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MEMORANDUM FOR THE MINISTER OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL
AFFAIRS, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

**MINISTERIAL ENGAGEMENT ROUNDTABLE
ON PROTECTING DEMOCRACY**

(For Decision)

SUMMARY

- The report that you and the Clerk of the Privy Council provided to the Prime Minister on April 5, 2023, included a commitment to engage with stakeholders and communities to seek views on best practices to mitigate the impact of foreign interference and disinformation on Canada's institutions.
- This note provides you with a proposed approach to implement this commitment through the creation of a "Roundtable for Ministerial Engagement on Protecting Democracy." This formal process would allow you to engage with stakeholders on an array of topics related to protecting and strengthening Canada's democracy and its institutions.
- Through this agile structure, you would be able to engage with stakeholders who could share their expertise and perspectives and inform the implementation of your mandate related to protecting Canada's democratic institutions.
- Since the Independent Special Rapporteur (ISR) is scheduled to complete his mandate by the end of October 2023, it is proposed to use this roundtable as a mechanism to build on the information gathered through the public hearings the ISR will be conducting and discuss options for the implementation of recommendations related to foreign interference in democratic institutions.
- It is recommended that you support the creation of the roundtable and agree to host the first session in Fall 2023 to discuss the topic of foreign interference. **Do you agree?**

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Background

- The report to the Prime Minister on foreign interference stressed that the Government of Canada must work with partners, both domestically and internationally, to ensure the strongest defences possible are in place and pointed to the need for a whole-of-society approach. In particular, it included a commitment to engage with stakeholders and communities to seek views on best practices to mitigate the impact of foreign interference and disinformation on Canada's institutions.
- In Budget 2022, the Privy Council Office received additional funding to coordinate, develop, and implement government-wide measures designed to combat disinformation and protect Canada's democracy.
- The Treasury Board-approved mandate of the Protecting Democracy Unit (PDU) includes engagement with experts and civil society. Engagement at the Ministerial and senior official levels will be complemented by engagement initiatives led by the PDU, including with academics, civil society organizations, private sector, and other levels of government.

Proposed approach

- It is recommended that you support the creation of a "Roundtable for Ministerial Engagement on Protecting Democracy" and agree to host a first meeting in Fall 2023.
- The agenda of the first meeting could focus on the ISR's recommendations. The first meeting would serve to test and fine tune the overall approach, frequency, and structure of the roundtable format and refine the longer-term strategy. If this approach is well received, the goal would be to host the ministerial roundtable annually, at least.

Membership

- It is proposed that the roundtable consist of 10-15 participants with diverse backgrounds, including representatives from academia, civil society organizations, private sector, as well as representatives from diaspora communities often impacted by issues related to foreign interference.
- PDU would provide you with a list of potential participants for the initial meeting, based on existing networks and canvassing of stakeholders. Should the roundtable be made permanent, a more formal process for selecting participants would be proposed.

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- Participation in the roundtables will be voluntary, participants will not receive an honorary; however, they will be reimbursed for certain expenses if applicable (travel, accommodation, meals, etc.). There should be opportunities for members to participate either in-person, virtually, or in hybrid format.

Format

- A two-day meeting is proposed where participants would hear presentations from experts, exchange information on relevant topics, and work towards identifying potential solutions to questions related to your mandate. You would not be expected to attend the full two days but would have the opportunity to participate in any sessions based on your availability.
- Potential themes of discussion for the roundtable could include foreign interference, electoral integrity, combating mis- and dis-information in Canada, open-source monitoring, etc.
- The creation of this forum will:
 - contribute to policy development being informed by the views and expertise of a diverse group of stakeholders ;
 - serve to test proposed approaches ;
 - serve to inform a continuous cycle of refinement and learning ;
 - serve to keep an open channel of communication that will enhance transparency and accountability.

First meeting

- It is recommended that the first meeting of the roundtable takes place in Fall 2023, and that the topic of discussion be foreign interference. It would align with the commitment from your report to the Prime Minister. Members of the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Panel could be invited to participate in the first meeting and any subsequent ones if relevant.
- The ISR is expected to complete the second part of his mandate by the end of October 2023. Hosting the first meeting of this Ministerial roundtable shortly after the release of his final report would provide an opportunity to engage with stakeholders and seek their advice on how to implement recommendations.

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PCO Comment

- It is expected that Fall 2023 will be a busy period with respect to the issue of foreign interference in democratic institutions given the conclusion of the ISR's mandate. The timing remains unclear for the completion of the reviews by the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, and the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency.
- A fall meeting following the completion of the ISR's work would provide an opportunity to build on the information gathered through the public hearings that would be conducted and engage with stakeholders with respect to the path forward before we finalize the next iteration of the Protecting Democracy Plan. The Plan should consider input from all of the review processes and the engagement with stakeholders.
- In developing this proposed approach, PCO considered other types of mechanisms for you to engage with stakeholders (e.g., advisory groups, task forces, town halls) and concluded that a roundtable would provide for more engaging interactions that will be a welcomed approach by stakeholders and most useful to support policy development on these issues. PCO sought advice from other departments who have similar roundtables, notably Public Safety Canada's Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security.
- Costs for hosting the roundtable will be covered by the current budget of the PDU.
- The ministerial roundtable would be a central component of the PDU's engagement strategy. It would be supported by other engagement opportunities being considered by the PDU, including with academics, tech companies, civil society organizations to ensure that policy gaps in relation to protecting democracy are identified and potential solutions are proposed.

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/Stinson/

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