

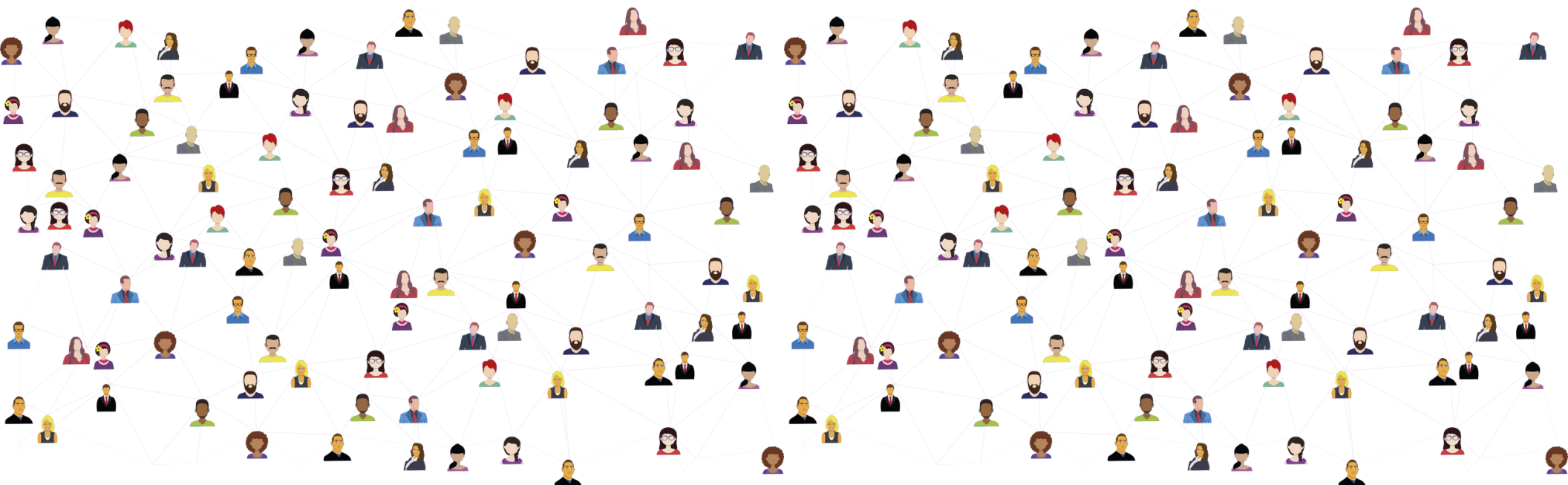


# Online Campaign Finance: Challenges and Solutions

## Money in Politics Regional Conference 2023

 **6-7 July 2023**

 **Castel Mimi, Bulboaca, Moldova**



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With the increasing role of online networks and digital technologies in social and political life, their use and misuse for campaign purposes open both, new opportunities and formidable challenges for all electoral stakeholders. Online campaigning, like any other phenomenon, has clear benefits for democratic politics but is also a gateway for harmful practices for the integrity of the democratic process.

On the one hand, digital and online tools provides quicker and cheaper access to constituents and voters. On the other, online political and electoral campaigns have been marked by patterns of illegal and malicious methods of online disinformation and influence, including anonymous content, or illicit targeting of voters. These practices are enabled by a lack of transparency in political and electoral campaign finance and weak oversight systems that should ensure the integrity of these processes.

Weak regulation and oversight of the integrity of political finance is a long-standing challenge. However, monitoring and detecting violations, and enforcing dissuasive sanctions against malpractice in political finance is significantly more difficult after the arrival of online forms of campaigning (paid and unpaid). Political finance oversight agencies and civil society actors across the globe face similar challenges in ensuring that online campaigns comply with democratic standards which ensure the equality of contestants, principles of free and fair voting, and transparency and accountability in the role of money in politics.

**The purpose of the conference is to exchange knowledge and lessons in addressing the challenges brought about by digitalization and online campaigning into the integrity of political and campaign finance.** Participants will review the main trends and identify effective solutions and transferable practices in protecting the integrity of political and electoral campaign finance in the digital age.

This two-day regional conference will bring together political finance oversight agencies, civil society monitors, political parties, international organizations, representatives of online platform, and electoral, media, and political finance practitioners from across the Eastern European region. A particular focus will be made on ensuring the participation of electoral and campaign finance stakeholders from Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, as well as global and international experts in the field.

The Conference is held at Castle Mimi, Bulboaca, Moldova on 6-7 July 2023.

The Conference is co-hosted by the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and National Democratic Institute (NDI). The conference builds on partnerships forged for preventing an undue role of money in politics at annual regional conferences "Money in Politics" held from 2016 to 2018 but did not take place in the following years, for reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Agenda (EEST - Chisinau time)

### DAY I. 6 JULY 2023

10:30 – 11:00

Registrations and Welcome Coffee

11:00 – 11:30

#### Welcoming Remarks

- Ms. Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova
- Ms. Angelica Caraman, Chairperson of the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova
- H.E Mr. Kent D. Logsdon, United States Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova
- Mr. Floris van Eijk, Chargé d’Affaires of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Republic of Moldova
- Mr. Sam van der Staak, Director for Europe, International IDEA

11:30 – 12:15

#### Session I: Online Campaign Finance – Existing and Emerging International Standards and Best Practices

Campaign finance in general, and online campaign finance in particular, lacks robust international standards and is guided by general electoral, anti-corruption, media and information integrity standards. Several initiatives have been launched by international organizations and supranational institutions to clarify international good practices and help develop internationally agreed standards.

The most notable is the latest EU draft legislation on the transparency of political advertisement and the related regulations on digital platforms and media. Furthermore, innovative legal regulations or bills have emerged outside of the EU, including in Australia, Canada, the US. In parallel, over the past years, some online platforms have developed their own transparency and anti-corruption policies, while others lack any impactful self-regulation. What is the current state of affairs and what are these emerging laws aiming to regulate? What lessons and regulatory steps can countries in the Eastern Partnership adapt to align with these new practices? The panel will review existing internationally accepted standards in online campaigning and particularly in online campaign finance. The discussion will include a review of the latest European legislation on the transparency of online advertisement and the related obligations of all key stakeholders regulated under the new EU legislation on transparency and integrity of elections. This session will also explore the policies that big tech companies establish for placing political ads online, including the understanding of political ads, authorization of users placing the policies, labeling political ads.

**Moderator:** Mr. Alexey Gromov, ODIHR Senior Election Adviser

#### **Speakers:**

- Ms. Barbara Jouan Stonestreet, OSCE/ODIHR expert
- Mr. Magnus Ohman, IFES Director for Regional Europe Office and Senior Political Finance Adviser
- Ms. Yuliya Shypilova, Programme Officer, International IDEA
- Mr. Oskar Braszczyński, Government and Social Impact Partner, Central and Eastern Europe, Meta/Facebook (online)

12:15 – 12:30

Coffee Break

**12:30 – 13:30**

### **Session II: Regulating Political Finance, Including Expenses Online**

Regulatory frameworks governing political finance vary to a great extent from country to country in Eastern Europe (non-EU), despite having shared historical experiences and similar institutional arrangements in the past. General principles for financing of political parties exist to uphold freedom of association and enable parties to play their representative and governance functions without unreasonable restrictions. At the same time, party and campaign expenditures made online are mostly unregulated or regulated in very basic terms, largely relying on existing principles of equality of treatment under the law, transparency of incomes and expenses, and the need to avoid an undue influence of big donors on public decision-making and elections. This panel will provide a regional overview of the major trends in political finance, with a focus on online campaign finance. It will focus on emerging challenges, as well as shortcomings and successes in ensuring political finance transparency and accountability.

**Moderator:** Ms. Jessica Keegan, Senior Advisor on Electoral Integrity, Center for Global Impact, International Republican Institute

**Speakers:**

- Mr. Marcin Walecki, Senior Resident Country Director Ukraine, National Democratic Institute
- Ms. Olesea Stamate, Chair of the Committee for Legal Affairs, Immunities and Appointments, Parliament of the Republic of Moldova
- Ms. Nana Kalandadze, Programme Manager, Regional Europe Programme, International IDEA

- Ms. Lina Petroniene, Chairperson of the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania
- Mr. Andrii Yevstihnieiev, Member of the Central Electoral Commission of Ukraine
- Mr. Alexandru Musteata, Director, Security and Intelligence Service of Moldova

**13:30 – 14:30**

**Lunch**

**14:30 – 15:30**

### **Session III: Online Campaign Finance: Challenges and Opportunities for Political Parties**

Online campaigning allows political parties to conduct campaigns more effectively and affordably, reaching a larger audience with fewer resources. At the same time, it presents challenges such as the possibility of negative anonymous campaigning, ease of withholding or underreporting online campaign spending, and use of third-party campaigners. These phenomena undermine a level playing field and open floodgates for dirty money and influence, including foreign influence over national democratic processes. This panel will discuss the practices of political parties in using online spaces for so-called organic (non-paid) and paid campaigns and will help set the agenda for more effective regulation, monitoring, and oversight performed by political finance oversight agencies.

**Moderator:** Mr. Martin Angeby, Country Director, National Democratic Institute, Moldova

**Speakers:**

- Ms. Birgitta Ohlsson, Director for Political Parties, National Democratic Institute (online)
- Mr. Oleksii Goncharenko, Member of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (online)
- Mr. Serhiy Vlasenko, Member of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (online)
- Mr. Ihor Hotsul, First Deputy Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the UDAR political party (Ukraine)
- Mr. Artur Mija, Secretary General, Political party "Party of Action and Solidarity" (PAS) (Moldova)
- Mr. Adrian Lebedinschi, Member of Parliament of the Republic of Moldova

**15:30 – 15:45**

**Coffee Break**

**15:45 – 17:15**

**Session IV: Campaign Finance Monitoring and Oversight: Challenges and Solutions from Political Finance Oversight Agencies**

Online campaigning is still a relatively new phenomenon, necessitating the use of specialized methodologies for monitoring, cost verification and oversight. Political finance oversight agencies throughout the region often lack a specific mandate and therefore the requisite tools to monitor and oversee online spaces and related online campaign finance. Given the evolving nature of online campaigning and the persisting lack of specialized knowledge about all of the methods that it employs, political finance oversight agencies face significant challenges in clearly identifying these new mandates and the methodologies.

This panel will discuss current challenges and solutions already adopted by some of the political finance oversight agencies to address them and practices in cooperation with big tech companies.

**Moderator:** Ms. Yuliya Shypilova, Programme Officer Eastern Europe, International IDEA

**Speakers:**

- Mr. Pavel Postica, Deputy Chairperson of the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova
- Mr. Toni Grebla, Chairperson, Permanent Electoral Authority of Romania
- Mr. Ihor Khokhych, Head of the Apparatus, National Agency for Corruption Prevention (NACP), Mr. Oleksandr Balas, Head of the External Communication Unit of the Department for the Prevention of Political Corruption, National Agency for Corruption Prevention (NACP), Ukraine
- Mr. Armen Smbatyan, Secretary of the Central Electoral Commission of Armenia
- Mr. Petru Iarmaliuc, Prosecutor delegated to Anti-corruption Prosecutor's Office of Moldova

**DAY II. 7 JULY 2023**

**09:30 – 10:00**

**Welcome Coffee**

**10:00 – 11:15**

### **Session V: The Role of Observers in Effective Monitoring of Online Campaign Finance**

Considering all complexities related to political finances in general, and online campaign finance, it is almost impossible for any public institution to fully oversee every aspect of this issue. That is why civil society can play an important role in detecting irregularities in financing of online campaigns. CSOs in many countries use innovative ways to increase the transparency of money in politics and raise public awareness of this topic. With the tools and resources at their disposal, civil society organizations can adopt transformative approaches to monitoring online campaign finance for both, supporting the state oversight functions or undertaking independent monitoring and reporting for public information. The panel will discuss the role of civil society monitors in online campaign finance monitoring, the methodologies, tools, and interactions with campaign finance oversight agencies.

**Moderator:** Mr. Magnus Ohman, IFES Director for Regional Europe Office and Senior Political Finance Adviser

#### **Speakers:**

- Ms. Francesca Boggeri, Social Media Coordinator, Election Observation and Democracy Support (EODS)
- Ms. Viktoriia Maksymova, Political finance analyst, Movement Chesno, Ukraine
- Ms. Mariana Focşa, Analyst on political parties' finances, Promo-LEX, Moldova
- Ms. Anastasiia Romanyuk, Civic Movement OPORA, Ukraine

**11:15 – 11:30**

Coffee Break

**11:30 – 13:00**

### **Session VI: Emerging Threats in Online Campaigning: Influencers, 'Troll' and 'Bot' Farms, Third-Party Financing and Foreign Funding**

In recent years there is an emerging trend of using social media in election campaigning, with posting advertisements and influencing the voters. With the fast development of the Internet and easy and daily access to social media, it has now become by far the most affordable and targeting-prone campaign tool. Simultaneously, politicians use influencers – opinion leaders with skills, charisma, and authority – in their campaigns to spread and amplify promotional messages on their behalf in exchange for a monetary reward. Some politicians go as far as to use so-called 'troll' and 'bot' farms, which are organized and funded groups that spread partial and/or false information and opinions favorable to their financiers. Furthermore, actors affiliated with political parties share campaigning messages, which may be organic or paid - a practice known as third-party campaigning but often in violation of set rules for such campaigning or in complete disregard of bans on such forms of campaigning. This panel will examine developments, challenges, and actions associated with the use of illicit and illegal practices in online campaigning, including the use of third-party campaigners where such are not allowed, inauthentic profiles, and certain forms of micro-targeting. The aim of the session will be to identify workable solutions that the legislators, oversight bodies and media actors can adopt in order to better protect the integrity of political and electoral campaigns.

**Moderator:** Ms. Francesca Boggeri, Social Media Coordinator, Election Observation and Democracy Support (EODS)



**Speakers:**

- Ms. Yuliya Shypilova, Programme Officer Eastern Europe, International IDEA
  - Ms. Amīlija Raituma, Head of the Investigation of Violations of Political Organizations Division, the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB) of Latvia
  - Mr. Marcin Walecki, Senior Resident Country Director Ukraine, National Democratic Institute
  - Ms. Olga Snopok, Analyst of the Civil Network “OPORA”, Ukraine
  - Mr. Levan Natroshvili, Deputy Director of the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), Georgia
  - Mr. Marcin Olender, Government Affairs and Public Policy Manager for Central and Eastern Europe, Google (online)
- Mr. Marcin Walecki, Senior Resident Country Director Ukraine, National Democratic Institute
  - Ms. Angelica Caraman, Chairperson of the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova

**13:00 – 14:00**

Lunch

**14:00 – 14:30**

**Wrap-Up Discussion and Concluding Remarks**

**Speakers:**

- Mr. Sam van der Staak, Director for Europe, International IDEA
- Mr. Alexey Gromov, ODIHR Senior Election Adviser
- Mr. Magnus Ohman, IFES Director for Regional Europe Office and Senior Political Finance Adviser