



MINUTES
Fourth Meeting of the European Cooperation Network on Elections
7 June 2019

The meeting was chaired by Irena Moozova, Director for Equality and Union citizenship in Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers.

1. Opening session

Director Moozova welcomed the participants at the fourth meeting of the European cooperation network on elections (ECN), dedicated to exchanging first impressions on the conduct of elections to the European Parliament and the specific ways the election package contributed to the process, as well as to exchanging views on how the cooperation can be continued.

Renate Nikolay, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Jourová, provided a summary of the initiatives undertaken in preparation for the elections, and conveyed that in the following week COM will adopt a Communication which will provide an initial assessment after the elections, and which will serve to inform the European Council meeting on 20-21 June. The Communication will be followed by a more detailed post-election report, to be issued in the fall. Ms Nikolay stressed the need to continue with the close cooperation both among authorities, and with the EU level, and in that context invited the Member States to keep their level of engagement with the Commission.

2. Exchange of views with the European Parliament

Representatives of the EP shared their initial assessment of the conduct of the 2019 elections, and conveyed that their conduct allows the conclusion that election results are valid and not subject of any manipulation or cyber-attacks. They stressed the relevance of the work carried out by the ECN in securing free and fair European elections.

EP elaborated on concrete initiatives undertaken prior to the elections, including in terms of fighting disinformation. The EP welcomed the strong cooperation achieved with COM in this regard, and stressed the importance to continue building on this cooperation among the institutions, as well as with the Member States. The EP recognizes there is space for optimization for the next elections, for instance when it comes to the publication of official results.

3. Update on foreign direct investment screening

COM presented the recently adopted FDI Screening Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of March 19, 2019 (which will enter into application in October 2020). As the Regulation in particular refers to electoral infrastructure as one of the factors against which to determine whether a foreign direct investment is likely to affect security or

public order, it is of particular relevance to the ECN. Contact points on the national level for the implementation of the FDI Screening Regulation will be appointed.

MS were invited to engage with the relevant contact points for the implementation of this regulation on the national level and consider including them in their national networks, to ensure maximum synergy among all the relevant initiatives.

4. Exchange of views with the Presidency

The Romanian Presidency presented a follow-up on the developments in the Council on the topic of securing free and fair elections, including on disinformation. Concerns were voiced by several MS over the lack of proper communication and lack of willingness for cooperation of social media platforms, while acknowledging the value of exchanges on disinformation on the EU level.

As the incoming Presidency, FI shared its plans for furthering the Council agenda on securing free and fair elections. It welcomed the ECN and praised the value it adds to strengthening coordination among Member States. It highlighted its Conference on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights to be held 10-11 September in Helsinki, as well as a conference on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the entry into force of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in Brussels in November. The priorities of the Presidency will be presented in Strasbourg on 3 July.

5. Reflections by Member States

MS were invited to share views on the steps undertaken in preparation for the elections and lessons learned which could inform actions for the future, as a first exchange of views on the implementation of the Election package, and along the lines of the questionnaire for the post-election report on the conduct of the 2019 European elections.

5.1. Election cooperation networks

Member States elaborated on their national election networks, and the activities undertaken. The level of formalization of cooperation within the national networks differs among Member States. One national taskforce follows a whole-government approach and includes civil society representatives. This informal network has conducted a number of exercises, with plans for future development and potentially for the establishment of a formal basis of cooperation on the national level. Some other Member States are also considering a more formal structure, or institutionalization of the established cooperation.

The national network in one Member State created useful links between authorities and relevant actors, helped to identify areas of improvement, and adopted a national action plan covering the areas indicated by the COM package. In another, the election package prompted the authorities to conduct a national mapping of the complex allocation of responsibilities in the electoral domain. Most national networks have incorporated the contact point for the Rapid Alert System (RAS), while in some the contact point is the same for both the RAS and the ECN.

Member States also called for more exchanges of information between MS using the existing channels, and for the organization of joint risk assessment workshops. In some Member States, cooperation with political actors

was also established. Legislative proposals are being considered by some Member States. Several Member States have pointed out that the network has already been used for elections other than those to the European Parliament.

5.2. Protection of personal data

An exchange was held on measures undertaken to ensure compliance with data protection rules. COM recalled the Guidance issued as part of the election package, as well as those issued by some national data protection bodies. The ECN will continue building on all the exchanges held so far with the relevant interlocutors, including the European Data Protection Board and Supervisor, the national data protection agencies and the Authority for European political parties and foundations.

5.3. Online transparency

A discussion was held on the legal framework for transparency in political advertising and related initiatives, and on the engagement with relevant stakeholders such as media actors and political parties. Some MS pointed out that platforms did not deliver on their commitments and pointed to the difficulties in establishing direct contact.

5.4. Fighting disinformation campaigns

EEAS presented the latest developments with regard to the RAS, while COM provided an update on the implementation of the Code of Practice. Member States took stock of the actions undertaken to combat disinformation, including in terms of awareness-raising and with regard to the interlinkages with the Rapid Alert System.

5.5. Democratic participation and the rights of EU citizens

COM noted the efforts it has been undertaking to support the participation of citizens, including by providing grants to projects across the Union which aimed at driving up turnout in the elections to the EP.

Several Member States pointed out that issues like double voting were being used to undermine trust in the democratic system. It was mentioned that it might be beneficial to look into the potential synergies between the European cooperation network and the Expert group on electoral matters.

5.6. Protection against cybersecurity incidents

A positive assessment was shared of the cybersecurity aspects of the elections. A short discussion was held on the main takeaways and possible follow-ups of the cybersecurity preparedness exercise held in connection with the European network meeting on 5 April, which also provided added value to MS.

6. Closing session/AOB

A brief exchange of ideas was held on future cooperation within the network. COM will inform about next meetings in due time.