



Democracy, disinformation and the European Democracy Action Plan

Digital transformation of our democracies and socio-economic life: the current challenges

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Context

Democratic participation, empowerment and inclusion



- *Europeans are increasingly making use of their electoral rights*
- *The turnout in the 2019 elections to the European Parliament reached a 25-year high*

Voter turnout in the European parliamentary election (2004 – 2019)



Source: European Parliament in collaboration with Kantar

#EU4Citizens

Justice
and Consumers

Context

- Together with the rule of law and fundamental rights, democracy is a **key value of the European Union. It needs to be nurtured and protected.**
- The Commission President's political guidelines committed to **a new push for European democracy.**
- Importance of promoting a **healthy** and plural political debate on the basis of respect and high standards. Importance of media **freedom and pluralism.**
- **Citizens** should be able to participate in the democratic debate, freely **express their views** and **inform themselves** from transparent and pluralistic sources.
- Recent events have further highlighted the need for actions to strengthen the resilience of our democracies and address vulnerabilities and the vectors for interference.
- In the past, campaign were mailing door-to-door, meetings, leaflets, TV, radio. With the digital transition=> new possibilities and unprecedented means to reach out to people, to tailor messages to personal interests, to advocate for ideas boundaries.

=> New actors eg social medias, data processing companies.

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Challenges

- The digital revolution in media and other services has created **unprecedented opportunities for democracies** and significantly reduced distance/barriers for interaction with citizens.
- It also created new and complex challenges and threats to elections :
 - line between genuine information and political campaigning is increasingly blurred;
 - cyberattacks;
 - practical obstacles to vote:
 - opaque interference, disinformation, increased risks of manipulations of the electoral behaviour in a covert way including and exploitation of specific vulnerabilities;
 - fragmentation of the political debate, less exposure to a plurality of views etc.

Challenges

=> affects the integrity and fairness of the democratic debate and electoral process, citizens' trust in elected representatives and in institutions as such.

- Specific vulnerabilities during election periods but also beyond.

=> collective responsibility to protect and defend democracy.

European democracy Action Plan



European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP), adopted in December 2020

- Policy actions to promote free and fair elections, protect journalists, fight disinformation and protect freedom of speech.
- Promotes civic engagement and active participation beyond elections.
- Measures to protect our democratic systems.
- Address areas in which our systems and citizens are most vulnerable, to make our societies more resilient and better prepared for the challenges of the future.

Key actions

Centred around individual rights and freedoms, transparency and accountability.

I. Protecting the integrity of elections and promoting democratic participation

- More transparency for political ads
- Clearer rules on the financing of European political parties
- More cooperation in the EU to ensure free and fair elections
- More participation and engagement beyond elections
- Mechanism for electoral resilience (cooperation between Member States)

Key actions

II. Strengthening media freedom and media pluralism

- Action to protect and empower journalists across the EU
 - Increased safety of journalists (Recommendation issued in 2021)
 - Framing strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) and establishing an expert Group (<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=3746>)
 - High professional media and journalistic standards
 - More support for media pluralism

III. Countering misinformation, disinformation, information influence operations and foreign interference

- Strengthened EU and Member State capacity to address disinformation
- Appropriate and effective instruments to impose costs on disinformation
- Stronger obligations and accountability of online platforms
- Increasingly empowered citizens (media literacy, awareness raising)
- Support for civil society

European Democracy Action Plan in action: some examples

- Anti-SLAPP package, adopted April 2022
- The Electoral package, launched Nov 2021
- Actions in the framework of European Cooperation Network on Elections



Recommendation

on protecting journalists and human rights defenders who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive courts proceedings

=> Journalists, human rights defenders

COMMISSION ANTI-SLAPP PACKAGE

Most efficient way to fight SLAPP and prevent it from growing roots in the EU is a combination of:

- Legislative measures: targeted legislation proposed (**Directive**) consisting of procedural safeguards against SLAPP in cross-border civil proceedings
- Non-legislative measures (**Commission Recommendation to Member States**) focusing on training, awareness raising, support to targets and monitoring; applies to all proceedings (civil, criminal and administrative)
- Evidence on SLAPPs is provided in a **Staff Working Document** accompanying the initiative

=> Right balance between fundamental rights.

Main elements of the SLAPP Recommendation

The recommendation covers all types of cases (civil, criminal, administrative) and both domestic and cross-border cases



Review of applicable frameworks



Training



Awareness raising



Support mechanisms



Data collection, reporting and monitoring



Assessment

EU 2020 CITIZENSHIP report

- Democracies depend on their citizens' participation.
- COM will among others
 - update of the rules on voting rights of mobile EU citizens in municipal and EU elections.
 - Support elections observation.



4 priority areas



Democratic participation, empowerment and inclusion



Facilitating free movement and simplifying daily life



Protecting and promoting EU citizenship



Protecting EU citizens in times of crises



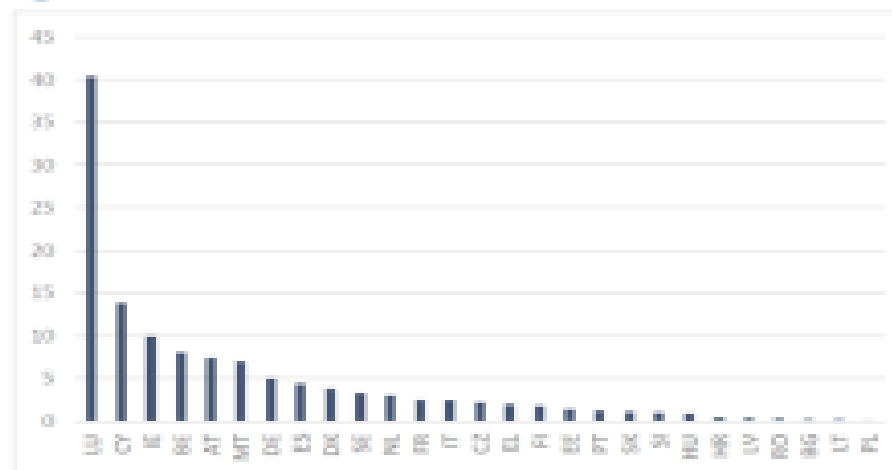
The Electoral package of November 2021

- A Chapeau communication on protecting election integrity and promoting democratic participation
- A proposal to Recast the Regulation on the statute and funding of the European political parties and European political foundations
- A proposal for a Regulation on the **transparency and targeting of political advertising**
- Two proposals **recasting the Directives on the electoral rights of mobile EU citizens**

“mobile EU citizens”?

*More than **13.5 million mobile EU citizens** (like a mid-sized MS)*

*Around **12 million** have the **right to vote and stand as a candidates** in municipal elections and elections to the European Parliament in their Member State of residence*



Source: [Cotling](#), pp. 42-43, based on 2017 Eurostat data.

Share of non-national EU citizens of voting age in the total electorate (%)

Today, the share of mobile EU citizens in the overall voting population varies greatly from one Member State to another. It is by far the highest in Luxembourg (40.4 %) and the lowest in in Poland (0.09 %). In Cyprus, Ireland, Belgium, Austria and Malta, the share of non-national EU citizens of voting age is also considerable, corresponding to between 7 and 14 % of the electorate.

Proposal for a Regulation on transparency of political advertising

- **Different EU rules** (including GDPR and e-Commerce/DSA) already relevant.
- Targeted legislative initiative to complement them.
- Twofold objective:
 - to contribute to the **proper functioning of the internal market** for political advertising and related services by laying down rules for a high level of transparency for political advertising and related services
 - to **protect natural persons** with regard to the processing of personal data by laying down rules on the use of targeting and amplification in the context of political advertising that involve the use of personal data.

Transparency of political advertising: key elements

- Targeted intervention **complementing different relevant EU rules.**
- Contributing to the proper functioning of the internal market (fragmentation, traditional rules not adapted to developments on technology and campaigning, easy circumvention etc).
- Protecting natural persons.
- Broad definition of political advertising (also issue based ads).
- **Transparency requirements on providers of political ads services.**
- Requirements applying to anyone **processing personal data for political ads => targeting and amplification techniques.**
- Explicit obligations on European Political Parties.

European Cooperation Network on elections

- Started in 2019
- [European cooperation network on elections | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-cooperation-network-on-elections.ec.europa.eu/)
- Regular meetings of contact points from Member States' national networks on elections facilitated by the Commission.
- Facilitates the swift, secure exchange of information on issues capable of affecting elections. Broad range of topics.
- Provides a forum for sharing expertise and best practices (eg elections in Covid time) including on threats, gaps and enforcement.

Compendium on e-voting practices

- The Commission announced in EDAP and the disability strategy a compendium on e-voting practices, which should also address elements of disinformation and accessibility for persons with disabilities.
- The compendium is being prepared in the framework of European Cooperation Network and in close collaboration with the Council of Europe.
- The compendium collects best practices on e-voting.

A joint mechanism for electoral resilience

- As of 2022, a joint mechanism for electoral resilience is organised and coordinated through the **European Cooperation Network on Elections**.
- Available to Member States as a **capacity-building tool** to support the exchange of expertise in areas such as **disinformation, cybersecurity, and online forensics**.

Enhancing inclusion and participation

- **Participation** is **key to building trust** in institutions and strengthening democracy as a whole.
- To make European elections more inclusive, the Commission works on improving **accessibility** and inclusiveness for elections to the European Parliament.
- Eg post elections report and disability strategy 2021-2030.

Conference of the Future of Europe

- A ground breaking deliberative democracy exercise
- 49 proposals of the Conference on the Future of Europe presented to the EU institutions' Presidents on 9th May
- Discussions about democracy focused on citizens' participation in policy-making and the need for more awareness about the EU



Climate change and the environment



Health



A stronger economy, social justice and jobs



EU in the world



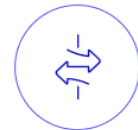
Values and rights, rule of law, security



Digital transformation



European democracy



Migration



Education, culture, youth and sport



Other ideas

New research?

What about?

- Issues affecting the resilience and reliability of electoral systems (interferences in elections processes and democratic debate).
- Ensuring a fair and plural democratic debate. How can technology help?
- Democracy in crisis time (health and other crisis) => free and fair elections.
- Impact of technological developments/new technologies on democracies (design, use, access etc.).
- Technologies to boost democratic participation including turnout.
- Technologies and democratic interactions with citizens (means, challenges, non-discrimination, digital literacy, complexity of issues etc).
- Decision making process in democracies.
- Inclusive democracy (underrepresented groups, how to make sure that no one is left behind).

Thank you



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