



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR JUSTICE AND CONSUMERS

Unit C4: Democracy, Anti-Corruption, Union Citizenship and Free Movement

## MINUTES

### 32<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the European Cooperation Network on Elections

29 September 2025

Hybrid

The thirty-second meeting of the European Cooperation Network on Elections (ECNE) took place on 29 September 2025.

#### **Welcome by the Commission and state of play of different work strands**

**COM** welcomed the participants and emphasised ECNE's work carried out since 2019, but also the network's strategic objectives in the context of the forthcoming European Democracy Shield. Moving forward, more in-depth exchanges will be encouraged through new ECNE working groups, such as the one recently launched on AI in Electoral Processes. Other working groups will focus on election integrity, safety in political life and political campaigning, with the aim of sharing best practices and exploring potential action at the European level.

#### **Updates from the Commission**

##### ***Political advertising***

**COM** hailed Regulation (EU) 2024/900 as a landmark piece of legislation, which provides EU common standards on transparency and accountability of political advertising services and will contribute to a higher resilience of the EU electoral system to information manipulation and interference, in support of free and fair electoral processes.

**COM** highlighted the adopted Implementing Regulation on the format, template and technical specifications of the labels and transparency notices of political advertisements, the work on the preparation of Guidance to support the implementation of the Regulation and further developments related to the Repository for online political advertisements, the portal on election dates and the portal linking national websites on the registered legal representatives of providers of political advertising services established outside the EU.

**COM** also explained that it actively engages with online platforms to provide clarity on the regulatory framework and intends to establish a new expert group of service providers linked to political ads and conduct regular dialogue with key entities including sponsors.

Several MS (**EE, IE, LT, NL, SE, SI**) raised concerns over new service policies of certain online platforms which might pre-empt election authorities from advertising elections/running "go to vote" campaigns.

### ***Roundtables in the context of the DSA***

**COM** underlined the importance of the regularly organised election roundtables (Roundtables), which are facilitated by **COM** in the context of the DSA. At the request of Member States, the roundtables are organised ahead of elections, with very large online platforms and search engines (VLOPSEs), the Digital Service Coordinators (DSCs) and competent Member State authorities. They help with the preparations of elections by focusing on online protections, issuing recommendations, publishing and documenting best practices and creating synergies beyond elections.

**COM** underlined a shared interest of several MS related to potential roundtables with broader participation.

### ***Disinformation and FIMI in electoral processes in EU candidate countries***

**COM** explained that democratic institutions and processes – including elections held in the Member States and candidate countries - have been major FIMI targets. To maintain situational awareness and coordinate more effectively with all Member States and Institutions, **COM** plans to reinforce the Rapid Alert System (RAS) by upgrading its analytical methodology and introducing new tools and frameworks, as well as developing a new platform.

**COM** also provided an overview of cross-cutting trends shaping the threat landscape for democratic resilience across EU candidate countries and potential candidates focusing on electoral integrity risks and electoral disinformation challenges.

**COM** finally stressed that strengthening integrity and democratic resilience in these countries represents a strategic investment for the EU, as attacks on democracy are attacks on the EU.

### ***Use of AI in electoral processes***

**COM** provided updates from the new ECNE working group on AI in electoral processes launched in September 2025.

### ***Exchanges on recent developments and practices in elections***

**FI** shared their experience with concurrent county and municipal elections held on 13 April 2025 and provided insights into the public debate over number of invalid votes in simultaneous elections.

**IE** provided an overview on the preparations for the presidential elections pointing out that the implementation of the rules on political advertising will be challenging.

**CZ** noted that postal voting used for the first time only for voters abroad, based on prior voter registration at the embassy or consulate. Digital identification of the voters was also used, for the first time. Voters do not receive ballot papers, but they must download and print them out.

**HR** presented their experience in the recently conducted local elections, expounding on the election procedures, materials and facilities used. Sign language was used to improve accessibility and communication efforts focused on specific groups of voters, such as young voters. Elections were challenging because of the high number of constituencies, election participants and repeat elections. **HR** plans to introduce new technologies, review the electoral legislation and implement a virtual assistant- chatbot.

**NL**'s presentation focused on early election planning. A new voting ballot will be tested in 5 municipalities, as there is no upscaling yet for universal use. To reinforce election resilience,

NL organises table-top exercises on threat analysis, provides safety briefings and holds hackathons with researchers and developers on how to use OSINT to protect elections. A report prepared by academics on how Member States organise early elections is published by the Ministry of the Interior. NL will hold municipal elections on March 2026 and invites ECNE members to a visitors' programme around these elections (17-19 March 2026).

RO shared insights on practical arrangements addressing the different risks and challenges to election integrity in the context of the 2025 Presidential elections, including information manipulation, disinformation and inauthentic behaviour online. These arrangements included a dedicated taskforce (30 people) to monitor online campaigning, specific communication channels and swift reactions to complaints.

PT reported on the use of postal voting in the parliamentary elections of 18 May 2025 and explained voting arrangements for the 12 October local elections. 302 administrative units were reconstituted, strengthening local representation. Regarding the 2026 presidential elections, PT noted that 153 consular posts will serve voters abroad, which constitute 15% of the electorate.

### **Safety in political life**

COM outlined that a new action on better protecting the safety of political candidates and elected representatives has been mandated by Commissions' Political Guidelines and by Commissioner McGrath and announced that a dedicated ECNE working group will be launched on the topic.

IT presented the National Observatory on the Phenomenon of Intimidation Against Local Administrators which was established to analyse and address the issue of intimidation faced by local authorities in Italy. Following the initial decree in 2015, definitive frameworks were outlined by subsequent laws in 2017 and 2018, establishing a Technical Body and a Working Group to support the Observatory's functions. The Working Group has been particularly active in launching awareness initiatives and providing local administrators with the necessary resources to combat intimidation. These initiatives included collaboration with prefectures in various Italian regions to organize meetings, training sessions, and conferences involving local administrators, law enforcement, and other stakeholders. These efforts also extended to educational institutions through a pilot project aimed at upper secondary school students, which focused on raising awareness about the role and challenges of local public institutions and fostering student engagement through active citizenship.

### **KL - Local Government Denmark (KL) is the association of the 98 Danish municipalities.**

The mission of KL is to safeguard common interests of the municipalities, assist individual municipalities with consultancy services, and ensure that the local authorities are provided with up-to-date and relevant information. Danish authorities assessed the threat landscape against local councillors in 2023, which evidenced increased polarisation, and the development of conspiracy theories linked to political positions which combined lead to increased threats against elected representatives. KL conducted a survey among local councillors confirming that they are increasingly subjected to harassment, threats, vandalism and violence compared to earlier years. KL presented a Guide from 2023 produced in collaboration between the Ministry of the Interior and Health, Local Government Denmark (KL), Danish Regions, the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET), and the National Police. It contains concrete advice and recommendations on how to prevent and handle harassment, threats, vandalism and violence. The guide is an update of the previous guidelines from 2006 and 2018 and provides

an up-to-date overview of the legal provisions that offer support to politicians. Denmark also developed a support hotline for candidates and elected representatives.

NL noted that there is a worrying increase in aggression and intimidation against local politicians and public officials, as highlighted by their Integrity Monitor and Safety 2024 report. Much of this hostility occurs online, where hate and intimidation are most common. Female politicians, in particular, face more online abuse and threats compared to their male colleagues. In addition, NL reported that police reports are decreasing. For these reasons, in 2018 NL formed the “network on resilient governance” composed by – 30 partners in politics and governance and safety experts, with the goal of enhancing resilience through cooperation. It developed several support instruments to increase awareness and preparedness, making the homes of local politicians safer and support individuals after incidents. The Network also developed a support package for online aggression. NL have expressed interest in further discussion with Member States on the topic.

### **Support to Youth participation – EU funded projects**

COM addressed the participation of young people in elections and democratic processes in general and underlined that the upcoming European Democracy Shield will have a dedicated focus on boosting societal resilience and citizens engagement, including youth engagement.

COM noted that COM’s co-funded projects operate as a critical engine for encouraging and strengthening the active participation of young people and introduced two EU-funded projects under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV) focused on enhancing citizen engagement in our democratic processes.

The “EU HAVE A DREAM”, an innovative project connecting youth and citizens across Europe through participatory theatre and debates on EU policies was presented by the project’s organisations - Fondazione Fitzcarraldo and Stranaidea.

The YOU-POD project, that engages around 100 students from three high schools in Trento (Italy), Mouchard (France), and Łódź (Poland) in activities focused on the European Union, new media literacy, and youth participation in democratic life was presented by the Antonio Megalizzi Foundation.

### **AOB and closing remarks**

COM called on ECNE members to use the new online workspace as a helpful channel to communicate about future meetings and topics. The next ECNE meeting will be held in hybrid format on 1 December 2025 after which an in-person meeting will be held in Brussels at the end of February 2026.

COM announced additional 2026 ECNE meetings in the second half of April, towards the end of May, early July, end of September and end of November.