



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

6-9 June 2024

ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission
Final Report



Warsaw
27 November 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
II.	INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
III.	BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT	4
IV.	LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM	6
V.	ELECTION ADMINISTRATION.....	8
VI.	VOTER REGISTRATION.....	10
VII.	PARTY AND CANDIDATE REGISTRATION.....	12
VIII.	ELECTION CAMPAIGN.....	14
IX.	ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN.....	17
X.	ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES.....	18
XI.	ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES	20
XII.	ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH.....	22
XIII.	CAMPAIGN FINANCE.....	23
XIV.	MEDIA	26
XV.	ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION	30
XVI.	ELECTION OBSERVATION.....	31
XVII.	POST-ELECTION DAY DEVELOPMENTS	32
XVIII.	RECOMMENDATIONS	33
	A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	33
	B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS.....	34
	ANNEX I: FINAL ELECTION RESULTS	37
	ANNEX II: ODIHR SEAM MEMBERS.....	38
	ABOUT ODIHR	39

European Parliament Elections
6-9 June 2024

ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission Final Report

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following official invitations from all European Union (EU) Member States to observe the 6-9 June 2024 European Parliament elections, in accordance with its mandate, and based on the recommendation of a Needs Assessment Mission, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed a Special Election Assessment Mission (SEAM) from 15 May to 14 June 2024.

The Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions issued by the SEAM on 10 June concluded that “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 polarization 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 EU Member States adopting national laws and regulations on most aspects. National laws regulating the process generally provide a sound basis for respecting fundamental civil and political rights and conduct of democratic elections, though different provisions for voting and candidacy rights, including of persons with disabilities do not ensure equal opportunities across all EU Member States. Some broad EU-wide common rules for the elections also exist, including proportional representation, thresholds, and incompatibilities with the mandate of a Member of the European Parliament. Other legislative initiatives at the EU level for further harmonization are not fully implemented or do not have broad support from across the political spectrum.

The elections were organized in a professional and effective manner by national election management bodies of EU Member States with election administrators generally enjoying a high level of public confidence. Some logistical challenges were communicated by the organizing authorities, in particular, where parallel elections took place or new legislation was recently implemented. Stakeholders from national election administrators and relevant authorities acknowledged the benefits of co-operation between Member States, notably with regard to exchange of data on voters and candidates. Cybersecurity measures both at national and European levels enhanced the level of preparedness of the electoral authorities against potential cyberattacks. Voting methods in Member States varied significantly, creating unequal opportunities for EU citizens across Member States. The European institutions, most prominently the European Parliament, conducted an extensive and inclusive voter education campaign.

The elections were inclusive, with some 361 million voters registered to vote. However, contrary to international standards and OSCE commitments, restrictions on voting rights in many Member States

in relation to legal incapacity based on mental disability persist. While no concerns regarding the accuracy of voter lists were raised, there was a relative lack of awareness about rules for registration and voting among mobile EU citizens. There is no sufficient mechanism to prevent double voting by EU citizens with more than one nationality or those who reside outside their home country although there was no indication that the practice is widespread.

The elections were competitive, with some 530 party and independent lists registered in an inclusive manner including more than 16,000 candidates across all 27 Member States, offering voters a wide choice of genuine political alternatives. Contrary to international standards and commitments, many Member States do not allow independent candidates to stand. Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, in some countries, a voter may only sign in support of one list for registration. Timelines for candidate registration varied greatly, and, together with differing signature collection and deposit requirements, created unequal campaign conditions across Member States. There has been little progress in efforts made by the EU Member States to harmonize rules for candidate registration on the European level, and further efforts are needed to promote the participation of young persons and women both as voters and candidates, though political parties often adopted internal policies conducive to increase the participation of these underrepresented groups.

The campaign was competitive, and low-key in most countries although some subjects, notably migration and support to Ukraine, were used as divisive tools both during online and offline campaigning. Fundamental freedoms were upheld. Regrettably, instances of serious political violence occurred. Some high-level EU officials campaigned actively despite still exercising their official duties, raising questions about the potential misuse of administrative resources and the lack of sufficient regulation on 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 providing transparency in political advertising and labelling. Nevertheless, worries remained concerning the oversight of campaign advertising practices and harmful rhetoric on less scrutinized platforms.

With almost 40 per cent in the outgoing parliament, women were fairly well represented in political and public life at the EU level. Nevertheless, the level of women's representation varies considerably across the EU and Member States are yet to reach gender equality aspired to in the 2020-2025 EU Gender Equality Strategy. 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. There was a 2.1 per cent decrease in the number of women in the newly elected parliament with 277 women MEPs (38.5 per cent).

While most Member States have ratified international and regional instruments protecting the rights of minorities, 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 underrepresented groups, notably Roma, were insufficient. In many Member States, inclusion of minority representatives was nominal, and few contestants addressed minority communities in their platforms. Regrettably, comments on migration and integration, including xenophobic comments, were prominent during the campaign.

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. 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. While the majority of Member States provide candidacy rights from the age of 18, enhancing youth participation and representation, the right to stand is guaranteed in all Member States by the age of 25.

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

The diverse and fragmented media across the EU Member States displayed limited interest in the campaigns of candidates, opting largely instead for 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. In 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 physical and online harassment of journalists, contributed to an antagonistic environment for media outlets and journalists in many Member States.

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

Legislation and practices related to election observation vary significantly across Member States. While some countries explicitly provide for both citizen and international observation, there continue to be no such provisions for election observation in several Member States, contrary to OSCE commitments.

Preliminary results were published by Member States by 10 June, with the exception of Ireland where counting took longer. The European Parliament announced a voter turnout of 51 per cent, which is a minor increase from 2019, though turnout between countries varied significantly, ranging from 21 per cent to 89 per cent, where voting is mandatory. The post-election environment was calm. The ODIHR SEAM was not informed of any appeals against election results that could have an impact on the allocation of mandates, though some isolated concerns were raised.

This report offers recommendations to support efforts to bring elections to the European Parliament closer to OSCE commitments and other international and regional obligations and standards for

democratic elections. Priority recommendations relate to enhancing suffrage rights to create equal opportunities for political participation among all citizens of EU Member States, addressing inflammatory and discriminatory speech in the campaign, protection of journalists from threats and intimidation, further enhancing the participation of women, providing increased opportunities for the participation of national minorities and increasing accessibility to the electoral process for persons with disabilities, and guaranteeing access of citizen and international observers to all stages of the electoral process. ODIHR stands ready to assist European institutions and national authorities in addressing the recommendations in this and previous reports.

II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Following official invitations from all European Union (EU) Member States to observe the 6-9 June 2024 European Parliament elections, in accordance with its mandate, and based on the recommendation of a Needs Assessment Mission, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed a Special Election Assessment Mission (SEAM) from 15 May to 14 June.

The mission, led by Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, consisted 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. In line with ODIHR's methodology, the SEAM did not observe election day proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner but visited a limited number of polling stations.

The ODIHR SEAM assessed compliance of the electoral process with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, as well as relevant EU regulatory framework and EU Member States national legislation. This final report follows a Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions released at a press conference in Brussels on 10 June.

The ODIHR SEAM wishes to thank the authorities of the EU Member States for their invitation to observe the elections, and the respective election management bodies and ministries for their cooperation and assistance. The ODIHR SEAM also expresses their appreciation to EU institutions, other national authorities, political parties, media and civil society organizations, and international community representatives for their co-operation.

III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The EU is a supranational political and economic union comprising 27 Member States.¹ The EU comprises seven principle decision-making bodies: the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Central Bank and the European Court of Auditors. The European Parliament represents the citizens of EU countries and is the only EU institution that is directly elected. The Parliament shares legislative powers with the Council of the European Union, but cannot initiate legislation, except related to its own elections. With the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the powers and role of the Parliament increased. The European Commission, which serves as the executive authority of the EU,

¹ The powers, responsibilities and procedures of the EU's institutions are laid down in the [founding treaties](#) of the EU. The EU is based on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. EU countries have agreed to grant the Union exclusive competences including in concluding trade agreements on behalf of the bloc and managing the euro. In many other areas, the EU shares competences with the member states, which means that both the EU and EU countries can adopt legally binding acts. In other areas, the EU lacks competence and Member States take the leading role, while the EU, when applicable, supports or complements their actions.

can initiate legislation and is accountable to the Parliament. The Court of Justice of the European Union ensures the interpretation and the application of EU law and the treaties, while the EU budget is scrutinized by the European Court of Auditors. A number of subordinate bodies advise the EU or operate in specific thematic areas.

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 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 elections, known as *Spitzenkandidaten*.³ Ahead of these elections, the lead candidate process generated a lot of debate at the level of EU institutions 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 may have potentially confused voters as to the impact of the election results on the Commission presidency.⁶ At the level of the EU institutions, there was an increased discourse on the so-called Europeanization of the electoral process, including a proposal to create an EU-wide constituency.

The 2024 EU parliamentary elections unfolded against a backdrop of diverse political landscapes across Member States, characterized by increased 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

² There are ten registered EUPPs: The Party of the European Left (PEL/EL), The Party of European Socialists (PES), Identity and Democracy Party (ID), The European People's Party (EPP), The European Green Party (EGP), The European Free Alliance (EFA), The European Democratic Party (EDP aka PDE), The European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR Party), The European Christian Political Movement (ECPM), The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE Party). National contestants gain representation in the Parliament as members of political groups. The political groups are organized not by nationality but by political affiliation. A minimum of 25 Members are needed to form a political group, and at least one-quarter of the Member States must be represented within the group. Members may not belong to more than one political group. Some MEPs do not belong to any political group and are known as non-attached Members.

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 the 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 them as *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. In its [December 2023 Resolution](#), the European Parliament reiterated that the lead candidate system could foster the European public debate and empower European political parties. The Resolution also states that the European political party with the most seats should initially lead negotiations to identify a common candidate with the largest majority. If necessary, other lead candidates will join this effort, proportional to the number of seats their parties have obtained. Many ODIHR SEAM interlocutors viewed this wording as a compromise necessary to reach a consensus on the lead candidate and the election of the President of the Commission.

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.

economic strains and corruption concerns.⁷ During this term, the European Parliament has grappled with the fallout from the 2022 ‘Qatargate’ scandal, involving one of its vice-presidents and several MEPs.⁸ 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 limited public engagement in political debate. Demonstrations by farmers in several Member States against agricultural policy reforms under the EU Green Deal, 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.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The Treaty on European Union (TEU) also known as Maastricht Treaty, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 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 incompatibilities 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

While each Member State must respect these 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, controls on political finance, timelines for election dispute resolution, and provisions for the participation of women and persons with disabilities in the electoral process and political life. Overall, national laws provide a sound basis for the respect of fundamental civil and political rights and for conduct of democratic elections. However, while the margin of appreciation is

⁷ Early elections across these European nations were held mostly due to governmental instability, coalition collapses, corruption scandals, and significant political disagreements or challenges within the ruling parties. Austria on 29 September 2019, Bulgaria on 2 April 2023, Denmark on 1 November 2022, Greece on 21 May 2023, Italy on 25 September 2022, Malta on 26 March 2022, the Netherlands on 22 November 2023, Slovenia on 3 June 2018, Slovakia on 30 September 2023, and Spain on 23 July 2023, Croatia 17 April 2024 and Portugal 10 March 2024.

⁸ See [Ombudsman Closing Note](#) on the Strategic Initiative on improving the European Parliament’s Ethics and Transparency Framework (SI/1/2023/MIK).

⁹ Article 39 of the [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) confirms that every EU citizen has the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in the Member State in which they reside, under the same conditions as nationals of that State, and that MEPs shall be elected by direct universal suffrage in a free and secret ballot.

¹⁰ Including the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([ICCPR](#)), 1979 Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#)), 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ([CERD](#)), the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ([CRPD](#)) and the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights. [In addition, the EU signed and ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence \(“Istanbul Convention”\)](#) which is now binding on all EU Member States. Twenty three out of 27 EU MS signed and ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention on National Minorities (FCNM). See also the compilation of [OSCE human dimension commitments to which all EU member states have committed](#).

afforded to the States with regard to suffrage rights, varied conditions result in unequal conditions for the universal suffrage, especially for persons with disabilities.¹¹

To ensure equal suffrage rights, conditions and rules for the right to vote and to be elected would benefit from further harmonization across Member States, in particular equal suffrage rights for persons with disabilities in elections to the European Parliament should be guaranteed.

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, as well as existing constitutional hindrances. While amendments, introducing a set of both obligatory and optional rules for the States, were enacted in 2018, not all Member States have ratified them.¹² Most notably, the obligatory amendments include the provisions on setting a minimum threshold of 2 per cent and 5 per cent for constituencies comprising more than 35 seats, a three-week deadline for candidate nomination processes, measures to prevent multiple voting, and designation of a responsible authority to facilitate information exchange on voters participating outside of their country of residence. Additional measures that Member States may implement include ballots displaying names and logos of the European political parties affiliated with national parties, absentee voting, and the possibility of voting from countries outside the EU. In 2022, a proposal for further amendments was passed by the Parliament but did not gain approval from the Council. The most contentious issues include lowering the voting age to 16, the principles for candidate selection, binding and voluntary gender quotas, the lead candidate process, as well as the establishment of a European electoral authority and a single EU-wide constituency for the election of 28 MEPs.¹³ 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) fully came into force in February 2024, requiring online platforms to mitigate risks related to elections while safeguarding fundamental rights, including freedom of expression.¹⁴ 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 (DSC), as required by the act.¹⁵

For the new parliament, a total of 720 MEPs were 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

¹¹ 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 CPRD. See also relevant sections of this report, *Voter Registration* and *Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities*, for further details.

¹² 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 the rules. See a [2021 study](#), commissioned by the European Parliament’s Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the AFCO, describing challenges in unifying European elections across States.

¹³ Other suggestions included a common minimum age requirement of 18 years to be elected, to guarantee rights to voting abroad including from outside the EU; to provide for alternative voting methods such as postal voting, early voting, or use of new voting technologies to facilitate voting, introduction of a fixed election day for all Member States, and introduction of a unified campaign period commencing eight weeks prior to election day.

¹⁴ The Digital Service Act was adopted on 29 September 2022. As of 17 February 2024, it applies to all online platforms. The [Artificial Intelligence Act](#) was adopted on 13 March 2024 but is not yet applicable.

¹⁵ 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.

to the outgoing Parliament, resulting from the review process undertaken ahead of each election.¹⁶ 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 the single transferrable vote system. 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 constituencies.¹⁷ There is also a considerable variation in electoral thresholds, ranging from none to a maximum of 5 per cent, which regrettably results in varying opportunities for new or small parties.¹⁸

V. 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, or representatives of courts. EMBs across EU Member States were composed of either party appointees, civil servants or citizen volunteers, and in some cases judges and lawyers.¹⁹

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 transparency of decision-making processes was not fully guaranteed, as in 17 out of 27 Member States EMBs either do not hold sessions or the sessions are closed to the public.²⁰ 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 technical operators.²¹ Some logistical challenges were also noted, particularly in countries with large amounts of out of country voters. For instance, Spain's postal services worked under

¹⁶ 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, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia each gained an additional seat, while France, the Netherlands and Spain received two additional seats each.

¹⁷ These are Belgium, Ireland, Italy and Poland.

¹⁸ 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. The 2022 proposal reiterated the idea of imposing an electoral threshold in big national constituencies, as already provided for in 2018 proposal. However, the requirements were loosened and, although Member States remain free to establish a threshold of no more than 5 per cent of the valid votes cast, they would be obliged to establish a threshold – of no less than 3.5 per cent and no more than 5 per cent – only for national constituencies comprising more than 60 seats. In practice, the rule would only affect Germany and Spain. The German legislature has twice tried to adopt self-imposed electoral thresholds for the European elections, but the German Federal Constitutional Court declared them unconstitutional in [2011](#) and [2014](#). The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has considered that electoral thresholds for the attribution of seats are acceptable because each electoral system has to marry competing if not conflicting purposes. See, for example ECtHR, judgment on [Cernea v. Romania](#) (Application no. [43609/10](#)), 27 February 2018.

¹⁹ In 13 EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia) there is a mixed model of EMBs. In 10 countries (Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Sweden) the elections are administered by a government body and in remaining 4 Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Malta and Slovenia) by an independent body.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ The reasons vary and include insufficient party nominees (Austria, Czechia) and low salaries for staff (Slovenia).

additional strain to deliver ballots to overseas voters, resulting in some delays.²² In Italy, the recently introduced law that facilitated students' voting for the lists and candidates of their territorial constituency of origin, without the need to return to the municipality of residence, necessitated establishment of special polling stations with different ballot papers.²³

At the European level, the European Co-operation Network for Elections (ECNE), established in 2019 by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 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, access for observers, and legislative proposals regarding political advertising. Overall, the co-operation was praised by various stakeholders, but some questioned the usefulness of the topics of focus and noted the need for more dialogue on operational matters. Still, the ODIHR SEAM found that ECNE provided a necessary platform for election officials from all EU Member States to meet and exchange on important issues as they were facing them and to share good practices on addressing common challenges, effectively increasing co-operation between States and across the region. European and national authorities, civil society and media launched an extensive, comprehensive and inclusive voter education campaign including through social networks.

While voting methods in Member States vary significantly, creating unequal conditions for EU citizens across Member States, the presence of alternative voting modalities enhanced overall voter participation. Most Member States allow the possibility to vote from abroad in European elections. Citizens of Italy abroad may only vote within the EU. Czechia, Ireland, Malta and Slovakia do not provide all citizens with the right to vote from abroad.²⁴ While many ODIHR SEAM interlocutors advocated for the introduction of out-of-country voting, others highlighted the politically sensitive nature of the issue.²⁵ Electronic voting machines can be used in Belgium and Bulgaria, but only Estonia uses internet voting.²⁶ Ten states provide for advance voting. Proxy voting is possible in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, despite ODIHR recommendations against it.²⁷ The European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) has advocated for Member States to explore alternative voting methods and the possibility to vote on designated early-voting days.²⁸

To facilitate inclusive electoral participation, relevant institutions should continue exploring alternative voting methods which duly comply with OSCE commitments and other international standards.

²² Also, Romania opened 915 polling stations and printed 2.5 million ballots for voters residing abroad.

²³ While several ODIHR SEAM interlocutors welcomed the move, some others were critical about the actual low numbers of students who applied to vote compared to the total number of "off-site" students. According to the Ministry of Interior [report](#), 23.734 students applied by the deadline and 21.114 of them were registered to vote. Interlocutors suggested that "out-of-town" workers should also be granted an opportunity to vote.

²⁴ 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. Maltese overseas citizens are provided with state-subsidized tickets to return home to vote. Recently, Greece has introduced postal vote to be used in the EP elections for the first time.

²⁵ 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".

²⁶ A recently adopted law in Estonia will provide for voting from mobile devices such as smartphones in future elections.

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ 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.

Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, and Romania held national or local elections at the same time.²⁹ 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 presented, particularly where out-of-country voting took place in parallel.

The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) reported a significant increase in disruptive cyberattacks against European infrastructures in the months before the polls.³⁰ Responding to concerns about cybersecurity and disinformation ahead of the elections, EU institutions engaged in consultations and launched a cybersecurity exercise to test the crisis plans and responses to potential cybersecurity incidents affecting the European elections.³¹ The ODIHR SEAM was informed by some national institutions that there had been some attempts at cyberattacks, but they had been dealt with successfully by the relevant authorities.³² In general, cybersecurity measures both at the European and national levels enhanced the level of preparedness of the electoral authorities against potential attacks.

VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

EU citizens of voting age have the right to vote in European Parliament elections either in their country of citizenship or in any other Member State. Voter eligibility is otherwise regulated by national legislation and differs across Member States, resulting in unequal conditions for voters. The minimum age for voting varies from 16 to 18 years.³³ At odds with international standards, voting rights of persons with intellectual disabilities are curtailed in many Member States.³⁴ 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.³⁵ Other limitations on persons serving a prison sentence remain in a number of countries.³⁶ Voting is compulsory in Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Luxembourg.³⁷ Significant numbers of stateless persons are present in a number of countries, and their status often impacts the exercise of their political rights.³⁸ Some ODIHR SEAM interlocutors raised concerns about the obstacles for the participation of homeless persons in the elections, mainly

²⁹ Additionally, several countries held referenda. In Slovenia, the parallel holding of a consultative referenda raised financial challenges, which were adequately resolved.

³⁰ [According to ENISA](#), the number of hacktivist attacks against European infrastructure doubled from the fourth quarter of 2023 to the first quarter of 2024.

³¹ The [exercise](#) was organized in November 2023 by the European Parliament's services, the European Commission and the ENISA. National authorities also informed the ODIHR SEAM about their respective measures and trainings on cybersecurity and cyber-hygiene.

³² For instance, French Cybersecurity Agency ANSSI ensures the cybersecurity of the election process and conducted technical audits of the MoI's cyberinfrastructure. In Ireland, the National Cyber Security Center is in charge of identifying "deep risks" in preventing cyberattacks. Foreign Interference Manipulation and Intelligence (FIMI) Unit at the Department of Foreign Affairs coordinates the EU level co-operation and also briefed national political parties before elections on cyber-hygiene.

³³ Voters in Austria, Germany, Malta, and Belgium vote at the age of 16. In Hungary, married persons can vote at 16, otherwise it is 18 years. In Greece, voting is possible from 17 years of age.

³⁴ See *Legal Framework and Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities* sections of this report.

³⁵ Paragraph 14 of the UN CCPR General Comment No.25 states that grounds for deprivation of voting rights should be "objective and reasonable".

³⁶ While 11 Member States have no restrictions on prisoners voting (Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Sweden), 14 apply some restrictions linked to the length of the sentence and/or the kind of offence a person is convicted for.

³⁷ The 2002 [Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters recognizes abstention as a political choice](#).

³⁸ According to [UNHCR data](#), more than 292,000 stateless people live in the Nordic and Baltic countries (2022 figures), including non-citizens in Latvia, and persons with undetermined citizenship in Estonia.

due to the lack of a permanent address, which is usually required for voter registration, and the lack of identity documents.³⁹

Blanket deprivation of suffrage rights of citizens serving a prison sentence and restrictions based on legal capacity should be reviewed in line with international obligations.

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;⁴⁰ others noted potentially inflated numbers in the voter lists, for various reasons including due to deceased voters not being consistently removed.⁴¹

Some 361 million voters were registered to vote in these elections.⁴² In-country voter registration across Member States is generally passive and automatic, while for voting from abroad many countries require active registration.⁴³

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union introduced and enforced the concept of European Union citizenship as additional to national citizenship.⁴⁴ Some 11 million EU citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals had the right to vote in these elections in their country of residence. However, the residency requirements for these ‘mobile EU citizens’ differ across Member States.⁴⁵ Registration deadlines for mobile EU citizens in their respective country of residence also vary significantly, ranging from several months to a few days before elections.⁴⁶ Some countries launched targeted voter education initiatives on voting for ‘mobile EU citizens’.⁴⁷ 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.

³⁹ [2020 AFCO Report on stocktaking of European elections](#) called on the Member States to improve their laws and remove the requirement to provide proof of address in order to make it easier for homeless people to vote. The [2024 Position Paper by NGO Feantsa](#) referred to some good practices facilitating the voting of homeless persons in Denmark, Germany, Ireland, and Italy. However, Feantsa also stressed that homelessness resulting in social exclusion can diminish the value of voting in comparison to immediate survival needs such as shelter, food, water and safety.

⁴⁰ For instance, Czechia, Ireland, Italy and Romania.

⁴¹ Reported to ODIHR SEAM in Bulgaria, Greece and Ireland, particularly in relation to citizens residing abroad.

⁴² See data as provided by [Eurostat](#).

⁴³ In Cyprus and Ireland, voting inside the country also requires an active registration.

⁴⁴ Article 20 of the TFEU grants EU citizens the right to move and reside freely in other Member States, to petition the European Parliament, to apply to the European Ombudsman, and to enjoy in a third country protection from the diplomatic and consular authorities of any other Member State than their own.

⁴⁵ 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. See [September 2023 research by the European Parliamentary Research Service](#) on existing policies for voting abroad. A European Parliament legislative resolution of 3 May 2022 on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage states: “not all Member States give their citizens the possibility of voting from abroad, and among those that do, the conditions for granting them the right to vote vary greatly; whereas granting all citizens of the Union residing outside the Union the right to participate in elections would contribute to electoral equality; whereas, however, Member States need to coordinate their administrative systems better in order to prevent voters from voting in two different Member States”.

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 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.

Authorities should continue efforts to facilitate voting by mobile EU citizens through timely notification and raising of awareness about the possibility for mobile citizens to vote and the deadlines for voter registration.

In line with the Council Directive 93/109/EC, a voter may only vote in one Member State. Notwithstanding the legal provisions aimed at safeguarding the integrity of the vote, there is no sufficient mechanism to prevent double voting by EU citizens with more than one nationality or who reside outside their home country. 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 the 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.

VII. PARTY AND CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

The recognition of political parties with a specific European legal status is provided for by the Treaty on European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and their activities are primarily governed by the 2014 EU Regulation on the Statute and Funding of European Political Parties and European Political Foundations. 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.

To register as an EUPP, the party must be based in an 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.

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. In line with the Council Directive 93/109/EC, 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.

While in most Member States the minimum age to stand for elections is 18, some have higher age requirements; this results in differing opportunities to stand.⁴⁸ 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

⁴⁸ However, there are 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.

recommendations to facilitate this right in the context of national elections, in line with OSCE commitments and international standards.⁴⁹

In EU Member States where it is currently not the case, candidate registration should allow for independent candidates, in line with OSCE commitments and international standards.

In most of the Member States, the registration requirements included collection of support signatures or a deposit.⁵⁰ In some countries, each voter or a representative⁵¹ may support only one list of candidates. This provision may limit freedom of association and expression, and is contrary to international good practice.⁵²

In order to enhance respect for freedom of association and expression, the legal framework should be amended to allow voters to sign in support of more than one electoral contestant in each election, in the EU Member States that currently apply such restriction.

Timelines for candidate registration varied greatly and, together with differing signature collection and deposit requirements, created unequal campaign conditions across Member States.⁵³ 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 practices of compiling the lists by parties are diverse.⁵⁴ 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 for EP elections.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, further commitment is needed by most political parties to promote diversity on candidate lists and to improve the representation of women, ethnic and linguistic minorities in the EU Member States where they exist as well as persons with disabilities in party activities.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ 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”.

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ In some countries, candidate lists may be supported by either voters or elected representatives.

⁵² 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”.

⁵³ 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.

⁵⁴ Some ODIHR SEAM interlocutors noted that while in some countries the selection of candidates for the list is done at the party congresses, in some other countries it is the party leaders who compose the list unilaterally.

⁵⁵ 13 countries apply binding legislative gender quotas for national elections. See the *Electoral Participation of Women* section for an overview of the respective quotas.

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ For more details, see dedicated sections of this report.

Effective measures should be undertaken, including by political parties, in order to promote inclusive participation of candidates from under-represented groups, including women, persons with disabilities and youth.

VIII. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Freedoms of association and peaceful assembly are enshrined in the EU Charter, as well as the national constitutional and legal frameworks of all Member States. There are no EU-wide regulations for campaigning by national parties.⁵⁸ Regulation of the manner and location of campaigning varies within 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.⁵⁹ Most EU Member States prohibit canvassing and the publication of opinion polls on election day or shortly 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, and their activities are not regulated.⁶⁰ For these elections, all 10 EUPPs developed and endorsed a voluntary self-regulatory Code of Conduct, in collaboration with an intergovernmental organization. The Code of Conduct 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.⁶¹

Overall, the campaign was competitive, although low-key in most countries, and the environment for campaigning permitted freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Regrettably, a few serious instances of politically related violence took place during the campaign period.⁶² Most notably, on 15 May, the Prime Minister of Slovakia was shot and suffered from life-threatening injuries while greeting supporters in the town of Handlova. Cases of harmful rhetoric, including elements of racism, misogyny, xenophobia, islamophobia, intimidation and violence persisted throughout the campaign and increasingly online. According to political parties, incidents often targeted women candidates,

⁵⁸ 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.

⁵⁹ See [campaign length](#) in each Member State.

⁶⁰ For instance, 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](#).

⁶¹ See International IDEA [Code of Conduct](#) for the 2024 European Parliament Elections. [In Sweden](#), the Sweden Democrats, affiliated with the ECR, reportedly used anonymous accounts to disparage other parties, violating agreed terms. This example illustrates the indirect accountability national parties face under their European political party standards through the signing of the code.

⁶² [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.

particularly those with migrant background and from LGBTI communities, and in some cases led to the filing of police reports or the need to hire private security.⁶³

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 misuse of administrative resources and advantages of incumbency during campaign are regulated at the national level and varies across Member States.⁶⁴ As such, there is a lack of clarity regarding campaigning by current high-level EU officials, EU staff or the use of EU resources in the campaign. Although no official complaints were filed, many ODIHR SEAM interlocutors raised concerns about the potential misuse of administrative resources, as some high-level EU officials were campaigning, while at the same time continuing 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.

Legislation and practice should be aligned to prevent any potential existing of perceived conflict of interest of candidates holding official positions with the EU institutions as well as any unwanted misuse of institutional resources during the campaign. Any suspicion of violations should be proactively investigated and established wrongdoings properly sanctioned.

The main campaign themes were the common EU migration policy and its overall impact on society, 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 ground of far-right parties and the values they are defending, notably concerning migration issues, Eurosceptic positions and their potential effects on EU cohesion, and the foundations of democracy were prevalent 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.⁶⁵ Further, during the elections, ODIHR SEAM interlocutors' concerns persisted over political ads spending and labelling practices, especially on less regulated platforms such as TikTok and X.⁶⁶

⁶³ 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 raised by ODIHR SEAM interlocutors also in Austria, Ireland, 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”.

⁶⁴ Some Members States do not have sufficient regulations to prevent the use of public office for campaign purposes and the misuse of administrative resources; these include Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden.

⁶⁵ 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.

⁶⁶ Although TikTok does not permit political advertising, it is still flooded with political deepfakes and other political content. Most political parties that the ODIHR SEAM met with acknowledged that they are active on the platform, either to monitor it or to ensure their messages are disseminated.

The ODIHR SEAM noted cases of disinformation affecting well-known political figures. SEAM political party interlocutors acknowledged that even though their supporters are aware that these instances are fabricated, they nonetheless manage to instill a degree of uncertainty among supporters and voters.⁶⁷ Under the EU's new artificial intelligence (AI) regulations, the use of deepfakes is legal provided that their creators disclose their artificial origins, and the DSA mandates that major tech platforms such as TikTok, X, and Facebook label AI-generated content.⁶⁸

Members States should pursue their efforts to implement DSA and AI regulations aimed at countering disinformation and manipulative content, including the use of deepfakes, in collaboration with technology and social media companies, media outlets and non-state actors.

The ODIHR SEAM monitored the online campaign activities of a sample of candidates and political parties on Facebook and X.⁶⁹ Most messages of the contestants were neutral in 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 with 406,782 and 257,578 respectively. The online campaign covered a range of topics, prominently featuring pro-EU messages, migration, economy and critiques of far-right ideologies, with the latter intensifying days before the elections. In the week leading up to the elections, there was a noticeable increase in critical posts, however, these remained mostly non-confrontational. Anti-migrant posts, particularly from Mr. Bardella and Anders Vistisen (Danish People's Party), generated higher engagement levels, indicating resonance with their followers.⁷⁰ Beyond the sample, xenophobic and Islamophobic messages were frequently observed in online campaign narratives of far-right parties across the Member States.⁷¹ The EU Parliament's social media activity was primarily focused on their extensive "Use Your Vote" communication campaign.

To enhance public confidence in the electoral process, electoral contestants should refrain from incitement to hatred or using intolerant or discriminatory rhetoric towards migrants and other vulnerable groups. Public officials and authorities at the national and EU level should promptly condemn and where relevant investigate such instances.

⁶⁷ ODIHR SEAM interlocutors highlighted a rise in the use of deepfakes against their party leaders over the past six months, which has negatively impacted their reputations. On [31 December 2023](#), a deepfake involving Marine Le Pen was circulated on platform X, utilizing artificial intelligence to manipulate her voice into Russian. Similarly, on [15 January](#), Frans Timmermans of the Netherlands' Greens was featured in a deepfake flying in a private jet to Malaga. On X, on [26 April](#), the Prime Minister of Denmark, Mette Frederiksen, fell victim of a deepfake appearing in a video where she states that she has "successfully abolished" all Christian holidays. On X, on [5 June](#), Jordan Bardella of the French National Rally was also targeted by a deepfake days before the election.

⁶⁸ The [AI Act](#) was adopted in December 2023 and approved by the Council of the EU on 21 May 2024 and the rules will come into force after 36 months.

⁶⁹ 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 to 11 June. A total of 1,484 posts from Facebook and X were analysed.

⁷⁰ 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". Fabrice Leggeri, the former head of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) between 2015 and 2022, who resigned from his position amid international criticism of harassment, misconduct and illegal migrant and asylum pushbacks, joined the France's far-right National Rally list and was elected MEP following their campaign focusing largely on migration issues.

⁷¹ Examples of Islamophobic posts in the days before the election include: 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](#), Spanish 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".

IX. 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.⁷² Nevertheless, not all Member States apply a gender quota for European Parliament elections.⁷³

Where there is a gender quota, it does not always stipulate the fair positioning of women on the list and ultimately does not always result in more equality in the number of women and men elected to the European Parliament.⁷⁴ Several Member States have special gender measures for candidate registration linked to the provision of public funding,⁷⁵ and in a few, legislation encourages internal party quotas for national elections.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, limited availability of sex-disaggregated data hinders efforts to ensure adopted policies and measures address the needs of citizens of each gender.⁷⁷

It is a common practice for political parties across all Member States to apply voluntary quotas.⁷⁸ However, some ODIHR SEAM interlocutors, notably from right-wing political parties, explicitly stated their opposition to any form of gender quota, mainly due to their belief that the increased participation of women in the public sphere challenges "traditional" family values, division of labour as well as sexual and reproductive rights.

Women were fairly well represented in the outgoing European Parliament, with 280 MEPs (39.8 per cent) compared to 424 men (60.2 per cent). While this does not reach the Europe-wide gender equality aspired to, it does make the European Parliament one of the most gender-balanced parliaments in the world.⁷⁹ Additionally, women held important positions within the outgoing EU institutions, and 12 of

⁷² See [EU Gender Equality Strategy](#).

⁷³ Eleven EU Member States have legislative gender quota requirements for European Parliament elections (Belgium, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia). See also the June 2024 [report](#) by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), "Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union: 2023 state of play".

⁷⁴ Paragraph 23 of the [1999 OSCE Istanbul Document](#) commits participating States to "making equality between men and women an integral part of [their] policies". See also Paragraph 3 of the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 7/09](#), which calls participating States to "encourage all political actors to promote equal participation of women and men in political parties, with a view to achieving better gender-balanced representation in elected public offices at all levels of decision-making". Belgium, France, Italy and Luxembourg all require 50 per cent representation of each gender; Greece, Spain, Croatia, Portugal and Slovenia at least 40 per cent; and Poland at least 35 per cent. In most cases the quota threshold is the same for both European and national elections, but the threshold for European elections is higher in Italy (50 per cent versus 40 per cent) and Slovenia (40 percent versus 35). Meanwhile, Ireland has a 40 per cent quota for national elections but none for European elections. 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.

⁷⁵ 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.

⁷⁶ These include Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Sweden.

⁷⁷ Among others, Paragraph 40.13 of the [1991 OSCE Moscow Document](#) commits participating States to "ensure the collection and analysis of data to assess adequately, monitor and improve the situation of women". See also the 1989 General Recommendation No. 9 adopted by the CEDAW Committee ([A/44/38](#)) and Goal 17.18 of the [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) adopted in 2015.

⁷⁸ Measures include different types of gender quotas, at times combined with rank orders.

⁷⁹ See [report](#) by EIGE. At the same time, no legislative measures in any EU Member State exist to address multiple discrimination such as gender, age, or minority.

the 27 Commissioners were women, in addition to the President of the Commission.⁸⁰ For the 2024 elections, the number of contesting women was some 5,000 out of some 16,000 candidates, and of the 10 lead candidates put forward by EUPPs, 5 were women. Moreover, in the election campaign, prominent women EU officials and some national lead candidates, enjoyed a high profile. There was a 2.1 per cent decrease in the number of women in the newly elected parliament with 277 women MEPs (38.5 per cent).⁸¹ On the other hand, the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Parliament, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Head of the European Central Bank and the President of the European Investment Bank are all women. In the parliament, 6 out of 14 Vice-presidents are women.

While both European and national political parties generally addressed the issue of gender equality and women's participation in public and political life in their programmes, these topics did not feature widely in the campaign or the contestants' debates and oftentimes remained limited to topics considered "women's issues", such as care provision, including childcare, as well as work and family-life balance.⁸² Fewer parties discussed the pay gap or gender and poverty.

Political parties should strengthen their efforts to foster inclusivity, including by adopting binding policies to place women in leading positions on candidate lists and integrating gender considerations into their policy proposals.

With regard to the active participation of women in political life, most interlocutors felt that women may be deterred by a hostile campaign environment, in particular by online verbal attacks.⁸³ Women candidates across different political parties in several Member States, reported that women were more exposed to sexist or degrading treatment, especially on social networks, and while men colleagues are predominantly attacked based on their political conviction, women politicians are frequently targeted because of their gender. This consideration prevents some women from seeking political office.

Violence against women in the campaign should be recognised by political parties and institutions as a barrier to women's active political participation. Consideration should be given to introducing or strengthening existing proactive and preventive measures against such actions.

To effectively facilitate women's participation in public and political life, comprehensive legal, institutional, and educational efforts challenging the existing gender stereotypes about the role of women and men in politics should be undertaken by the authorities at all levels.

X. ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

Respect for the rights of persons belonging to minorities is laid down explicitly in Article 2 of the TEU, as well as in other international instruments and OSCE commitments.⁸⁴ Although most Member States have ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National

⁸⁰ Data according to European Commission [website](#).

⁸¹ The number of elected women varied considerably between Member States and ranged from 0 per cent in Cyprus to 61.9 per cent in Sweden.

⁸² Article 191c of the [1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) provides that political parties "shall consider incorporating gender issues in their political agenda, taking measures to ensure that women can participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men".

⁸³ For instance, ODIHR SEAM interlocutors raised such issues in Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia. See [report](#) by the European Women's Lobby on cyberviolence against women.

⁸⁴ Among others, Paragraph 35 of 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".

Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, challenges remain in the practical implementation of their election-related provisions.⁸⁵ Further, the level of recognition of national minorities varies among the Member States.⁸⁶

Access to language rights and their exercise in practice are equally varied. While some Member States have multiple state languages⁸⁷ and/or allow or even provide for the use of other languages in public life, including in electoral processes,⁸⁸ others adopt more restrictive approaches that run counter to international standards.⁸⁹ Bulgaria and Latvia have legal bans on the use of minority languages in campaigns, limiting freedom of expression.⁹⁰

The lack of identity documents among some minority communities, which is often related to the absence of a fixed abode, poverty, low levels of education and social vulnerability, can cumulate to exclude under-represented groups from political and electoral participation. The EU's largest minority, the Roma, remain the most disenfranchised group across the Member States. Very few Roma representatives stood as candidates.⁹¹ In many Member States, inclusion of minority representatives in mainstream political parties was tokenistic and did not lead to tangible results. Some interlocutors argued that the use of a single national constituency for the European Parliament elections across most of the Member States may be an obstacle for minority populations to achieve representation.

⁸⁵ The FCNM stipulates the right to effective participation, including in electoral processes, and commits state parties to create necessary conditions and adopt measures in order to promote full and effective equality in political life. Belgium, Greece and Luxemburg have signed but not yet ratified the FCNM; France has not signed. The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages emphasises that “the right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life is an inalienable right conforming to the principles embodied in the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”.

⁸⁶ In Bulgaria, the Constitution guarantees the right of self-identification but does not refer to national minorities; Greece only recognizes religious minorities. See also the ACFC [Thematic Commentary](#) No. 4 (2016) “The Framework Convention: a key tool to managing diversity through minority rights. The Scope of Application of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities”.

⁸⁷ Belgium (Dutch, German, French), Luxembourg (Luxembourg, French, German), Malta (Maltese, English), Ireland (Irish, English), Finland (Finnish and Swedish) and Cyprus (Turkish and Greek).

⁸⁸ While not all EU Member States have specific legal requirements to provide voting materials or information in national minority languages, according to interlocutors in Member States where the ODIHR SEAM was present, voter information and/or campaign materials were available in minority languages in Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia and Spain. In Lithuania, campaign-related events are usually aired by broadcasters only in the Lithuanian language, but some election-related information were translated in minority languages, and available online. In Finland, election information materials were provided in 20 languages addressing national minorities and immigrant populations.

⁸⁹ 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”. See also paragraph 12 of the [ICCPR General Comment No. 25: Article 25 \(Participation in Public Affairs and the Right to Vote\), The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right of Equal Access to Public Service](#).

⁹⁰ 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. In its 2023 rulings, in the case of [Dzibuti and Others v. Latvia](#) and that of [Valiullina and Others v. Latvia](#), the ECtHR found in particular that the measures taken by the Latvian Government to increase the use of the national language in schools had been proportionate, and necessary to, in particular, ensure unity in the education system and to ensure a sufficient level of Latvian for residents to participate effectively in public life.

⁹¹ Candidate’s ethnic identity can only be known once publicly declared. However, [reports](#) indicate that for the 2024 elections there were nine Roma candidates from four countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary and Slovak Republic), but none of these nine were elected. The outgoing parliament included four members of Roma origin, from Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and Spain. The incoming parliament, with 720 members, will not include any Roma MEP, according to the Brussels based [Roma Foundation for Europe](#).

Very few political parties or candidates explicitly addressed minority communities in their electoral platforms. Conversely, across most EU Member States, concerns about migration and integration of migrants have become part of the central political cleavage and featured prominently during the election campaign.⁹² In most Member States visited, ODIHR SEAM interlocutors cited growing anti-migrant and xenophobic sentiments, including examples of derisive comments about non-majority communities. In several States, stakeholders described 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.

To achieve full political participation by all citizens, EU and national stakeholders should continue their efforts to eliminate barriers and facilitate the exercise of electoral rights for members of minority communities, including their participation both as voters and candidates. Effective strategies include implementing internal political party mechanisms which promote minority participation, adjusting electoral thresholds to facilitate minority representation, and providing electoral materials and information in accessible formats in minority languages.

XI. 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 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which has been ratified by all Member States and by the EU itself.⁹³ However, the level 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.⁹⁴ According to the European Disability Forum,⁹⁵ 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 another 6 decide on a case-by-case basis.⁹⁶ ODIHR has previously called on participating States to remove all restrictions on voting rights on the basis of disability to fully comply with the CRPD.⁹⁷

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 Rights Report on political participation of persons with disabilities, out of 705 MEPs in the outgoing European Parliament, only 4 had a visible disability, even though persons with disabilities make up some 15 per cent of the EU population.⁹⁸ At the time of compiling this report, data on the number of MEPs with disabilities elected for the incoming parliament was unavailable.

⁹² See PACE [report](#) “The theme of migration and asylum in the election campaign and the consequences on the welcoming and rights of migrants”.

⁹³ [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.

⁹⁴ 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.

⁹⁵ The [European Disability Forum](#) is an umbrella organization of more than 100 different disability organizations.

⁹⁶ 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.

⁹⁷ See ODIHR [Electoral Recommendations Database](#).

⁹⁸ See [European Human Rights Report, Issue 6 – 2022](#)

The European Parliament could consider collecting data on a voluntary basis among its elected members to assess the diversity and inclusivity of the parliament.

EU directives, whether on web accessibility or on audio visual media services, facilitating accessibility of sign language interpretation, audio description and subtitling, strengthen the environment in Member States for better accessibility of information for persons with disabilities, although implementation remains uneven.⁹⁹ Positively, as part of the #useyourvote campaign, voter information in all 27 Member States and their official languages was available online in easy-to-read format.¹⁰⁰

A few countries, for instance France and Latvia, require parties to provide campaign materials, including their programmes, in accessible formats. At the same time, disabled persons organizations (DPOs) questioned the effectiveness of the distribution of easy-to-read formats.¹⁰¹ Where there are no legal requirements, generally political parties made little effort to reach out to voters with disabilities and to adapt their campaign materials to the needs of voters with hearing or visual impairments. Although party programmes of some contestants addressed the needs of persons with disabilities, these themes were not prevalent in the campaign.¹⁰²

To facilitate meaningful participation, contestants should be encouraged to take steps to make their platforms, programmes, campaign materials and messages in formats accessible to persons with various types of disabilities and authorities should consider proactive measures to support contestants in making their campaigns more accessible.

There have been continuous efforts, including through the ECNE,¹⁰³ to facilitate the 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).¹⁰⁴ 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 adequate data on the accessibility of voting premises is not

⁹⁹ 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”.

¹⁰⁰ See European Parliament [website](#) for easy-to-read voter information.

¹⁰¹ However, an example of a successful dedicated easy-to-read website was [mivotocuenta](#) (my vote counts), a project supported by Spain’s Ministry of Interior and civil society.

¹⁰² Article 38 of the [UN General Comment on Article 9: Accessibility \(CRPD/C/11/3\)](#) by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that “It is also important that political meetings and materials used and produced by political parties or individual candidates participating in public elections are accessible. If not, persons with disabilities are deprived of their right to participate in the political process in an equal manner”. The recommendation [CM/Rec\(2011\)14](#) of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life states that member states should require political parties “to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to information on political debates, campaigns and events which fall within their field of action”

¹⁰³ 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](#).

¹⁰⁴ 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.

available.¹⁰⁵ In this respect, efforts to monitor the accessibility of polling stations is a positive practice.¹⁰⁶

Continuous efforts should be made in close co-operation with disabled persons' organizations, to ensure persons with disabilities can vote autonomously, including ensuring the premises and layout of polling stations are suitable for independent access and providing electoral information in formats accessible to persons with disabilities, including voters with visual impairments.

XII. ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH

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. Prior to these elections, the EU adopted the Youth Strategy (2019-2027) and the Youth Action Plan (2022-2027) to promote inclusive political and electoral youth participation at European and national levels.¹⁰⁷ Several Member States have adopted aligned national youth strategies, but not all of them specifically promote youth participation in elections.

Youth participation was one of the key concerns for EU institutions to increase voter turnout ahead of the elections, with specific voter education efforts targeted at first-time voters.¹⁰⁸ The EU institutions actively encouraged it, among others by recognizing youth civic organizations and university alliances as European Parliament Communication Partners, providing them with funding for projects and digital outreach campaigns.¹⁰⁹ In line with good practice, candidates can stand for office by the age of 25 in all Member States, with the majority allowing candidates from the age of 18 years.¹¹⁰

Member States and European institutions should continue their efforts to foster the political participation of young persons in elections by adopting appropriate strategies and conducting active information campaigns, including targeted voter education for first-time voters.

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. Alternative voting methods, such as postal voting, early voting, e-voting, voting at diplomatic representations or at polling stations outside of the voters' residences contributed positively in most EU Member States to foster the participation of highly mobile youth in European Parliament elections. Nevertheless, millions of young workers and students remain excluded from voting if residing outside of their hometown and unable to return home for the elections.

¹⁰⁵ 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.

¹⁰⁶ For example, Poland's Ombudsman's office and civil society partners organized an observation of polling stations to check for accessibility, using a checklist covering different aspects of accessibility (wheelchair access, height of information on walls, lighting/lamps for the visually impaired, height of tables in booths, braille ballot covers, etc.).

¹⁰⁷ See [Resolution](#) of the Council of the European Union 2018/C 456/01 and related [Youth Action Plan](#).

¹⁰⁸ Prior to the elections, the results of a [Eurobarometer survey](#) on youth and democracy published on 13 May 2024 showed that 64 per cent of young people (aged 15 to 30) planned to vote.

¹⁰⁹ For instance, the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency, the European Youth Card Association and the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe among others.

¹¹⁰ 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.

Youth-related issues were well included in the campaign of some party platforms and debates. Several political parties also promoted young candidates, advancing them on electoral lists, which led to their election.¹¹¹ Nevertheless and despite some efforts, the average age of MEPs in the newly elected parliament is 50 years old, slightly up from 49.5 five years ago.¹¹² The youngest MEP is 23-year-old. The highest concentration of MEPs (116) is in the age group between 40 and 44 years old.

XIII. 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.¹¹³ Although there have been initiatives to amend the Regulation, no changes have been made since the last European Parliament elections.¹¹⁴ The 2022 DSA introduced additional transparency measures related to paid online political advertisement, requiring clear labelling of the entity/person who paid for the advertisement, but also which party/candidate such advertisements are promoting, indirectly regulating involvement of third parties in the campaign on EU level.

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.¹¹⁵ 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 18,000.¹¹⁶ 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.¹¹⁷ There are no expenditure limits for EUPPs in connection to the election campaign, contrary to international good practice.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ 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, and Sebastião Bugalho, Portugal's ruling party Democratic Alliance were elected at the age of 28.

¹¹² On average, the youngest MEPs come from Malta (on average 41 years old), and the oldest from Luxembourg (on average 60 years old). The oldest MEP is 76 years old.

¹¹³ See the 2023 [Study](#) on "Provisions of national law affecting European political parties and European political foundations".

¹¹⁴ 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.

¹¹⁵ 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.

¹¹⁶ This ceiling does not apply to donations made by MEPs, MPs or members of local councils.

¹¹⁷ This limitation applies to political parties affiliated to EUPPs, that are registered in countries outside of EU. In [ACRE v Parliament, case T-107/19](#), the General Court of the European Union ruled that parties established outside the EU cannot donate to the European political parties as they cannot be considered as political parties under the Regulation 1141/2014.

¹¹⁸ 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]".

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 Regulation 1141/2014.¹¹⁹ While national parties in their campaigns use these funds according to their national regulations, contradictions may appear when they contribute financially to their EUPPs, as funds coming from anonymous or foreign sources to EUPPs are not allowed.¹²⁰ Campaigns on the national level can be funded both from public and private funds, except in Italy where public subsidies to political parties are not provided. While EUPP funds cannot be used for campaigns of national political parties or candidates, they can use them to conduct their own European campaigns. This limitation was widely criticized by most ODIHR SEAM interlocutors, including EUPPs and national political parties.

Rules regarding funding sources, donation and expenditure limits, and third-party financing, should be introduced or enhanced where currently lacking, and contradictions between national and EU regulations regarding campaign finance should be eliminated.

Oversight bodies in Member States vary, with more than one institution in charge of campaign finance oversight in seven Member States.¹²¹ The APPF is the primary body responsible for campaign finance oversight of EUPPs. It co-ordinates its work with other EU bodies¹²² and with national oversight institutions, with which it holds annual meetings to exchange information and practices. In the lead up to the 2024 elections, the APPF developed several guides and instructions for EUPPs.¹²³ 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 guidelines were vague, and that the APPF did not provide sufficient clarification on 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.

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.¹²⁴ 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 the APPF publishes on

¹¹⁹ 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.

¹²⁰ Article 7 of CoE Committee of Ministers' Recommendation Rec(2003)4 provides that "States should specifically limit, prohibit or otherwise regulate donations from foreign donors". The 2023 ODIHR Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulation in paragraph 229 further specify that "this restriction aims to avoid undue influence by foreign interests, including foreign governments, in domestic political affairs, and strengthens the independence of political parties".

¹²¹ These institutions include ministries in 4 Member States, a parliamentary body in 3 Member States, election commission in 5 Member States, an audit institution in 12 Member States, and an independent oversight institution in 9 Member States.

¹²² 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.

¹²³ See the [Guidance on Donations and Contributions](#), the [E-Cap guidance](#) and [Guidance](#) on prohibition of direct and indirect funding. See also the APPF's [June 2024 special report](#). 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.

¹²⁴ 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".

its website.¹²⁵ While the APPF published the reports on donations regularly until 27 May in an open-data and user-friendly format, the absence of reports on incurred expenditures in the same period limited the usability of this information. EUPPs are required to submit their annual reports by 30 June for the preceding year. These reports should include annual financial statements, information on revenues, expenditures, assets and liabilities, as well as list of donors and contributors, and should be audited by an external auditor, selected by the European Parliament. There are no time limits for the APPF to review annual reports of EUPPs, and, as part of that, review of their campaign finance, which reduces effective oversight of campaign incomes and expenditures.¹²⁶

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 and Sweden. Reporting requirements on the national level on disclosure 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.¹²⁷ These variations significantly reduced transparency and limited voters in making an informed choice, contrary to international commitments and good practice.¹²⁸

To enhance transparency, European political parties and national parties, where it is not the case, should be required to open a dedicated bank account for campaign purposes and to provide specific pre- and post-election campaign finance reports, that would disclose all types of campaign income and expenditures. Reasonable thresholds for disclosure of the identity of donors should be set. Reports should be submitted in electronic and user-friendly format and should be published immediately upon the submission.

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 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.¹²⁹ On the national level, review and audit of campaign finance reports is often late and ex-post, ranging from one to more than six months after the elections. This, together with, in some instances, limited investigation and enforcement powers of the oversight bodies, reduces the effectiveness of oversight and potential enforcement of the rules.

Overall, the existing legal framework and practice, with various rules for donors' disclosure on the 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.

¹²⁵ EUPPs shall immediately report to the APPF "single donations" exceeding EUR 12,000.

¹²⁶ 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](#).

¹²⁷ 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 a team of 27 media partners.

¹²⁸ 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](#).

¹²⁹ 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".

Once introduced, campaign finance reports of European political parties and, where appropriate, of national parties, should be promptly reviewed and audited by relevant institutions. The findings of the audits should be published in a timely manner. To enhance the transparency and effectiveness of campaign finance oversight, the oversight institutions should be granted adequate resources and the necessary investigatory powers.

XIV. MEDIA

Media Environment

The European media environment is pluralistic, while following 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. The increasing dominance of a few large tech companies in the online advertising market has raised concerns about the fairness and transparency of the digital market and has a negative impact on the sustainability of independent journalism.¹³⁰

Public media enjoy the highest level of trust in most Member States. However, in the majority of the Member States, their independence is undermined by politicized senior management or supervisory boards.¹³¹ Furthermore, public broadcasters in 14 Member States are mainly funded from the state budget, making them vulnerable to financial instability due to political interference.¹³²

In order to enhance the scope of the information available for voters and promote balanced and impartial reporting in the news and current affairs programmes, public broadcasting services should be further strengthened to ensure that their system of appointment of the management and oversight bodies does not undermine their editorial independence and provides for a systematic, reliable, and apolitical system of funding.

Many ODIHR SEAM interlocutors also pointed to the growing concentration of news media and the increasing dominance of the state in advertising markets in a number of Member States.¹³³ They highlighted the lack of effective regulation and transparency in the distribution of state advertising funds, undermining fair competition and challenging editorial independence.

¹³⁰ In 2022, the EU adopted the [Digital Markets Act](#), with the stated aim of preventing large companies from abusing market power and facilitating market entry for new players. On 6 September 2023, the European Commission [designated](#) six companies, Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, ByteDance, Meta, and Microsoft, as gatekeepers, obliging them to comply with the anti-trust [requirements](#) of the Digital Markets Act within six months.

¹³¹ During the campaign period, the Ministry of Culture of Slovakia [proposed](#) legal amendments that will provide for greater political control over the hiring of the general director and the board of directors of Slovak Public Broadcaster. On 10 June, eight major international media freedom organizations [urged](#) the Slovak parliament to reject the proposed bill, as if implemented it could “lead to the politicization of the broadcaster in breach of the European Media Freedom Act”.

¹³² In Poland, following a transition of power and replacement of the public media director and supervisory board, President Andrzej Duda [vetoed](#) the budget of Polish Public Media, resulting into their liquidation. In the Netherlands, the ruling coalition announced cuts of EUR 100 million to the EUR 940 million budget of the Dutch Public Broadcaster in 2026. Paragraph 16 of [General Comment 34](#) to the ICCPR calls on states to “ensure that public broadcasting services operate in an independent manner. In this regard, States parties should guarantee their independence and editorial freedom. They should provide funding in a manner that does not undermine their independence”.

¹³³ The 2023 Media Pluralism Monitor [assessed](#) that the existing distribution of state advertising poses a high risk to the political independence of media outlets in 18 Member States and a medium risk in 5 Member States.

In order to protect media pluralism and prevent the undue influence of state funding on media outlets, state advertising should be allotted based on predetermined, clear, objective and transparent criteria which are applied equitably across different types of media. Transparency requirements should apply to both the public institutions distributing state advertising funds and media outlets receiving these funds.

Despite recommendations by international human rights bodies, including the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, defamation and insult remain a criminal offence in 23 Member States.¹³⁴ Many ODIHR SEAM interlocutors also noted a growing number 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.¹³⁵

In order to effectively guarantee freedom of expression, Member States should move towards decriminalizing defamation and libel, and review civil sanctions for defamation to ensure a proportionate and reasonable remedy, and provide for safeguards against abusing defamation legislation.

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.¹³⁶ 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.¹³⁷ The reported usage of spyware against journalists in some EU states, further contributes to self-censorship.¹³⁸

Member States should reinforce effective protection of journalists from threats and intimidation. Considerations should be given to strengthening the capacity of the law enforcement bodies to ensure swift investigation of online and offline cases of pressure on journalists and media outlets in order to avoid impunity for crimes that are linked to journalism.

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, incorporated in the constitutions of Member States, provides for freedom of expression and freedom of the media. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive

¹³⁴ 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”.

¹³⁵ 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](#) 2022/758 on protecting journalists and human rights defenders who engage in public participation from SLAPPs, outlining the general regulatory and practical framework for Member States on protection 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.

¹³⁶ For example, in Slovakia, following the shooting of Prime-Minister Robert Fico, the leader of the Slovak National Party and vice-speaker of the parliament [accused](#) “liberal media and political opposition” of instigating the attack by “inciting hatred in the society”. It was followed by the [statement](#) of Mr. Fico on 5 June, when he blamed “anti-government media, foreign-funded political NGOs and the opposition” for the attack. An [analysis](#) of media freedom violations and serious threats to media freedom across Member States reported on the CoE’s [Safety of Journalists](#) platform, notes an increased number of attacks and instances of intimidation and harassment targeting journalists, highlighting France, Italy, Greece, Poland, Spain, and Bulgaria as the main offenders.

¹³⁷ 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.

¹³⁸ The 15 June 2023 [recommendation](#) by the European Parliament to the European Council and Commission pointed out that government bodies in several Member States have used “surveillance spyware against journalists, politicians, law enforcement officials, diplomats, lawyers, business people, civil society actors and other actors, for political and even criminal purposes” and “strongly condemned the use of spyware by member states”.

(AVMSD) and DSA offer a general legal framework for media at the EU level that is largely implemented in the legislation of Member States. 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 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 which excludes independent, freelance journalists and bloggers, non-profit news websites and CSOs as well as insufficient safeguards against surveillance.¹³⁹ The interlocutors also expressed concerns regarding the funding and independence of the new regulatory body.

Coverage of the Election Campaign

Media coverage of domestic politics overshadowed the low-key electoral campaign in the majority of the Member States, with coverage often focusing on relations between the 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. In some countries, senior government officials used their official positions to promote their parties.¹⁴⁰ Overall, limited coverage of candidates and their platforms has reduced voters' opportunities to learn about contestants and their platforms, thus hindering their ability to make an informed choice.

Neither the AVMSD nor the DSA provide for a specific regulatory framework for electoral campaigns. In 21 Member States, media provided contestants with free time, either through legal requirements or by their own internal decisions, however, in some cases, it was offered outside of prime time.¹⁴¹ Paid political advertisements on public broadcasters were permitted in 14 Member States and on private broadcasters in 20 Member States, however, contestants made limited use of these, opting for cheaper campaigns in online media.

Debates between leading candidates were organized in the majority of Member States, offering contestants a platform to present their views.¹⁴² However, in several countries, contestants from non-parliamentary parties complained that they were not invited to participate, while in a few countries,

¹³⁹ Article 2 of the MFA defines media service as service, "where the principal purpose of the service or a dissociable section thereof consists in providing programmes or press publications to the general public, by any means, in order to inform, entertain or educate, under the editorial responsibility of a media service provider". Paragraph 44 of the General Comment 34 to the ICCPR notes that "Journalism is a function shared by a wide range of actors, including professional full-time reporters and analysts, as well as bloggers and others who engage in forms of self-publication in print, on the internet or elsewhere".

¹⁴⁰ In Italy, on 9 April, the Parliamentary supervisory commission for the Italian Public Broadcaster (RAI) introduced a new provision in the [regulation](#) for the coverage of the campaign for the European election. This provision has resulted in extensive coverage and visibility of senior government officials, especially of the Italian Prime Minister, ECRP leader, and MEP candidate Giorgia Meloni. In one such instance, on 5 June, Rainews24 broadcast an entire 47-minute press conference of Ms. Meloni. On 5 May, the Union of Journalists of RAI (USIGRAI) [organized](#) a strike, protesting against censorship and excessive and uncritical coverage of senior government officials, including the prime minister. In another example, French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal debated on behalf of the ruling party with the leader of the opposition and list carrier for the European parliament Elections, Jordan Bardella. Later during the campaign, Mr. Attal appeared in the middle of a debate among EP contestants, interrupting the participants and making a short statement endorsing the ruling party and their lead candidate.

¹⁴¹ For example, in Greece, free time was provided between 1:00 and 3:00, and in Romania all free advertisements and in Bulgaria half of free advertisements, were broadcast between 12:30 and 13:00.

¹⁴² Notably, in Hungary, the debate among the EP candidates was the first debate on public television since 2006.

major contestants could not agree on the format of the debates.¹⁴³ Two online debates among leaders of the European parties organized by private media outlets received very limited attention.¹⁴⁴ 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 only to the *Spitzenkandidaten* nominated by existing political groups in the current European Parliament.¹⁴⁵ Such an approach prevented four political parties from participating and is not in line with Paragraph 7.8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.¹⁴⁶

A number of legislative and practical initiatives to combat disinformation were initiated on the EU level, including obligations for the major online platforms to counter disinformation introduced in the DSA. 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. Many ODIHR SEAM interlocutors noted significant efforts by media and civil society organizations in fact-checking, including at the EU level. However, such efforts appeared to be insufficient, as disinformation, especially online and on social networks, including the use of deep fake videos discrediting politicians, was consistently used in the majority of Member States, often in connection with negative campaigning and as foreign interference.¹⁴⁷ The European Commission suspended the broadcasting activities and licenses of some 20 media outlets affiliated with the Russian Federation.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ For instance, in Italy, the Public Broadcaster RAI tried to organize a debate between Prime Minister, ECRP leader, and MEP candidate Giorgia Meloni facing the leader of the opposition Democratic Party and MEP candidate Elly Schlein. However, four out of the eight parties running did not accept the format, leading to the cancellation of debates with the heads of lists on public media, as per the [clarification](#) by the Italian media regulator AGCOM.

¹⁴⁴ On 29 April, the Maastricht online [debate](#), organized by the POLITICO website and Maastricht University, featured leaders of 8 European political parties. By 9 June, it had received some 70,000 views on YouTube. Another [debate](#) on economic policies, organized by the Bruegel think tank and the Financial Times, featured leaders of 4 European political parties, and was viewed on YouTube fewer, then 600 times by 9 June.

¹⁴⁵ In order to be recognized as a group at the European Parliament, a political group should consist of at least 23 MEPs from at least one-quarter of Member States.

¹⁴⁶ ID and ECR did not nominate their *Spitzenkandidaten*, while FDA and ECPM had nominated their *Spitzenkandidaten* and were running independently, but were also members of other political groups in the outgoing parliament. The EBU informed the ODIHR SEAM that such limitations were decided by the European Parliament as the organizer of the tender for the debates. Paragraph 7.8 of the 1990 OSCE [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”.

¹⁴⁷ 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 about the EU elections and co-ordinated efforts to amplify disinformation. The [analysis](#) of the reactions of major social networks reactions to the identified disinformation conducted by fact checking organization Maldita.es, noted, that in the four months before the elections, 56 per cent of the disinformation on integrity of elections received no visible action from YouTube, X, Tiktok, Facebook and Instagram. 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”.

¹⁴⁸ On 17 May 2024, the European Commission [introduced](#) a ban on four media outlets: Voice of Europe, *RIA Novosti*, *Izvestia*, and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. This ban supplemented the EU-wide [bans](#) on Russia Today and Sputnik and 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. In the [opinion](#) of the Commission, these media outlets “are under the permanent direct or indirect control of the leadership of the Russian Federation, [...] engaged in a systematic, international campaign of media and information manipulation, interference and grave distortion of facts, [...] targeting European political parties, especially during election periods and the functioning of democratic institutions in the EU and its Member States”. The websites of these media outlets appeared to be accessible during the campaign.

XV. 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 at all stages or of a final judicial review. More specifically, in a few Member States, national parliaments take the final decision on complaints on election results, which are not subject to further judicial review.¹⁴⁹ In some Member States, review of complaints is done without a public hearing.¹⁵⁰ In addition, several Member States do not provide timely or any deadlines for adjudicating complaints regarding election results.¹⁵¹ 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.¹⁵² As previously noted by ODIHR, the above limitations undermine the right to effective legal remedy, at odds with OSCE commitments and other international standards.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, there is a general trust in the adjudicating bodies across Member States.

To ensure effective remedies are available during elections, it is recommended to further enhance the election dispute resolution processes. This includes introducing the possibility of judicial review with public hearing at all stages of the electoral process and establishing timely deadlines for filing and adjudicating such appeals.

A few disputes have been brought to the attention of the ODIHR SEAM before election day. These related to candidate registration, and due process was respected in their adjudication.¹⁵⁴ 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. The Court noted that the appeal failed to substantiate that the minimum threshold infringes upon the German constitutional identity, given the aim of harmonizing democratic representation within the EU.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ This includes Belgium, Denmark, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

¹⁵⁰ This includes France, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. According to Paragraph 13.9 of the [1989 OSCE Vienna Document](#), OSCE participating States committed to “ensure that effective remedies as well as full information about them are available to those who claim that their human rights and fundamental freedoms have been violated; they will, inter alia, effectively apply the following remedies: - the right to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time [...], including the right to present legal arguments”.

¹⁵¹ This includes Croatia, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Spain. 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)”.

¹⁵² Appeals on the majority of issues can be brought to the attention of the Court within two months. According to Article 23a of the [Statute](#) of the EUCJ, “[t]he Rules of Procedure may provide for an expedited or accelerated procedure and, for references for a preliminary ruling relating to the area of freedom, security and justice, an urgent procedure”.

¹⁵³ Article 41 of the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) provides that every person has the right to have their affairs handled impartially, fairly and within a reasonable time by the institutions and bodies of the Union. 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”. Principle 1A of [Recommendation Rec \(2004\)20](#) of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers advises that “all administrative acts should be subject of judicial review”. See also [Amicus Curiae](#) of the questions raised by the pending case of *Mugemangango v. Belgium*, 14 October 2019.

¹⁵⁴ The ODIHR SEAM was informed of such cases in France, Poland, the Netherlands, and Spain.

¹⁵⁵ See the Constitutional Court [decision](#) from 6 February 2024.

The enforcement of and compliance with the DSA is conducted by the Commission together with relevant national authorities. 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, political content on its services, as well as the non-availability of an effective third-party real-time civic discourse and election-monitoring tool.¹⁵⁶ Earlier, on 23 December 2023, the Commission opened similar proceedings against X primarily focusing on the compliance with the DSA obligations related to countering the dissemination of illegal content and the effectiveness of measures taken to combat information manipulation on the platform.¹⁵⁷ 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 with the CJEU.¹⁵⁸ The process had not concluded at the time of reporting.

XVI. 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.¹⁵⁹

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 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.¹⁶⁰ All Member States 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.¹⁶¹

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.

¹⁵⁶ See [Press Release](#) from the European Commission of 30 April 2024.

¹⁵⁷ See the [Press Release](#) from the European Commission of 23 December 2023.

¹⁵⁸ In case of non-compliance, online platforms may be fined up to 6 per cent of their annual revenue. Continued refusal to comply with the legislation can lead to temporary suspension of services within the EU.

¹⁵⁹ 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”.

¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in Greece ODIHR SEAM were told that anyone wishing to observe would not be prevented to do so while in Ireland the returning officers have the discretion to permit access to the media and other entities to the polling stations.

¹⁶¹ 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 organizations which endorse relevant international standards”.

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,¹⁶² and one non-partisan civil society organization, Election-Watch.EU, conducted an assessment on the EU level.¹⁶³

The laws of EU Member States should be revised to explicitly guarantee the access of citizen and international observers to all stages of the electoral process, in line with international commitments.

XVII. POST-ELECTION DAY DEVELOPMENTS

The European Electoral Act prescribes that publication of the election results must wait until all Member States have held their elections, so as not to unduly influence the elections in other Member States. Therefore, preliminary results for European elections could only be published after 23:00 CEST on Sunday 9 June, once the voting finished in the last Member State, Italy. At the same time, the European Parliament can publish first country estimates starting from 18:15 CEST, with a first projection of the new composition of the Parliament around 20:30.¹⁶⁴

Official preliminary results started to be published after 23:00, with the exception of France, where the Ministry of Interior published the preliminary results at 20:00 on its website.¹⁶⁵ All preliminary results by country were published by 10 June, with the exception of Ireland where counting took longer due to recounts with estimates published on 11 June.

The European Parliament announced a voter turnout of 51 per cent, which is a minor increase from 2019 (50.66 per cent). Turnout between countries varied, with countries with mandatory voting like Belgium (89 per cent) and Luxemburg (82 per cent) having the highest turnout and Croatia (21 per cent) and Lithuania (28 per cent) the lowest. Election results saw the EPP maintain its position as the single largest group in the European Parliament. The widely mooted surge in support for rightist groups did materialize to an extent, to the detriment of the greens and leftist parties, marking the main shift in the political balance of the European Parliament compared to 2019-2024.

The post-election environment was overall calm and peaceful. In France, shortly after the results of the EU Parliament elections were revealed, showing the far-right National Rally securing 31.4 per cent of the votes and winning 30 seats compared to the French President's party, Renaissance, which won 13 seats, President Emmanuel Macron announced his intention to dissolve the French parliament. Invoking Article 12 of the French Constitution, President Macron called for early parliamentary elections to take place on 30 June with a second round on 7 July.¹⁶⁶

The ODIHR SEAM was not made aware of any appeals against election results that could have an impact on the allocation of mandates. However, in the days after the elections, ODIHR received concerns raised by several Romanian MEPs and other stakeholders including citizens, regarding alleged irregularities in voting in some areas in Romania for local elections which also, it is claimed, impacted

¹⁶² For instance, the Central Election Commission (CEC) in Bulgaria accredited ten citizen observer groups, including the Institute for Public Environment Development (IPED) and Union for Fair Elections (*OCHI*), while the CEC in Latvia accredited 60 citizen observer groups. In Poland, *Komitet Obrony Demokracji* (KOD) deployed several thousand observers to 300 polling stations. In Romania, 80 national observer groups were accredited, including, for example, Expert Forum and Funky Citizens that deployed large numbers of short-term observers each. In Poland, KOD (the main citizen observer organization in the country) received some 2,000 certificates for observers.

¹⁶³ See [Wahlbeobachtung.org | wählen – mitbestimmen – mitgestalten](https://wahlbeobachtung.org/waehlen-mitbestimmen-mitgestalten).

¹⁶⁴ Based on national estimates, exit polls and pre-electoral voting intentions.

¹⁶⁵ The MoI published preliminary results composed of samples of votes from specially selected polling stations.

¹⁶⁶ In his delivery speech on [June 9, 2024](#), President Macron stated that “far-right parties, which in recent years have opposed so many of the advances made possible by our Europe, (...) are gaining ground across the continent...I could not, at the end of this day, act as if nothing was happening”.

on the elections for the European parliament. Concerns were particularly raised regarding an apparent high number of invalid votes and the rejection of official complaints calling for a recount in affected places.

XVIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations contained throughout the text are offered with a view to further enhancing the conduct of elections at the European level and across the Member States and supporting efforts to bring them fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections.¹⁶⁷ ODIHR stands ready to assist the European and national authorities to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To ensure equal suffrage rights, conditions and rules for the right to vote and to be elected would benefit from further harmonization across Member States, in particular equal suffrage rights for persons with disabilities in elections to the European Parliament should be guaranteed.
2. To enhance public confidence in the electoral process, electoral contestants should refrain from incitement to hatred or using intolerant or discriminatory rhetoric towards migrants and other vulnerable groups. Public officials and authorities at the national and EU level should promptly condemn and where relevant investigate such instances.
3. To effectively facilitate women's participation in public and political life, comprehensive legal, institutional, and educational efforts challenging the existing gender stereotypes about the role of women and men in politics should be undertaken by the authorities at all levels.
4. To achieve full political participation by all citizens, EU and national stakeholders should continue their efforts to eliminate barriers and facilitate the exercise of electoral rights for members of minority communities, including their participation both as voters and candidates. Effective strategies include implementing internal political party mechanisms which promote minority participation, adjusting electoral thresholds to facilitate minority representation, and providing electoral materials and information in accessible formats in minority languages.
5. Continuous efforts should be made in close co-operation with disabled persons' organizations, to ensure persons with disabilities can vote autonomously, including ensuring the premises and layout of polling stations are suitable for independent access and providing electoral information in formats accessible to persons with disabilities, including voters with visual impairments.
6. Member States should reinforce effective protection of journalists from threats and intimidation. Considerations should be given to strengthening the capacity of the law enforcement bodies to ensure swift investigation of online and offline cases of pressure on journalists and media outlets in order to avoid impunity for crimes that are linked to journalism.
7. The laws of EU Member States should be revised to explicitly guarantee the access of citizen and international observers to all stages of the electoral process, in line with international commitments.

¹⁶⁷ According to Paragraph 25 of the [1999 OSCE Istanbul Document](#), OSCE participating States committed themselves "to follow up promptly the ODIHR's election assessment and recommendations".

B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Election Administration

8. To facilitate inclusive electoral participation, relevant institutions should continue exploring alternative voting methods which duly comply with OSCE commitments and other international standards.

Voter Registration

9. Blanket deprivation of suffrage rights of citizens serving a prison sentence and restrictions based on legal capacity should be reviewed in line with international obligations.
10. Authorities should continue efforts to facilitate voting by mobile EU citizens through timely notification and raising of awareness about the possibility for mobile citizens to vote and the deadlines for voter registration.

Candidate Registration

11. In Member States where it is currently not the case, candidate registration should allow for independent candidates, in line with OSCE commitments and international standards.
12. In order to enhance respect for freedom of association and expression, the legal framework should be amended to allow voters to sign in support of more than one electoral contestant in each election in the EU Member States that currently apply such restriction.
13. Effective measures should be undertaken, including by political parties, in order to promote inclusive participation of candidates from under-represented groups, including women, persons with disabilities and youth.

Election Campaign

14. Legislation and practice should be aligned to prevent any potential existing or perceived conflict of interest of candidates holding official positions with the EU institutions as well as any unwanted misuse of institutional resources during campaign. Any suspicion of violations should be proactively investigated and established wrongdoings properly sanctioned.
15. Member States should pursue their efforts to implement DSA and AI regulations aimed at countering disinformation and manipulative content, including the use of deepfakes, in collaboration with technology and social media companies, media outlets and non-state actors.

Electoral Participation of Women

16. Political parties should strengthen their efforts to foster inclusivity, including by adopting binding policies to place women in leading positions on candidate lists and integrating gender considerations into their policy proposals.
17. Violence against women in the campaign should be recognised by political parties and institutions as a barrier to women's active political participation. Consideration should be given to introducing or strengthening existing proactive and preventive measures against such actions.

Electoral Participation of Youth

18. Member States and European institutions should continue their efforts to foster the political participation of young persons in elections by adopting appropriate strategies and conducting active information campaigns, including targeted voter education for first-time voters.

Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities

19. The European Parliament could consider collecting data on a voluntary basis among its elected members to assess the diversity and inclusivity of the parliament.
20. To facilitate meaningful participation, contestants should be encouraged to take steps to make their platforms, programmes, campaign materials and messages in formats accessible to persons with various types of disabilities and authorities should consider proactive measures to support contestants in making their campaigns more accessible.

Campaign Finance

21. Rules regarding funding sources, donation and expenditure limits, and third-party financing, should be introduced or enhanced where currently lacking, and contradictions between national and EU regulations regarding campaign finance should be eliminated.
22. To enhance transparency, European political parties and national parties, where it is not the case, should be required to open a dedicated bank account for campaign purposes and to provide specific pre- and post-election campaign finance reports, that would disclose all types of campaign income and expenditures. Reasonable thresholds for disclosure of the identity of donors should be set. Reports should be submitted in electronic and user-friendly format and should be published immediately upon the submission.
23. Once introduced, campaign finance reports of European political parties and, where appropriate, of national parties, should be promptly reviewed and audited by relevant institutions. The findings of the audits should be published in a timely manner. To enhance the transparency and effectiveness of campaign finance oversight, the oversight institutions should be granted adequate resources and the necessary investigatory powers.

Media

24. In order to enhance the scope of the information available for voters and promote balanced and impartial reporting in the news and current affairs programmes, public broadcasting services should be further strengthened to ensure that their system of appointment of the management and oversight bodies does not undermine their editorial independence and provides for a systematic, reliable, and apolitical system of funding.
25. In order to protect media pluralism and prevent the undue influence of state funding on media outlets, state advertising should be allotted based on predetermined, clear, objective and transparent criteria which are applied equitably across different types of media. Transparency requirements should apply to both the public institutions distributing state advertising funds and media outlets receiving these funds.
26. In order to effectively guarantee freedom of expression, Member States should move towards decriminalizing defamation and libel, review civil sanctions for defamation to ensure a

proportionate and reasonable remedy, and provide for safeguards against abusing defamation legislation.

Election Dispute Resolution

27. To ensure effective remedies are available during elections, it is recommended to further enhance the election dispute resolution processes. This includes introducing the possibility of judicial review with public hearing at all stages of the electoral process and establishing timely deadlines for filing and adjudicating such appeals.

ANNEX I: FINAL ELECTION RESULTS¹⁶⁸

2024 European Parliament Elections Results

Political Groups in the European Parliament	No. of Seats	% of Seats
EPP - Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	188	26.11%
S&D - Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	136	18.89%
ECR - European Conservatives and Reformists Group	83	11.53%
Renew Europe - Renew Europe Group	75	10.42%
ID - Identity and Democracy Group	58	8.06%
Greens/EFA - Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	54	7.50%
The Left - The Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL	39	5.42%
NI - Non-attached Members	45	6.25%
Others - Newly elected Members not allied to any of the political groups set up in the outgoing Parliament	42	5.83%

Reported Voter Turnout: 51.08%

¹⁶⁸

Data according to the provisional results published by the European Parliament's European Elections [website](#).

ANNEX II: ODIHR SEAM MEMBERS

Core Team

Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir	Head of Mission	Iceland
Rashad Shirinov		Azerbaijan
Davor Čorluka		Bosnia and Herzegovina
Tamara Otiashvili		Georgia
Ahmad Rasuli		Kyrgyzstan
Radivoje Grujić		Serbia
Egor Tilpunov		Ukraine
Mark Stevens		United Kingdom
Nadia Zoubir		United States of America

Regional Analysts

Dóra Mecseky	Belgium
Olga Švepešová Blatáková	Czechia
Elma Šehalić	Germany
Iryna Ulasiuk	Italy
Dimash Alzhanov	Kazakhstan
Eva Pedersen	Norway
Stefan Szwed	Poland
Jelena Stefanović	Serbia
Marek Mračka	Slovak Republic
Sarah Crozier	United Kingdom

ABOUT ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 150 staff.

ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programmes annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

ODIHR also assists participating States in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights and fundamental freedoms** consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas, including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked people, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance and non-discrimination**, ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website (www.osce.org/odihhr).