State expert discussed the current difficulties with smart devices including tablets. The voter identification system is broken and control lost by having to go to App stores/Apple/Google.

3.3. Proposed way forward to prepare the compendium of e-voting practices

COM explained its proposed way forward to prepare the compendium and experts had the opportunity to express their views.

In particular, COM proposed a structure for the compendium that includes the following sections (1) executive overview; (2) terminology and abbreviations; (3) increasing interest on e-voting solutions; (4) relevant international standards for e-voting; (5) e-voting practices in the EU. COM proposed that experts from Member States prepare contributions describing their e-voting and information and communications technology (ICT) practices. EE (internet voting), BE (e-voting machines) and LV (vote scanning) confirmed their willingness to prepare contributions for the compendium. BE highlighted how quickly electronic software

and machines can become out-dated and so, the compendium should not be too detailed in that regard.

COM proposed to refer to practices other than voting and counting to offer comprehensive solutions in the compendium (i.e. other ICT solutions in the electoral process). COM will reach out to other experts within the subgroup to invite them to prepare further contributions.

COM mentioned a list of elements that contributions could touch upon: (1) short description of e-voting solution; (2) applicable regulatory framework; (3) description of software architecture/system and application configuration/ technology used; (4) testing methodology; (5) functional and operational flow; (6) communication campaign/awareness raising, including building trust and confidence of voters; (7) how it serves to address accessibility for persons with disabilities and older persons; (8) compliance with data protection requirements; (9) how much the Recommendations on e-voting of the Council of Europe (2017) are taken into account; and (9) threats and vulnerabilities identified and measures for mitigation.

It was agreed that experts from Member States preparing contributions will send a draft (5-7 pages long) by mid-July, with the possibility to extend the deadline until mid-August. These contributions will be peer reviewed by other members of the subgroup by September. For this, the collaborative space in TEAMS could be used.

3.4. Summary of contribution on Estonian internet voting system

EE presented what their contribution to the compendium could include, taking into account the different elements proposed by COM.