



SPECIAL ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION European Parliament Elections, 6-9 June 2024

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The 2024 European Parliament elections, held across 27 EU Member States with over 361 million registered voters, were genuinely competitive and professionally organized by national authorities, with fundamental freedoms respected. The elections took place amidst growing political polarisation and a backdrop of increased security and cost of living concerns. While the diverse national legal frameworks generally provide a sound basis for the conduct of democratic elections, differences in voting and candidacy rights across Member States created unequal conditions for universal suffrage. A largely subdued election campaign, including in the media, also saw some instances of political violence and threats both against politicians and journalists. Positively, new EU legislation addresses the growing threat of disinformation, but oversight and implementation need strengthening as incidents were widespread in the campaign. To form a fully inclusive body, under-represented groups would benefit from increased commitment and more initiatives, both at the European and national levels. Most Member States do not provide full access for both citizen and international observation, which decreases transparency of the electoral process.

The legal framework for the European Parliament elections is diverse, with European Union (EU) Member States adopting national laws and regulations on most aspects. Despite this diversity, some broad EU-wide common rules for the elections exist, including proportional representation, thresholds, and positions are incompatible with the mandate of a Member of the European Parliament. While national laws generally provide a sound basis for respecting fundamental civil and political rights and conduct of democratic elections, different conditions for voting and candidacy rights create unequal circumstances for universal suffrage. Attempts to harmonize electoral legislation at the European level have been made but have not yet materialized.

The elections were organized by national bodies of EU Member States in a professional and effective manner and election administrators generally enjoyed a high level of public confidence. Some logistical challenges were noted by the organizing authorities, in particular where parallel elections took place or new legislation was recently implemented. Stakeholders acknowledged the benefits of co-operation between Member States, notably with the exchange of data on voters and candidates. Measures on cybersecurity both at national and European levels enhanced the level of preparedness of the electoral authorities against potential attacks. Some ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission (SEAM) interlocutors favoured increased harmonization of electoral rules and practices but at the national level there were also some reservations in this regard. Voting methods and possibilities among Member States varied significantly, creating unequal conditions for EU citizens across Member States. To increase turnout in the elections, the Parliament conducted an extensive and inclusive voter education campaign and recommended to introduce complementary voting methods.

Some 361 million voters were registered to vote for the elections. However, restrictions on voting rights in many Member States in relation to legal incapacity based on mental disability, and for prisoners, persist. While no concerns regarding the accuracy of voter lists were raised, increased co-operation and harmonization of voter registration timelines at the EU level could be helpful to enhance data sharing on mobile EU citizens and to prevent the potential for double voting. There was a lack of awareness about rules for registration and voting among mobile EU citizens.

The elections were competitive, with some 530 party and independent lists registered in an inclusive manner including more than 16,000 candidates, offering voters a wide choice of genuine political

alternatives. Contrary to international standards and commitments, many Member States do not permit independent candidates. Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, in some countries, a voter may only sign in support of one list for registration, and differing signature collection and deposit requirements created unequal campaign conditions across Member States. On the European level, efforts to harmonize rules for candidate registration in terms of voting age, binding gender quotas and other measures have not progressed. Combined with the limited use of temporary special measures, and other incentives, this does not ensure the election of a fully inclusive body. At the same time, political parties often promoted internal policies to increase the participation of underrepresented groups, notably women and youth.

Overall, the campaign was competitive, although low-key in most countries. EUPPs widely discussed potential coalitions following the elections, not limited to but in relation to the appointment of the EU commission and the possible impact of far-right parties. Fundamental freedoms were upheld, though regrettably instances of political violence occurred. In the conduct of the campaign, including digital discourse, some subjects, notably, migration became divisive. Several high-level EU officials continued to campaign actively, while not resigning from their official duties, raising questions about potential misuse of administrative resources and the lack of sufficient regulation of the use of EU resources in the campaign. Throughout the elections, concerns about possible foreign interference, disinformation, and cyber threats were prominent. Positively, the Digital Services Act was introduced, enabling for the first time more oversight of the online platforms and their fulfilment of the obligation to mitigate risks associated with electoral processes and provide transparency in political advertising and labelling. Nevertheless, ongoing worries concerning the oversight of campaign advertising practices and harmful rhetoric on less scrutinized platforms remained.

Women are fairly well represented in political and public life but are yet to reach gender equality aspired to in the EU Gender Equality Strategy, and the level of women's representation varies considerably between Member States. Five out of the 10 lead candidates put forward by European parties were women, and some 30 per cent of candidates for the elections were women, but a lack of political commitment, effective mechanisms to guarantee women's representation and derogatory campaign discourse and attacks negatively impacted women's participation.

Most Member States ratified international instruments protecting the rights of minorities, but challenges remain for implementation of election-related provisions. Access to language rights and their exercise is varied, and limitations on election-related materials being only available in the state languages in some Member States contravene international standards. Efforts to include under-represented groups, notably Roma as well as homeless people, were insufficient and problems such as the lack of identity documents contribute to exclude them from political participation. In many Member States, inclusion of minority representatives was nominal, and few contestants addressed minority communities in their platforms. Conversely, discourse about migration and integration, including xenophobic comments, were prominent.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been ratified by all Member States, but implementation varies between countries in terms of the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in elections. There is a lack of disaggregated data with respect to candidates contesting the elections, and there were only four MEPs in the outgoing parliament with a visible disability. Positively, voter information across all 27 Member States was available online in an easy-to-read format and, in a few countries, parties also provided campaign materials in accessible formats. Notwithstanding efforts to facilitate autonomous access of persons with disabilities to elections, the advancement has been uneven across Member States and persons with visual, hearing or intellectual disabilities continue to face significant barriers.

The number of MEPs under 35 years of age in the outgoing parliament was the lowest since its first election in 1979. The promotion of youth participation was a major focus for the EU for the 2024 polls, and youth-related issues were included in party platforms. In four member states the voting age is 16 and

in one is 17, which although creating unequal opportunities between voters in different EU Member States, increases youth participation. The majority of Member States provide candidacy rights from the age of 18, and the right to stand is guaranteed in all by the age of 25, enabling youth participation and representation. Several parties promoted youth in their candidate lists.

Campaign finance is governed by an EU regulation for European Political Parties (EUPP), national level regulations for national parties and, to some extent, EUPPs. In some instances, these regulations in some instances are at odds regarding the permissibility of funding sources. While some guidance on allowed finance sources and planned campaign activities for EUPPs, made by the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations, are welcome, some parties opined that these guidelines do not provide sufficient clarification on campaign finance. Various rules for donor disclosure, absence of specific campaign finance reporting requirements for EUPPs and timely audits of those, limited transparency and the ability of voters to make an informed choice, and reduced the effectiveness of campaign finance oversight.

The diverse and fragmented European media displayed limited interest in the campaigns of the EP candidates, opting for the coverage of domestic politics, security, migration, and opposition to EU environmental policies. Free airtime and debates provided contestants with a platform to present their views; however, some non-parliamentary parties and several major contestants were excluded from the debate between candidates at the country level and from the debate for the lead candidates. Among many Member States, public media, while enjoying the highest level of trust, struggled with threats to their integrity due to a lack of editorial autonomy and politically motivated funding decisions. Growing political polarization, the spread of disinformation, as well as legal, physical and online harassment contributed to an antagonistic environment for media outlets and journalists in many Member States.

Member States provide opportunities for redress through judicial and administrative channels for voters and electoral contestants, in accordance with national frameworks. Additionally, there are review mechanisms at the EU level. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is at times undermined by the lack of an expedited review processes or the absence of judicial review at all stages, contrary to OSCE commitments and other international standards. Nevertheless, with exceptions, there is a general trust in the adjudicating bodies across Member States.

With regard to international and citizen election observation, electoral legislation and practices vary significantly across Member States. While some countries explicitly provide for both citizen and international observation, there continue to be no such explicit provisions for election observation in several Member States, contrary to previous ODIHR recommendations and OSCE commitments; this decreases transparency of the electoral process. Recently, EU institutions have expressed increasing support for election observation activities and various citizen-led organizations conducted election observation activities on the national level.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Background and Political Context

The European Parliament is directly elected by European Union (EU) citizens from its Member States. It is one of the EU's key legislative bodies, sharing law-making and budgetary powers with the Council of the EU, overseeing EU activities, and playing a crucial role in appointing the European Commission.¹

Over 16,000 candidates from 27 Member States, all of which are OSCE participating States, competed for the 720 seats allocated for the new legislative term. Competition is exclusively among national parties

¹ The EU's institutional framework includes the European Parliament, elected by EU citizens; the European Council, with a President chosen by its members; the Council of the European Union, featuring rotating national ministers; the European Commission, led by a President nominated by the European Council and elected by the Parliament.

and candidates within their constituencies, although European Political Parties (EUPPs), that bring together national parties from across the EU, also play an important role.² EUPPs may present lead candidates ahead of the EU parliament election, known as *Spitzenkandidaten*.³ The lead candidate process generated a lot of debate at the EU level as they are generally perceived as running for the role of EU Commission President,⁴ though, at present, this is neither a formal requirement nor binding.⁵ This potentially confuses voters as to the impact of the election results on the Commission presidency.⁶ At the EU level, there was an increased discourse on the so-called Europeanization of the electoral process, including a proposal to create a EU-wide constituency.

The 2024 EU parliamentary elections unfolded against a backdrop of diverse political landscapes across Member States, characterised by increasing political fragmentation and the rise of new parties, including from political extremes, in recent years. This trend has led to government reshuffles or snap elections in a number of Member States, reflecting growing disillusionment with traditional parties amid economic strains and corruption concerns. During this term, the European Parliament has grappled with the fallout from the 2022 ‘Qatargate’ Scandal, involving a vice-president and several MEPs.⁷ As elections approached, concerns regarding the risk of foreign interference, growing political polarisation, spread of disinformation and harmful rhetoric became more prominent, and some ODIHR SEAM interlocutors questioned their impact on the overall integrity of the elections, in particular when combined with lack of public engagement. Demonstrations against agricultural policy reforms under the EU Green Deal by farmers in several Member States, the recent adoption of the New Asylum and Migration Pact by the Council of the EU on 14 May 2024 as well as the consequences of the war in Ukraine and partly in Gaza also shaped the pre-election environment.

Electoral System and Legal Framework

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the 1976 Electoral Act (as amended in 2002) establish broad common rules for European Parliamentary elections. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) further stipulates that the Parliament is responsible for establishing procedures for the direct universal election of its members. The common rules include proportional representation, rules on thresholds and positions that are incompatible with the mandate of a member of the European Parliament (MEP). They are further supplemented by various by-laws. Most notably, Council Directive 93/109/EC regulates the suffrage rights of EU citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals. Regulation 1141/2014, as amended by Regulations 2019/493 and 673/2018, outlines the framework for EUPPs and foundations. Additionally, all Member States are parties to key international and regional instruments related to democratic elections and have committed to respecting human rights and the rule of law under the OSCE commitments.

² There are ten registered EUPPs.

³ In November 2012, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) urging the EUPPs to nominate candidates for the position of President of the Commission during the 2014 elections, so as to reinforce the political legitimacy of both Parliament and the Commission. The lead candidates for the 2024 EU Parliament elections were: the current President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen from the European People’s Party, Nicolas Schmit representing Socialists & Democrats, Valérie Hayer for Renew Europe, Sandro Gozi of the European Democratic Party, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann from the Free Democratic Party, Bas Eickhout and Terry Reintke for The Greens, Raül Romeva and Maylis Roßberg from the European Free Alliance, and Walter Baier for the European Left. Two other parties, the European Conservatives and Reformists and the Identity and Democracy, also had list leaders but did not nominate their *Spitzenkandidaten* as such.

⁴ The European Commission President is nominated by the European Council after considering the European Parliament election results and must secure a parliamentary majority to assume office.

⁵ The Council’s leeway in interpreting Article 17(7) of the Treaty on European Union ([TEU](#)) has stirred debate over the legitimacy of the appointment process, highlighted when lead candidates were bypassed in 2019, underscoring the clash between parliamentary ambitions and the Council’s treaty.

⁶ In 2019, following difficulties in the European Council to approve a majority candidate, the nominated and ultimately appointed president of the European Commission was not among the lead candidates put forward by political parties.

⁷ See [Ombudsman Closing Note](#) on the Strategic Initiative on improving the European Parliament’s Ethics and Transparency Framework (SI/1/2023/MIK).

While each Member State must respect common rules, other aspects of the electoral process are governed by national laws, resulting in significant variations. These include *inter alia* differences in minimum voting age, candidate eligibility, conditions for out-of-country voting, campaign periods, electoral thresholds, political finance, timelines for election dispute resolution, and provisions for the participation of women and persons with disabilities. Overall, national laws provide a sound basis for the respect of fundamental civil and political rights and for conduct of democratic elections. However, this discretion regarding voting and candidacy rights results in unequal conditions for universal suffrage across Member States.⁸

In an attempt to address a number of these variations, the European Parliament has put forward multiple proposals to amend the electoral legal framework. However, these attempts have consistently failed due to a lack of consensus and commitment among different stakeholders, including within Member States or existing constitutional hindrances. While amendments were enacted in 2018, not all Member States have ratified them.⁹ A 2022 proposal for further amendments is still under debate. The most contentious issues include lowering the voting age to 16, the principles for candidate selection, including binding and voluntary gender quotas, the lead candidate process, and the establishment of a single EU-wide constituency for the election of 28 MEPs. While European parties largely favour harmonizing legislation, many at the national level express doubts about its success due to deeply rooted traditional and cultural practices in elections.

Positively, the Digital Services Act (DSA) came into force in February 2024, requiring online platforms to mitigate risks related to elections and combat disinformation while safeguarding fundamental rights, including freedom of expression.¹⁰ The DSA includes a comprehensive set of investigative and sanctioning measures to be implemented by national authorities and the Commission. Currently, infringement procedures have been initiated against six Member States, with letters of formal notice sent for failing to designate or empower Digital Services Coordinators, as required by the act.¹¹

A total of 720 MEPs will be elected for a five-year term through a secret ballot based on the principle of degressive proportionality. This represents an increase of 15 MEPs compared to the outgoing Parliament, resulting from the review process undertaken ahead of each election.¹² ODIHR SEAM interlocutors opined that the seat allocation process was properly handled and is representative. As obligated by the common rules, each Member State uses a proportional voting system, though the modalities vary. In total, 19 use a preferential vote system, 6 closed lists and 2 single transferrable vote. Member States also establish constituencies or decide on how to subdivide the electoral area, as well as determine the method for allocating seats among candidate lists. In most Member States, the national territory forms a single electoral constituency, though four Member States have divided their territories into multiple

⁸ Article 21 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), provides for the right for everyone to take part in the government of their country. Paragraph 7.3 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that OSCE participating States will “guarantee universal and equal suffrage to adult citizens”. See also Article 29 of the [CPRD](#) and Paragraph 48 of [General Comment No. 1 to Article 12](#) of the CRPD.

⁹ EU decisions are subject to approval by the Member States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements. At the time of this reporting, Spain has not ratified.

¹⁰ The Digital Service Act ([DSA](#)) was adopted on 29 September 2022 and came into force on 17 February 2024. The [Artificial Intelligence Act](#) was also adopted on 13 March 2024 but is not yet applicable.

¹¹ These are Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia. Each Member State has to designate a Digital Services Coordinator, who is responsible for all matters relating to the application and enforcement of the DSA in that country. Member States should have done so by 17 February 2024.

¹² The composition is assessed before each election, following the principles outlined in Article 14 of the [TEU](#) and Article 223-224 of the [TFEU](#). This includes a cap of 750 MEPs: a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 96 seats per EU Member State, and the principle of degressive proportionality, and is based on the most recent population figures. As a result, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia each gained an additional seat, while the Netherlands and Spain received two additional seats each.

constituencies. There is also a considerable variation in electoral thresholds, ranging from none to a maximum of 5 per cent, which results in varying opportunities for new or small parties.¹³

Election Administration

The 6-9 June elections were administered by national election management bodies (EMBs), which vary in structure and composition, with electoral processes managed by relevant ministries or independent commissions or agencies, courts, and comprised of either party appointees, or civil servants, citizen volunteers, and in some cases judges and lawyers.

In general, ODIHR SEAM interlocutors expressed a high level of confidence in the integrity and professionalism of EMBs across the majority of Member States. Nevertheless, the openness of the decision-making process was not guaranteed, as in 17 of the 27 Member States election administration bodies either do not hold sessions or the sessions are closed to the public, limiting transparency.¹⁴ Overall, EMBs managed their tasks effectively and professionally meeting all legal deadlines. EMBs in Austria, Czechia, Portugal and Slovenia among others informed the ODIHR SEAM about difficulties in recruiting polling staff, including computer operators.¹⁵ Some logistical challenges were also noted; for example in Spain, postal services worked under additional strain to deliver ballots to overseas voters, resulting in some delays, and in Italy, the recently introduced law to facilitate voting for students outside their designated constituency, necessitated establishment of special polling stations with different ballot papers.

The European Co-operation Network for Elections (ECNE), established in 2019 by the European Commission, engages with EMBs and other relevant national authorities to meet regularly and exchange views on trends, best practices and challenges, *inter alia* with respect to cybersecurity, use of technology in elections, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and legislative proposals regarding political advertising. The co-operation was overall praised by various stakeholders, but some questioned its usefulness and noted need for more dialogue on operational matters. European and national authorities, civil society and media launched an extensive, comprehensive and inclusive voter education campaign including through social networks.

Voting methods in Member States vary significantly, creating unequal conditions for EU citizens across Member States. The presence of alternative voting possibilities in some countries enhanced voter participation opportunities. Most Member States allow the possibility to vote from abroad in European elections. Citizens of Italy and Bulgaria abroad may only vote within the EU. Czechia, Ireland, Malta and Slovakia do not provide most citizens with the right to vote from abroad.¹⁶ Electronic voting machines can be used in Belgium and Bulgaria and only Estonia uses internet voting.¹⁷ Ten states provide for advance voting and proxy voting despite ODIHR recommendations against it is possible in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands.¹⁸ The European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)

¹³ In total, 13 Member States do not have a threshold requirement: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain.

¹⁴ In Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Sweden decisions are mostly taken in closed sessions or internal meetings. Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Slovakia have a legal requirement to hold open sessions.

¹⁵ The reasons vary and include insufficient party nominees (Austria, Czechia) and low salaries for staff (Slovenia).

¹⁶ Voting is possible for some officials residing abroad and their families. Fifteen countries provide for postal voting abroad and most of them offer voting at diplomatic representations. Recently, Greece has introduced postal vote to be used in the EP elections for the first time. A [2020 Venice Commission report](#) stated that "While it is within the scope of the state's own sovereignty to decide whether to grant the right to vote to citizens residing abroad, the introduction of out-of-country voting might be considered".

¹⁷ A recently adopted law in Estonia will provide for voting from mobile devices such as smartphones in future elections.

¹⁸ Notwithstanding its benefits to facilitate universal inclusion and equality, proxy voting potentially compromises the secrecy of the vote by disclosing the voter's intent to another person. [ODIHR has consistently recommended](#) to review this practice, including in favour of other alternative voting methods.

has advocated for Member States to explore alternative voting methods and the possibility to vote on designated early-voting days.¹⁹

Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, and Romania held national or local elections at the same time.²⁰ In some countries this was welcomed with the hope that it will increase voter turnout, while in other countries, for example Bulgaria and Romania, authorities recognized the additional strain on resources, logistical arrangements and workload that this presents, also where out-of-country voting was also being organized.

Concerns about cybersecurity and disinformation became priorities ahead of the elections, and the EU institutions co-operated in conducting a cybersecurity exercise to test the crisis plans and responses to potential cybersecurity incidents affecting the European elections.²¹ The ODIHR SEAM was informed by some national institutions that there had been some attempts at cyber-attacks, but they had been dealt with by relevant authorities.

Voter Registration

EU citizens of voting age have the right to vote in European Parliament elections. Voter eligibility is otherwise regulated by national legislation and differs across Member States. The minimum age for voting varies from 16 to 18 years.²² Voting rights of persons with intellectual disabilities are curtailed in many Member States.²³ Contrary to international standards, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, previous ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations, in Bulgaria and Estonia all persons serving prison sentence are disenfranchised, regardless of the severity of the crime committed.²⁴ Voting is compulsory in Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Luxembourg.²⁵

Overall, ODIHR SEAM interlocutors expressed confidence in the inclusiveness and accuracy of national voter registers across Member States. Some countries reported progress in the centralisation and digitalisation of voter registration;²⁶ others noted potentially inflated numbers in the voter lists, for various reasons including due to the entries of deceased voters not being consistently removed.²⁷

Some 361 million voters were registered to vote in these elections.²⁸ In-country voter registration across Member States is generally passive and automatic, while for voting from abroad many countries require active registration.²⁹ Some 11 million EU citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals have the right to vote in elections to the European Parliament in their country of residence.

¹⁹ In a [July 2023 report](#), the AFCO “[encouraged] the introduction of postal voting to ensure that the inability to go to the polling stations on Election Day does not prevent citizens of the Union from exercising their right to vote” and in a [2022 report](#) noted that “obstacles accessing voting booths and polling stations should be addressed, the possibility for postal, proxy, advance and electronic voting should be revisited”. In December 2023, the European Commission adopted a Defence of Democracy package, which included [recommendations](#) to increase participation and turnout by complimentary voting methods and inclusion of youth, women and persons with disabilities.

²⁰ Additionally, several countries held referenda.

²¹ The [exercise](#) was organized in November 2023 by the European Parliament's services, the European Commission and the EU Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA). National authorities also informed the ODIHR SEAM about their respective measures and trainings on cybersecurity and cyber-hygiene.

²² Voters in Austria, Germany, Malta, and Belgium vote at the age 16, as well as in Hungary (for married persons, otherwise 18 years), and in Greece at the age of 17.

²³ See *Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities* section of this report.

²⁴ While 11 Member States have no restrictions on prisoners voting, 14 apply some restrictions linked to the length of the sentence and/or the kind of offence a person is convicted for.

²⁵ The [Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) recognizes abstention as a political choice.

²⁶ For instance, Czechia, Ireland, Italy and Romania.

²⁷ Reported to ODIHR SEAM in Bulgaria, Greece and Ireland, particularly in relation to citizens residing abroad.

²⁸ See data as provided by [Eurostat](#).

²⁹ In Cyprus and Ireland, voting inside the country also requires an active registration.

However, the residency requirements differ across Member States.³⁰ Registration deadlines for these so-called “mobile EU citizens” in their respective country of residence also vary significantly, ranging from several months to a few days before elections.³¹ Some countries launched targeted voter education efforts.³² Overall, while considerable efforts at the EU and national levels were in place to facilitate voting and prevent double voting by mobile citizens, the reported lack of interest, low level of awareness about the possibility to vote for mobile citizens and inconsistent deadlines to register impacted participation.

A voter may only vote in one Member State. There is no mechanism to prevent double voting by EU citizens with more than one nationality, as Member States have no obligation to notify each other in this regard. Nevertheless, authorities in some Member States commended to the ODIHR SEAM the practice of bilateral exchanges of encrypted data on mobile EU voters, as a potentially effective tool to prevent double voting. While most ODIHR SEAM interlocutors agreed that the probability of double voting is minimal, some argued that publicity regarding potential double voting combined with disinformation could impact the trust in the elections. Several EMBs noted difficulties in corroborating some information on mobile voters due to the overall fragmented nature of data exchange stemming from different deadlines and systems used in Member States. A unified deadline for voter registration across Member States would facilitate better exchange of information.

Party and Candidate Registration

The Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations (APPF) is in charge of registering, controlling and imposing sanctions on EUPPs and their affiliated European political foundations.³³ Nomination of candidates can take place only at the Member State level by a national political party or by individual self-nomination of independent candidates, with varying conditions across Member States. All candidates should be citizens of a Member State, and subject to the same conditions on length of citizenship and of residency as nationals of the Member State in which they stand. Members of national parliaments and other elected or appointed government officials, as well as employees of EU institutions, cannot stand for election. No person may stand as a candidate in more than one Member State and national EMBs bilaterally verified the eligibility of candidates who are nationals of another EU Member State.

In most Member States, the minimum age requirement to stand for elections is 18.³⁴ Given the proportional system of the elections and allocation of mandates across political party lists, many Member States do not permit independent candidates to stand for elections to the European Parliament, despite previous ODIHR recommendations to facilitate this right in the context of national elections, in line with OSCE commitments and international standards.³⁵ In most of the Member States the registration

³⁰ Requirements vary from having domicile or usual residence within the electoral territory, to be ordinarily resident or be listed in the population register. Some countries also apply minimum period of residence.

³¹ For example, mobile EU citizens residing in Spain should register until 30 January, those residing in Portugal and Poland could register until three days before elections.

³² For instance, in Spain in October 2023, the Electoral Census Office informed through a letter some 303,000 mobile EU citizens residing in Spain about the possibility to vote in these elections.

³³ To register as a EUPP, the party must be based in a EU Member State according to its statutes, and must either have members in the European, national or regional legislative bodies in at least one quarter of Member States (seven), or its member parties must have received at least 3 per cent of the vote in at least seven states in the most recent European Parliament elections. Its member parties must have participated in elections to the European Parliament or have publicly expressed the intention to participate in the next elections.

³⁴ However, there are notable exceptions: in Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia, the minimum age is 21; in Romania, it is 23; and in Italy and Greece, it is 25.

³⁵ Independent candidates can stand in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Malta and Romania. See Paragraph 7.6 of the 1990 [Copenhagen Document](#). See also [General Comment 25 to the ICCPR](#), which underlines that “The right of persons to stand for election should not be limited unreasonably by requiring candidates to be members of parties or of specific parties”.

requirements included collection of support signatures or a deposit.³⁶ In some countries, each voter may support only one list of candidates; this provision may limit freedom of association and expression, and is contrary to international good practice.³⁷ Timelines for candidate registration varied greatly, and, together with differing signature collection and deposit requirements created unequal campaign conditions across Member States.³⁸ Other interlocutors believed that since the European Parliament elections are *de facto* a series of national contests, equality of opportunity within each country is sufficient.

In total, some 530 party and independent lists were registered for these elections with more than 16,000 candidates, in an overall inclusive manner, offering voters a wide choice of genuine political alternatives. Nevertheless, the inclusivity and diversity of candidate lists remains mainly the prerogative of political parties at the national level and the limited use of temporary special measures and other incentives is insufficient to ensure the election of a fully inclusive body. Eleven countries use binding legislative gender quotas.³⁹ Several European and national parties had in place internal policies to increase the participation of under-represented groups as candidates, usually focusing on women and youth.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, further commitment is needed by most political parties to promote diversity in candidate lists and to improve the representation of ethnic and linguistic minorities as well as persons with disabilities in party activities.⁴¹

Election Campaign

Freedoms of association and assembly are enshrined in the EU Charter, as well as the national legislation of all Member States. There are no EU-wide regulations for campaigning by national parties.⁴² Regulation of the manner and location of campaigning varies within EU Member States, with specific rules often determined by municipalities and local administrations. Rules determining the beginning of the official campaign also vary, with Belgium having the lengthiest campaign duration of four-months, followed by Latvia with 120 days, while Portugal has the briefest campaign, lasting 12 days. Most EU Member States prohibit canvassing and the publication of opinion polls on election day or immediately before.

EUPPs are permitted to campaign for the European Parliament and formulate shared manifestos, but they cannot field candidates or campaign in favour of associated national parties or candidates. Campaign activities by EUPPs are explicitly prohibited in seven countries and in many Member States, their

³⁶ ODIHR SEAM interlocutors in Greece noted the high amount of deposit requested as a hindrance for participation of candidates. Some new parties in Austria and Slovenia reported challenges in collecting the required number of signatures. In Bulgaria, Italy, and Spain, several candidate lists were refused due to insufficient signatures.

³⁷ Austria, Croatia, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain. Paragraph 96 of the ODIHR and Venice Commission [2020 Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states, “it should be possible to support the registration of more than one party, and legislation should not limit a citizen or other individual to signing a supporting list for only one party”.

³⁸ For instance, the candidate registration lasts 90 days in Slovakia and 21 days in Greece. Article 3a of [Council Decision \(EU, Euratom\) 2018/994](#) proposed at least a three-week deadline for candidate registration.

³⁹ Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain have binding gender quotas for European elections in their legislation. Belgium, France, Italy and Luxembourg apply the parity principle with 50 per cent for each gender. Greece, Spain, Croatia, Portugal and Slovenia have a quota of at least 40 per cent for each gender, and Poland applies a 35 per cent gender quota. In Romania, the legislation provides for ensuring that lists of candidates represent both sexes, without setting any particular quota. Ireland and Malta have binding gender quotas for national elections, but not for European ones. In Bulgaria, most of ODIHR SEAM’s political party interlocutors, while being mindful of the importance of nominating a representative sample of candidates, viewed quotas as undemocratic and not in line with the principle of free choice.

⁴⁰ Several political parties among others in Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden apply various types of internal voluntary gender quotas.

⁴¹ For more details, see dedicated sections of this report.

⁴² In its [legislative resolution of 3 May 2022](#), the European Parliament proposed, but has not yet adopted, the harmonization of campaign regulations, including a standardized start and a 48-hour silence period.

activities are not regulated.⁴³ In collaboration with an intergovernmental organization, International IDEA, all ten EUPPs developed and endorsed a voluntary self-regulatory Code of Conduct, which embodies commitments to uphold electoral integrity, transparency, and the principles of fair campaigning, while actively countering disinformation and ensuring the ethical use of campaign tools and technologies.⁴⁴

Overall, the campaign was competitive, although low-key in most countries and the environment for campaigning permitted freedom of expression and assembly. Regrettably though, a few instances of politically related violence took place during the campaign period.⁴⁵ Most notably, on 15 May, the Prime Minister of Slovakia was shot and sustained life-threatening injuries while greeting supporters in the town of Handlova. Cases of harmful rhetoric, intimidation and violence persisted throughout the campaign. According to political parties, incidents often targeted women candidates, particularly those from immigrant and LGBTI communities, and in some cases led to the filing police reports or the hiring private security.⁴⁶

National parties employed a combination of conventional approaches, including billboards, leaflets and rallies, alongside digital campaigns, with direct voter engagement underscored as key to building lasting support, particularly among new voters, according to ODIHR SEAM interlocutors. The content reflected the political fragmentation of the various Member States and was dominated by local and national party dynamics with domestic political agendas often overlapping with European level issues.

The use of administrative resources throughout the campaign is regulated at the national level and varies across Member States.⁴⁷ As such, there is insufficient clarity on issues related to campaigning by current high-level EU officials, EU staff or the use of EU resources in the campaign. Many ODIHR SEAM interlocutors raised concerns about potential misuse of administrative resources, as several high-level EU officials were campaigning, while at the same time continued to exercise their official duties, as well as engaging staff members in the campaign and about MEPs using their allowances for campaign purposes, which limits transparency and accountability.

The main campaign themes were the common migration policy and its impact, climate change and the EU Green Deal, as well as security, in particular the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Economic stability, the cost-of-living crisis and anti-corruption were important campaign issues, as were infrastructure and regional growth. The perceived growing influence of far-right parties, notably concerning their emphasis

⁴³ In Slovenia, only citizens or entities based within the country are permitted to campaign; Hungary's campaign regulations limit campaigning to only those entities standing for election; and in the Czech Republic, while party list submitters, candidates, and third parties are allowed to campaign, third parties must not be foreign legal entities, potentially excluding EUPPs depending on the legal interpretation. See [Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations](#).

⁴⁴ See International IDEA [Code of Conduct](#) for the 2024 European Parliament Elections.

⁴⁵ [On 20 May 2024](#) in Lisbon, a confrontation involving the *Ergue-te party* was documented on video and corroborated by ODIHR SEAM interlocutors. In Germany, physical attacks on *SPD* candidate Matthias Ecke, *Greens'* Yvonne Mosler, and ex-mayor of Berlin Franziska Giffey took place on [4 May and 7 May respectively](#). On [12 May](#), in Ireland, Councillor Tania Doyle and her husband were assaulted by an individual probing her immigration stance during their campaign activities in West Dublin. Also, in Ireland, [on 17 May](#) a *Fine Gael* candidate Linkwinstar Mattathil Mathew faced harassment and racist abuse while posting election posters, forcing him to remove them.

⁴⁶ Most ODIHR SEAM interlocutors from EUPPs as well as national party interlocutors in Belgium, Germany or the Netherlands, reported an increase in online hate speech, violence and death threats. See also opinion by [the European Economic and Social Committee](#). Concerns with respect to recurring sexist comments and violence against women online were also raised by ODIHR SEAM interlocutors also in Austria, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia. The Council of Europe [Convention](#) on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2011), provides that states “must adopt measures to fulfil their commitment to preventing and combating violence against women”.

⁴⁷ Some Member States have insufficient regulations to prevent the use of public office for campaign purposes and the misuse of administrative resources despite previous recommendations by ODIHR; these include Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden.

on migration, Eurosceptic positions and the potential effects on EU cohesion, national sovereignty, and the foundations of democracy were regular talking points in the campaign.

Online campaigns at the Member State level are mostly unregulated. While the DSA has advanced regulation of the online space, recently adopted additional transparency measures for political campaigns have yet to be implemented.⁴⁸ Further, during the elections, ODIHR SEAM interlocutors' concerns persisted over political ad spending and labelling practices, especially on less regulated platforms like TikTok and X.

The ODIHR SEAM monitored the online campaign activities of a sample of candidates and political parties on Facebook and X.⁴⁹ Most messages of the contestants were promoting their programmes in a neutral tone. France's National Rally candidate, Jordan Bardella and Valérie Hayer, chair of the Renew Europe group, generated the most engagements (interactions) among the monitored subjects.⁵⁰ The online campaign covered a range of topics, prominently featuring pro-EU messages, migration, and critiques of far-right ideologies. Anti-migrant posts, particularly from Mr. Bardella and Anders Vistisen (Danish People's Party), generated higher engagement levels, indicating resonance with their followers.⁵¹ Beyond the sample, xenophobic and Islamophobic messages were frequently observed in online campaign narratives of far-right parties throughout the region.⁵² The EU Parliament's social media activity was primarily focused on their extensive "*Use Your Vote*" communication campaign.

Electoral Participation of Women

Gender equality is enshrined in the TEU, and the EU has adopted six directives on equality between women and men, to be transposed into national legislation by Member States. An EU Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025) includes an obligation on Member States to promote women's participation and representation in the 2024 elections, as part of a goal to make significant progress by 2025 towards a gender-equal Europe.⁵³ Nevertheless, there is no obligation for gender equality in the legislations of Member States for the European Parliament. Where there is a quota for participation of women on candidate lists, it does not always stipulate the fair positioning of women on the list.⁵⁴ Several Member States have special gender measures for candidate registration linked to provision of public funding,⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Set to be implemented in autumn 2025, the EU regulation on [the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising](#) mandates political parties to maintain transparency in their advertising efforts, necessitating explicit disclosure of sponsorships and judicious management of personal data in line with [GDPR](#) provisions, thereby safeguarding the electorate's right to make informed decisions.

⁴⁹ The sample comprised 32 accounts and included all lead candidates, representatives from EUPPs, the EU Parliament, and a select group of MEPs across the political spectrum starting from 17 May 2024.

⁵⁰ These candidates garnered 296,955 and 201,068 engagements (interactions), respectively.

⁵¹ For example, on [21 May](#), Jordan Bardella (ID) shared a post affirming "More and more French people no longer recognize their country: mass immigration is a major concern. We need a migratory turning point, and I advocate the systematic refoulement of migrant boats who want to dock in Europe". On [19 May](#), Anders Vistisen (ID) stated "Palestinians from Gaza are a particularly integration-resistant and radicalized people, who rank towering in the crime statistics and pose a great threat to society and law-abiding citizens".

⁵² On [4 June](#), the Portuguese party CHEGA posted "Many Islamic immigrants, instead of respecting the rules and customs of the countries that host them, do not integrate. All they want to do is destroy European civilization and the identity that defines us all. Islamic extremism is a danger". On [3 June](#), political party VOX posted a video in which it is affirmed "Radical Islam is gaining ground. In countries like France and Belgium, women are already subject to restrictions on how to dress and are forbidden from entering bars".

⁵³ See EU [Gender Equality Strategy](#).

⁵⁴ France and Belgium provide for parity of both sexes throughout the lists using a zipper system, but Belgium uses a preferential vote. In Portugal and Spain, the alternation of both sexes is applied only to certain sections of the lists. When it comes to enforcement, lists in Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain are invalidated if they do not comply with the quota requirements, whereas in Luxembourg public funding might be reduced and Croatia and Romania apply financial sanctions, nevertheless only in a nominal amount.

⁵⁵ Austria, Croatia, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania and Sweden provide extra funding or link allocation of public funding to the levels of gender equality of party lists.

Lithuania, the Green Party put up the first ever all-women list in the country's political history.

and in a few, legislation encourages internal party quotas for national elections.⁵⁶ It is a common practice for political parties across all Member States to apply voluntary quotas.

Women are fairly well represented in the European Parliament and in political life, but far from reaching the Europe-wide gender equality aspired to. In the outgoing European Parliament, 280 MEPs were women (39.8 per cent). However, the number of women elected to the European Parliament varies considerably between Member States.⁵⁷ Women hold important positions within the EU, and 12 of the 27 Commissioners are women, in addition to the President of the Commission.⁵⁸

No Member State has specific legal requirements to ensure equitability of campaign opportunities for women. Further, women may also be deterred by the hostile environment for politics, including verbal attacks.⁵⁹ At the same time, prominent women EU officials, including the President of the Commission, the President of the European Parliament, and the Italian Prime Minister held an extremely high profile during the election campaign. Of the 10 *Spitzenkandidaten* put forward by EUPPs, 5 were women. The number of women candidates contesting the 2024 elections was some 5,000 out of some 16,000.

Electoral Participation of National Minorities

Respect for rights of persons belonging to national minorities is explicit in the TEU, international standards and OSCE commitments.⁶⁰ While most Member States have ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), challenges remain in the implementation of election-related provisions.⁶¹ Further, the level of recognition of national minorities varies among Member States. Some uphold rights based on self-identification, while others are more restrictive.⁶²

Access to language rights and their exercise in practice are equally varied. While some Member States have multiple state languages, or provide for the use of other languages in public life, including in electoral processes,⁶³ others take a more limiting approach.⁶⁴ Despite the presence of significant minority communities, election-related materials are only available in the state language(s) in some Member States, contravening international standards.⁶⁵ Bulgaria and Latvia have legal bans on the use of minority

⁵⁶ These include Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Sweden.

⁵⁷ In the outgoing parliament, for instance, it ranged between 66.7 and 15.2 per cent.

⁵⁸ Data according to [European Commission](#) website.

⁵⁹ For instance, ODIHR SEAM interlocutors raised such issues in Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and Romania. Most of these verbal attacks were targeting women from minority communities, in particular with migrant background or LGBTI.

⁶⁰ For instance, Paragraph 35 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document provides that, “The participating States will respect the right of persons belonging to national minorities to effective participation in public affairs, including participation in the affairs relating to the protection and promotion of the identity of such minorities”.

⁶¹ The FCNM stipulates the right to effective participation, including in electoral processes, and commits state parties to create necessary conditions and to promote full and effective equality in political life. Belgium, Greece and Luxembourg have signed but not yet ratified the FCNM, whereas France has not signed it.

⁶² In Bulgaria, the Constitution guarantees the right of self-identification but does not refer to national minorities.

⁶³ Most Member States have no specific legal requirements to provide voting materials or information in national minority languages. Nevertheless, voter information and/or campaign materials were available in minority languages in Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain. In Finland, election information materials were provided in 20 languages addressing national minorities and immigrant populations. In France, some electoral materials were provided in English alongside the state language.

⁶⁴ In Lithuania, campaign-related events are usually aired by broadcasters only in the Lithuanian language, and without subtitles. While some election-related information is translated in minority languages, and available online, there is no public or private television or radio channel based in Lithuania that operates in any minority language. In Estonia, a recently adopted law eliminates the use of minority language (Russian) in education, [impacting](#) the right and ability to receive information.

⁶⁵ For example, Bulgaria, Greece, and Latvia allow election and campaign materials only in the state language. Paragraph 12 of the UN Committee on Human Rights, [General Comment No. 25](#) (1996), states that information and materials about voting should be available in minority languages.

languages in campaigns, limiting freedom of expression.⁶⁶ Further, Greece does not recognize any ethnic or linguistic minorities,⁶⁷ and so does not provide election materials in minority languages or allow for the use of minority language in campaigning.

Problems such as the lack of identity documents, often related to the absence of a fixed abode, economic poverty, low levels of education and social vulnerability, cumulate to exclude under-represented groups from political and electoral participation. The EU's largest minority community, the Roma, remain the most disenfranchised group across the EU and efforts to include them were not sufficient. Overall, the inclusion of minority representatives in mainstream political parties was nominal, notably for the Roma community. It was noted by some interlocutors that the use of a single national constituency for the elections in many Member States is an obstacle for minority populations to achieve representation.

Very few national parties or candidates explicitly addressed minority concerns in their electoral platforms. Conversely, concerns about migration and integration of migrants became a polarizing campaign topic and contributed to the further marginalization of minority groups.⁶⁸ In most Member States visited, ODIHR SEAM interlocutors noted growing anti-migrant and xenophobic sentiments, including examples of derisive comments about non-majority communities. In several, stakeholders noted a marked degradation of public discourse that stigmatizes members of minority communities and negatively affects the general environment for the exercise of the right to participate.

Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities

EU Member States have made various commitments to strengthen the political participation of persons with disabilities, guided in particular by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which has been ratified by all Member States and by the EU itself.⁶⁹ However, the scope of implementation of the CRPD varies from one country to another in terms of the exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in elections.

In particular, persons deprived of legal capacity and persons residing in institutions continue to face restrictions in their right to vote or to participate in elections.⁷⁰ According to the European Disability Forum,⁷¹ although 15 EU countries have confirmed the right to vote for persons with reduced legal capacity without exception, 6 automatically withdraw the right to vote if there is a question of legal capacity and 6 decide on a case-by-case basis.⁷² ODIHR has previously called on states to remove all restrictions on voting rights on the basis of disability to fully comply with the CPRD.

Generally, EMBs and political party interlocutors were unaware on whether any persons with disabilities were on candidate lists due to a lack of disaggregated data. According to the 2022 European Human

⁶⁶ International standards provide for the right of national minorities to conduct election campaigns in their mother tongues. Paragraph 32.1 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document commits participating States to grant national minorities the right "to use freely their mother tongue in private as well as in public". In [May 2023](#), the ECtHR ruled that Bulgaria's absolute ban on the use of unofficial languages in the campaign, coupled with the threat of administrative sanctions, disproportionately restricted the European Convention's guarantee of the freedom of expression. In [June 2022](#), Latvia introduced a draft amendment in parliament, obliging political parties to carry out campaign activities only in the state language.

⁶⁷ Except for the Muslim religious minority in Thrace.

⁶⁸ See PACE [report](#) "The theme of migration and asylum in the election campaign and the consequences on the welcoming and rights of migrants".

⁶⁹ [The Optional Protocol to the CRPD](#), which allows complaints to the CRPD Committee over human rights violations has been ratified by most EU Member States except Bulgaria, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, and Romania.

⁷⁰ When ratifying CRPD, a few Member States, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, and Poland made declarations and reservations, including on Article 12 on 'equal recognition before the law', and thus restrict the right to vote of persons deprived of legal capacity.

⁷¹ The [European Disability Forum](#) is an umbrella organization of more than 100 different disability organizations.

⁷² Belgium, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta and Portugal automatically withdraw the right to vote if there is a question of legal capacity and Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Poland and Romania decide on a case-by-case basis.

Rights Report on political participation of persons with disabilities, out of 705 MEPs in the outgoing European Parliament, only four have a visible disability, even though persons with disabilities make up some 15 per cent of the population.⁷³

EU directives, whether on web accessibility or on audio visual media services, facilitating accessibility of sign language interpretation, audio description and subtitling, strengthens the environment in Member States for better accessibility of information for persons with disabilities, although implementation remains uneven.⁷⁴ Positively, as part of the *#useyourvote* campaign, voter information on all 27 Member States and their official languages was available online in easy-to-read format.⁷⁵

A few countries, for instance France and Latvia, require parties to provide campaign materials, including their programmes, in accessible formats. At the same time, disability-rights organizations questioned the effectiveness of the distribution of easy-to-read formats.⁷⁶ Where there are no legal requirements, generally political parties make little effort to reach out to voters with disabilities. There have been continuous efforts, including through the ECNE,⁷⁷ facilitating autonomous access of persons with disabilities to the electoral process, for instance in areas such as increasing the number of accessible polling stations, providing adapted voting information and materials and offering alternative ways to vote (such as postal voting, home voting or mobile polling stations).⁷⁸ Nevertheless, while significant progress has been made on legal standards and guidelines on accessibility of polling stations, the advancement has been uneven across Member States and persons with visual, hearing or intellectual disabilities still face barriers and an adequate data on accessibility of voting premises is not available.⁷⁹

Electoral Participation of Youth

The EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) and Youth Action Plan (2022-2027) promote inclusive political and electoral youth participation at European and national levels.⁸⁰ However, in the outgoing parliament, only 37 of the 705 MEPs were under the age of 35 (5 per cent), the lowest percentage since the first European Parliament elections in 1979. For these elections, the EU promoted youth participation by recognizing youth civic organizations and university alliances as European Parliament Communication Partners, providing them with funding for projects and digital outreach campaigns. Several Member States have adopted aligned national youth strategies and five Member States have a lower voting age than 18. In line with good practice, in all Member States candidates can stand for office by the age of 25 with the majority allowing candidates from the age of 18 years.⁸¹

A number of ODIHR SEAM interlocutors opined that early integration of youth into the electoral process can boost interest in politics, develop voting habits, and increase engagement. In many countries there

⁷³ See [European Human Rights Report, Issue 6 – 2022](#)

⁷⁴ Paragraph 92 of the Explanatory Memorandum to Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2017\)5](#) states that “the use of sign language and subtitles should also be included to further reduce barriers when communicating on e-voting”.

⁷⁵ <https://elections.europa.eu/en/easy-to-read/>

⁷⁶ In this respect, dedicated easy-to-read websites, such as [mivotocuenta](#) (my vote counts), a project supported by Spain’s Ministry of Interior and civil society, is a good practice.

⁷⁷ For example, see the 2023 Commission Staff Working Document: [Guide of good electoral practices in Member States addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process](#).

⁷⁸ For example, Greece introduced postal voting to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in these elections, while Slovenia amended its legislation in 2018 to require all polling stations to be accessible.

⁷⁹ See for instance the 2024 report [Political participation of people with disabilities – new developments](#), by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. [European Parliament legislative resolution of 3 May 2022](#) called on Member States to introduce measures to maximise the accessibility of the elections for citizens with disabilities covering, among others and where appropriate, voting information and registration, polling stations, voting booths and devices and ballot papers. For example, Malta outlined actions to support candidates with disabilities in local, national and EU elections in its National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons for 2021-2030.

⁸⁰ See [Resolution](#) of the Council of the European Union 2018/C 456/01 and related [Youth Action Plan](#).

⁸¹ See [The Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#): I.1.1. iii. the right to stand for election should preferably be acquired at the same age as the right to vote and in any case not later than the age of 25.

were active measures to encourage youth to vote by adopting outreach on social platforms. Several political parties also promoted young candidates, advancing them on electoral lists, and youth-related issues were well included in some party platforms and debates.⁸²

Political Party and Campaign Finance

Party and campaign finance of EUPPs is governed by Regulation 1141/2014, last amended in 2018. In addition, for national parties campaigning for European Parliament elections, the national laws of the respective Member State are applicable.⁸³ Although there have been initiatives to amend the Regulation, no changes have been made since the last European Parliament elections.⁸⁴

Public funding can account for 90 per cent of the expenditure of an EUPP, and 10 per cent should be covered by a party's own resources, including membership fees, donations (including contributions from national party members), and loans.⁸⁵ Of the total public funding, 90 per cent is distributed proportionately based on the number of affiliated MEPs, and 10 per cent is allocated in equal amounts to all parties. Citizens and legal entities may annually donate to EUPPs up to EUR 18,000 per donor.⁸⁶ Regulation 1141/2014 foresees the disclosure of the identity of donors to EUPPs for donations above EUR 3,000 annually from a single donor. Anonymous donations, donations from third countries, public authorities and entities over which such authority may exercise a dominant influence, are prohibited. There are no expenditure limits for EUPPs in connection to the election campaign, contrary to international good practice.⁸⁷ While EUPP funds cannot be used for campaigns of national political parties or candidates, they can use them to conduct their own European campaigns.

On the national level, with the exception of Latvia, there are no specific rules regarding funding of campaigning by EUPPs. For national parties that nominated candidates for European Parliament elections, rules for national elections apply, where some funding sources are in conflict with the Regulation 1141/2014.⁸⁸ While national parties in their campaigns use these funds according to their national regulations, contradictions appear when they contribute financially to their EUPPs, as funds coming from anonymous or foreign sources to EUPPs are not allowed. Campaigns on national level can be funded both from public and private funds, except in Italy where public subsidies to political parties are not provided.

⁸² For example, the Greens/EFA nominated 24-year-old Maylis Roßberg as a lead candidate. Jordan Bardella, a high-profile leader of the National Rally party in France, is 28 years old.

⁸³ See the 2023 [Study](#) on “Provisions of national law affecting European political parties and European political foundations”.

⁸⁴ See the EC's [proposal](#) to amend Regulation 1141/2014, which includes regulating political advertising, enhancing transparency, strengthening the link between European political parties and their member parties, gender equality, regulating referendum campaigns, and allowing private funding with own resources. See also ODIHR's [Submission](#) to the European Commission and to the European Parliament on Preliminary Comments on Reforming the Regulation.

⁸⁵ Any EUPP fulfilling certain criteria, including being represented in the European Parliament at least by one MEP, registered by the APPF and not to be sanctioned by it, can apply for funding for a given financial year and send to the European Parliament by 30 September of the preceding financial year its application and an estimated budget. See the funding [amounts](#) allocated for the European Political Parties in 2023.

⁸⁶ This ceiling does not apply to donations made by MEPs, MPs or members of local councils.

⁸⁷ Paragraph 19 of the 1996 United Nations Human Rights Committee, [General Comment No. 25 on Article 25](#) of ICCPR, states that “reasonable limitations on campaign expenditure may be justified where this is necessary to ensure that the free choice of voters is not undermined or the democratic process distorted by the disproportionate expenditure on behalf of any candidate or party”.

⁸⁸ Foreign funding is allowed in 6 Member States, while in 11 Member States anonymous donations are banned only from certain amount, ranging between EUR 50 in Malta and EUR 4,600 in Romania. Third party campaigning is regulated explicitly in only three Member States (Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia) and is prohibited in four (France, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia). In 10 Member States there are no limits on expenditures of national parties, and only 2 (Latvia and Romania) have specific expenditure limits for EUPPs.

EUPPs are not required to open a designated bank account for campaign purposes, and there is no specific campaign finance reporting requirement, contrary to international good practice.⁸⁹ EUPPs submit reports on their income and expenditure on an annual basis, and for the six months prior to elections must report donations to the APPF in writing on a weekly basis, which APPF publishes on its website.⁹⁰ While the APPF published the reports on donations regularly, in an open-data and user friendly format, the absence of reports on incurred expenditures in the same period made the usability of information related to donations limited. There are no time limits for APPF to review annual reports of EUPPs, which reduces effective oversight of campaign income and expenditure.⁹¹

On the national level, there are varying reporting requirements, with three Member States not requiring specific campaign finance reports (Germany, Malta and the Netherlands), while in two member States only donations are required to be reported (the Netherlands and Sweden). In most Member States it is required to submit reports electronically, except in Denmark, France and Sweden. Disclosure and reporting requirements on the national level vary, with only seven Member States requiring the disclosure of the identity of all donors, while in the remaining Member States the disclosure threshold ranges between EUR 12 in Lithuania and EUR 25,000 in Spain, and with France and Greece not requiring any disclosure at all.⁹² These variations significantly reduced transparency and limited voters in making an informed choice, contrary to international commitments and good practice.⁹³ Oversight bodies in Member States vary, with more than one institution in charge of campaign finance oversight in seven Member States.⁹⁴

The APPF is the primary body responsible for campaign finance oversight of EUPPs.⁹⁵ It co-ordinates its work with other EU bodies, and also with national oversight institutions, with which it exchanges information and practices. In the lead up to the 2024 elections, the APPF developed several guides and instructions for EUPPs, to help them mitigate risks related to the financing of campaign activities.⁹⁶ While this was a positive step in clarifying and pre-empting prohibited campaign activities, stakeholders met by the ODIHR SEAM, including EUPPs, commented that the guides are vague, and that the APPF is not providing sufficient clarification regarding what constitutes direct or indirect funding to national parties. Although the APPF considers that it is not difficult for the EUPPs to comply with the law, some EUPPs claimed that they decided not to co-organize campaign events with their national party members in order to avoid potential infringements. Possible sanctions for violations of campaign finance rules by a EUPP or foundation include de-registration, loss of public funding and fines. The enforcement of the

⁸⁹ Paragraph 200 of the ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) recommends that “[r]eports on campaign financing should be turned into the proper authorities within a period of no more than 30 days after the elections”.

⁹⁰ EUPPs shall immediately report to the APPF “single donations” exceeding EUR 12,000.

⁹¹ Article 5.2 of the 2004 UN [Convention Against Corruption](#) states that “Each State Party shall endeavour to establish and promote effective practices aimed at the prevention of corruption”. See also paragraph 271 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#).

⁹² See 2021 European Parliament [Study on Financing of political structures in EU Member States](#). See also [the Transparency Gap](#), analysis of political finance in EU, made by the team of 27 media partners.

⁹³ Article 7.3 of the 2003 UN [Convention Against Corruption](#) recommends states “take appropriate legislative and administrative measures [...] to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office”. See also paragraph 247 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#).

⁹⁴ These institutions include ministries in 4 Member States, a parliamentary body in 3 Member States, election commission in 5 Member States, audit institution in 12 Member States, and independent oversight institution in 9 Member States.

⁹⁵ The control is also exercised by the Authorising Officer of the European Parliament, and by the European Court of Auditors, that audits the EU’s budgetary revenues and expenditures, including in relation to political party funds received from European Parliament.

⁹⁶ See the [Guidance on Donations and Contributions](#), the [E-Cap guidance](#) and [Guidance](#) on prohibition of direct and indirect funding. There are five guiding principles for campaign of EUPP: scope - transnational, content – predominant focus on European topics, ownership – responsibility of EUPP, authorship – visibility of EUPP, and compatibility with national law.

rules is late and limited, as the APPF has no access to bank accounts of EUPPs, basing its oversight mainly on external audits of EUPPs annual financial reports.⁹⁷

Overall, the existing legal framework and practice, with various rules for donors' disclosure on national level, absence of specific campaign finance reporting requirements for EUPPs and timely audits of those, limited transparency and voters' ability to make informed choice, and reduced effective oversight of campaign finance.

Media

The diverse European media environment remains fragmented along national and linguistic lines, with only a handful of media outlets covering the entire EU. Although television is still the main source of information, the ongoing transition to a digital market challenges the financial sustainability of traditional media outlets in a concentrated online advertising market. While public media enjoy the highest level of trust in most Member States, a lack of editorial or managerial autonomy as well as insufficient or politically motivated funding continuously undermines their integrity in the majority of Member States. Many ODIHR SEAM interlocutors also pointed to the growing concentration of news media and increasing dominance of the state in advertising markets in a number of Member States.

Despite recommendations by international human rights bodies, including the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, criminal defamation and insult laws remain in place in 23 Member States.⁹⁸ As noted by ODIHR in its election observation activities in EU Member States, many interlocutors highlighted the growing use of lawsuits, filed mainly on defamation grounds, targeting journalists, media outlets, and civil society with the intention to intimidate and silence critics by burdening them with expensive and time-consuming litigation.⁹⁹

Although journalists generally enjoy a high level of safety in the EU, increasing political polarization has resulted in a more antagonistic approach displayed by some politicians toward critical media in recent years. Such actions, combined with inflammatory rhetoric, encourage hostile behaviour towards the media, leading to an increased number of physical and online attacks on journalists, especially women.¹⁰⁰ The reported usage of spyware against journalists in some EU states, further contributes to self-censorship.¹⁰¹

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive and DSA provide a general legal framework for media at the EU level that is largely implemented in the legislation of Member States. However, neither provides a specific regulatory framework for electoral campaigns. On 11 April 2024, the European Parliament adopted the Media Freedom Act (MFA), due to be implemented by Member States in 2025. The MFA establishes safeguards for the editorial and financial independence of public media and media regulators

⁹⁷ Article 14 of [Recommendation Rec 4\(2003\)](#) of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on common rules against corruption in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns advises that: "[b.] The independent monitoring should include supervision over the accounts of political parties and the expenses involved in election campaigns as well as their presentation and publication".

⁹⁸ Defamation is fully decriminalized only in Cyprus, Ireland, Malta and Romania. Paragraph 47 of [General Comment 34](#) to the ICCPR calls on states to "consider the decriminalization of defamation and, in any case, the application of the criminal law should only be countenanced in the most serious of cases and imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty".

⁹⁹ In 2023, the Coalition Against SLAPPs (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation) in Europe [noted](#) a persistent increase of such cases in Europe over the past decade. On 27 April 2022, the European Commission issued [Recommendation](#) on protecting journalists and human rights defenders who engage in public participation from SLAPPs. On 11 April 2024, the European Parliament and Council of the EU adopted a [Directive](#) on protecting persons who engage in public participation from SLAPPs. Member States are to implement the Directive in within two years of its adoption.

¹⁰⁰ A [report](#) by Media Freedom Rapid Response highlights the disproportionate number of attacks against women journalists in Member States in 2023, including smear campaigns, rape threats and threats to their family members.

¹⁰¹ See the [recommendation](#) by the European Parliament of 15 June 2023.

in Member States, countermeasures against undue concentration, and increases protection for journalists and media workers from intimidation and harassment. It also establishes an EU-level media regulatory body, composed of members of national media regulators and the European Commission. While most ODIHR SEAM interlocutors were cautiously optimistic about the MFA, some were critical of its narrow definition of media, insufficient safeguards against surveillance, as well as the funding and independence of the new regulatory body.

Media coverage of domestic politics overshadowed the low-key EP electoral campaign in the majority of Member States, with coverage often focused on relations between a Member State and the EU, security, migration and opposition to EU environmental policies (the Green Deal), highlighting increasing polarization between the far right and the rest of the political spectrum. Overall, limited coverage of candidates and their platforms reduced the opportunity for voters to learn about contestants and their platforms, thus diminishing their ability to make an informed choice.

There were a number of legislative and practical initiatives to combat disinformation on the EU level, including obligations for the major online platforms to counter disinformation introduced in the DSA.¹⁰² However, such efforts appeared to be insufficient, as disinformation, especially online and in social networks, including the use of deep fake videos discrediting politicians, was used across Member States, often in connection with negative campaigning and reportedly as foreign interference.¹⁰³ It also suspended the broadcasting activities and licenses of some 20 media outlets.¹⁰⁴ Still, many ODIHR SEAM interlocutors noted significant efforts by media and civil society organizations in fact-checking including at the EU level.

Legislation in most Member States provides free airtime to contestants, but, in some cases, it was offered outside of prime time. Debates between leading candidates were organized in the majority of Member States, offering contestants a platform to present their views. However, in several countries, contestants from non-parliamentary parties complained that they were not invited to participate, while in a few countries, major contestants could not agree on the format of the debates.¹⁰⁵ Two online debates among leaders of the European parties organized by private media outlets received very limited attention. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which represents public media in 56 countries including all EU Member States organized a debate at the European Parliament, which was simultaneously interpreted in all 24 official EU languages and rebroadcast on channels or web portals of the majority of their members in the EU, making this debate the largest platform for the EU-level campaign. However, participation in this debate was limited to the five lead candidates representing political groups in the current European Parliament. Such an approach prevented four political parties from participating and is at odds with Paragraph 7.8 of the Copenhagen Document.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² This was supplemented by the 2022 Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation, and the European Commission published detailed guidelines for major online platforms on the mitigation of systemic risks for electoral processes.

¹⁰³ In particular, the report of The European Digital Media Observatory's Task Force on the 2024 European Parliament Elections raised significant concerns about disinformation narratives on the EU elections and coordinated efforts to amplify disinformation. Paragraph 22 of the European Parliament resolution of 25 April 2024 on new allegations of Russian interference in the European Parliament, in the upcoming EU elections and the impact on the European Union noted that "Russia remains the main origin of foreign interference and disinformation in the European Union".

¹⁰⁴ On 17 May 2024, the European Commission introduced a ban on four media outlets: Voice of Europe, RIA Novosti, Izvestia, and Rossiyskaya Gazeta, supplementing the EU-wide bans on Russia Today and Sputnik (including their subsidiaries), Oriental Review, Tsargrad, New Eastern Outlook, Katehon as well as the main Russian television channels Rossiya RTR, RTR Planeta, Rossiya 24, TV Centre International, NTV, NTV Mir, Spas TV, Rossiya 1, REN TV, and Pervyi Kanal introduced in 2022-23. The websites of these media outlets appeared to be accessible during the campaign.

¹⁰⁵ For instance, in Italy, the Public Broadcaster RAI tried to organize a series of debates between party leaders, however, four out of the eight parties running, did not accept the one-on-one format, leading to the cancellation of all debates on public media upon the recommendation of the Italian media regulator AGCOM.

¹⁰⁶ The EBU informed ODIHR SEAM that the limitations in this instance were decided by the European Parliament as the organizer of the tender for the debates. Paragraph 7.8 of the Copenhagen Document requires states to "provide that no legal or administrative obstacle stands in the way of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis for all political groupings and individuals wishing to participate in the electoral process".

Election Dispute Resolution

Member States provide opportunities for redress through both judicial and administrative channels at various levels of the electoral process according to respective national frameworks. In some, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is undermined by the lack of an expedited review process, the absence of open hearings or judicial review at all stages. Several Member States do not provide timely deadlines for adjudicating complaints regarding election results.¹⁰⁷ In a few Member States, national parliaments take the final decision on complaints, which are not subject to further judicial review.¹⁰⁸ There are also review mechanisms at the EU level: a national court can decide to initiate the preliminary reference procedure with the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) when an issue of EU law or compatibility of national law with EU law is raised in a domestic case by one of the parties. However, these processes often have lengthy deadlines, which do not allow for the resolution of disputes during the electoral process. As previously noted by ODIHR, the above limitations undermine the right to effective legal remedy, at odds with OSCE commitments and other international standards. Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, there is a general trust in the adjudicating bodies across Member States.

State practices on logging complaints received and publishing decisions and related materials vary despite ODIHR recommendations to make information about election disputes publicly available in a timely manner. A few disputes have been brought to the attention of the ODIHR SEAM, largely related to candidate registration, and due process was respected in their adjudication.¹⁰⁹ In addition, on 6 February 2024, the German Federal Constitutional Court dismissed an appeal from a political party challenging Germany's act of approval for an amendment to the Electoral Act of September 1976, which aims to impose a threshold. On 30 April 2024, the European Commission initiated formal proceedings against Meta for potential breaches of the DSA, particularly the policies relating to disinformation, deceptive advertising and political content on its services.¹¹⁰ The DSA does not prescribe a specific legal deadline for concluding formal proceedings, as the duration of an investigation is contingent upon various factors, including the complexity of the case. Should the Commission determine that there has been a breach of the DSA, it may issue a decision imposing fines, which would be subject to judicial review.

Election Observation

In line with their OSCE commitments, some Member States provide for both citizen and international observation. However, the legislation of many Member States does not explicitly prescribe such requirement. The lack of explicit provisions and guarantees for citizen and international observation of all stages of the electoral process decreased transparency and is at odds with Paragraph 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.¹¹¹

Only eight Member States, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovenia have provisions on both international and citizen observation. Six Member States, Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Hungary, Luxembourg and the Netherlands provide only for international observation. In Latvia and Slovakia, only observation of certain stages of electoral process is allowed. Eleven Member States

¹⁰⁷ Section II.3.3.g. of the 2002 [Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) recommends that "[t]ime-limits for lodging and deciding appeals must be short (three to five days for each at first instance)". This includes Croatia, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

¹⁰⁸ This includes Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Paragraph 5.10 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) commits participating States to ensure that "everyone have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity".

¹⁰⁹ The ODIHR SEAM was informed of such cases in France, Poland, the Netherlands, and Spain.

¹¹⁰ See [Press Release](#) from the European Commission of 30 April 2024. In December 2023, similar proceedings were initiated against X.

¹¹¹ Paragraph 8 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that "The participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place".

do not have explicit legal provisions for observation, though in six of these, Denmark, France, Germany, Malta, Spain and Sweden, the electoral process is open to the public without accreditation. In Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Portugal, observation is not provided for and is not facilitated.

Nevertheless, all Member States have extended an invitation to ODIHR to observe these elections as well as facilitated access to the entire electoral process. In the past year, EU institutions have expressed increasing support for election observation activities.¹¹²

In a number of EU Member States, ODIHR SEAM interlocutors stated that due to the high level of public trust in the election administration, there is no need to systematically observe election day proceedings. However, some political parties informed the ODIHR SEAM of their intention to deploy partisan observers across the constituencies that they will contest, with the aim to enhance transparency of the electoral process.

Enhancing the transparency of the process, various citizen-led organizations conducted election observation activities on the national level, such as in Bulgaria, Latvia, Poland and Romania, and one non-partisan civil society organization, Election-Watch.EU, conducted an assessment on the EU level.¹¹³

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Brussels, 10 June 2024 – This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is an assessment made to determine whether the elections complied with OSCE commitments, international obligations and standards for democratic elections, and with national legislation.

ODIHR has endorsed the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the electoral process, including the count, tabulation and announcement of results, and the handling of possible post-election day complaints or appeals. ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, some months after the completion of the process.

The ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission (SEAM), headed by Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, was deployed from 15 May and consists of a core team of 7 international experts based in Brussels and 10 regional analysts deployed across EU Member States. The 17 mission members were drawn from 16 OSCE participating States. The ODIHR SEAM did not carry out systematic or comprehensive observation of the voting, counting and tabulation on election day, in line with ODIHR's methodology for election assessment missions. Mission members did, however, visit a limited number of polling stations on election day.

The ODIHR SEAM wishes to thank the authorities of the EU member states for their invitation to observe the election, and the respective election management bodies and respective ministries for the assistance. They also express their appreciation to other state institutions, political parties, media and civil society organizations, and international community representatives for their co-operation.

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¹¹² In its' [2023 Recommendation](#) on inclusive and resilient electoral processes, the European Commission encouraged Member States "...to promote the observation of elections by citizens and international organisations which endorse relevant international standards".

¹¹³ See [Wahlbeobachtung.org | wählen – mitbestimmen – mitgestalten](#)