

# European Commission calls on national political parties to join efforts to ensure free and fair elections in Europe

In September 2018, as part of the State of the Union, President Juncker proposed [measures](#) to bolster European democracy and protect free and fair elections in Europe. Ahead of the European elections, Commissioner Vera **Jourová** has written to national political parties calling on them to ensure transparency of political advertising, to be ready to face cyberattacks and to respect European data protection rules during the campaign.

Frans **Timmermans**, First Vice-President said: *“We know there are forces which are trying to disrupt our societies, meddle in our elections and subvert our democracies. They will most likely step up their malicious activities in the run-up and during the European elections. We cannot be naïve. It’s time we too step up our democratic defences as soon as possible so that people will be better informed, and their data better protected.”*

Věra **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality said, *“Our elections and ultimately our democracies are challenged by new threats. Today, I call on all political parties to play their part in securing free and fair elections. Voters deserve transparency to make an informed choice. Online political advertising should be as transparent as the advertising you receive in your mailbox or on the market. Political parties also need to secure their networks to prevent cyberattacks and fully respect data protection rules. I expect all political actors to take their responsibility; at the same time the new sanctions introduced will also ensure the rules are respected.”*

The [package of measures](#) adopted in September aims to bolster European democracy and protect free and fair elections in Europe. It includes a series of actions addressed to national and European political parties and foundations. Today, the Commission calls on national parties to ensure **transparency of the sources and amount of campaign funding for online activities** during the upcoming European Parliament election campaigns. To increase this transparency the Commission urges national political parties, foundations and campaign organisations to:

- ensure **citizens can easily recognise online paid political advertisements and communications**, and the party, foundation or organisation behind them;
- **make information available about their spending for online activities on their websites**. This includes paid online political advertisements and communications, as well as information on any targeting criteria used in the dissemination of such advertisements and communications;

- make their **paid online political advertisements** and communications accessible through their websites.

The Commission also reminds political parties and campaign organisations to implement appropriate measures to be able to tackle **cyberattacks** and recalls their obligations concerning the protection of personal data. Political parties that do not respect **data protection rules** to deliberately influence or attempt to influence the outcome of European elections will be subject to **new sanctions**, introduced by the amended [Regulation on the European political parties and foundations at the European level](#), which is expected to enter into force in April. Sanctions could amount to 5% of the annual budget of the European political party or foundation concerned. In addition, those found to be in breach would not be able to apply for funding from the general budget of the European Union in the year in which the sanction is imposed. These sanctions target infringements of rules on the protection of personal data being used by the European political parties or foundations to deliberately influence or attempt to influence the outcome of European elections. The European Commission calls on Member States to introduce similar sanctions at national level.

### **Next steps**

Following the European Parliament elections in May, the Commission will prepare a report, including on the implementation of the Elections' Recommendation, based amongst others on input from the political parties.

### **Background**

In September 2018, President **Juncker** presented the [Elections package](#) to better protect our democratic processes from manipulation by third countries or private interests. This came as a response to challenges posed by online campaigning and to threats observed in recent elections and referenda directed at discrediting and delegitimising elections in Europe. It includes a set of measures which aim to increase transparency in online campaign activities, assist stakeholders in the application of data protection rules in the electoral context, improve coordination between responsible national authorities and among Member States at the European level, and introduce the possibility to impose sanctions for the illegal use of personal data in order to deliberately influence the outcome of the European elections.

The [European Parliament welcomed the package in its Resolution](#) on the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica case adopted on 25 October 2018. The Council of national Ministers set out detailed expressions of support and commitments to action on the part of the Member States in its [Conclusions on securing free and fair European elections of 19 February 2019](#).

Responding to the Recommendation, Member States have established **national networks** to formalise cooperation among national authorities to jointly identify threats and gaps, share good practices, and exchange on how to apply electoral rules online. These national networks have met twice at a European level as the **election cooperation network**, assisted by the Commission, to share expertise and best practices among the Member States including on

threats, gaps and enforcement, most recently on 27 February. The next meeting will take place on 4 April.

**For More  
Information**

More information on the [electoral package](#) including the letter sent this morning

September 2018 [press release](#)

[Factsheet](#): Securing free and fair European elections