

For Public Release

UNCLASSIFIED

MEMORANDUM FOR MINISTER OF PUBLIC SAFETY, DEMOCRATIC  
 INSTITUTIONS AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

UPDATE ON ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES (WINTER 2024)

(For your information)

**SUMMARY**

- This note follows-up on the recommendation that was sent to you on the possibility to create a ministerial roundtable on issues related to protecting democracy. Your office indicated that there was no interest to move forward with such an initiative at this point.
- The Protecting Democracy Unit (PDU) has continued to progress on other aspects of an engagement strategy related to protecting democracy, in particular with respect to disinformation. A detailed plan is included for your information (Annex A).
- The plan includes engagement opportunities with external stakeholders, as well as efforts to strengthen interdepartmental coordination, and to engage with provincial and territorial governments.
- These activities contribute to advancing your 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 democratic institutions, as stated in your April 2023, report to the Prime Minister (*Countering an evolving threat: Update on recommendations to counter foreign interference in Canada's democratic institutions*).

**Background**

- Progress has been made over the year in establishing the Protecting Democracy Unit (PDU) at PCO and advancing key priorities to coordinate, develop, and implement government-wide measures designed to combat disinformation and protect our democracy.

2023-DEM-REF-00053

For Public Release

- [APG] - UNCLASSIFIED

- o As part of these activities, the PDU has increased its engagement efforts with both internal and external stakeholders. Details are included in the attached Engagement Plan (**Annex A**).

#### *Engagement with external stakeholders*

- o As indicated in the note recommending a ministerial roundtable, the PDU is engaging with external partners with a view to leverage civil society's efforts and to increase our understanding of the needs in developing future policies. Current activities include:
  - o *Democracy Xchange*: Building on last year successful workshop on the margins of the DemocracyXChange Summit in Toronto, the PDU has initiated discussions with the Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University to organize a similar event during next year's Summit in April 2024. As per their usual practice, it is expected the organizers will invite you to speak during the Summit.
  - o *Youth Engagement*: Preliminary discussions have been initiated with the Public Policy Forum to explore options on how to engage with youth on the issues of disinformation and trust in our democratic institutions, as well as how disinformation impacts their support for Canada's democratic processes.
  - o *Public Libraries*: PDU has engaged in discussions with the Council of Canadian Urban Libraries to explore potential partnerships in efforts to build citizen resilience to disinformation, which as a first step could include an environmental scan of initiatives already undertaken by libraries with a view to leverage promising practices.
  - o *Academic research*: PDU has also initiated discussions with selected academics to explore the possibility of commission further research to deepen our understanding of the impact of disinformation in Canada. This is in addition to the ongoing engagement with the Canadian Digital Media Research Network.

#### *Interdepartmental coordination*

- o As part of your mandate to lead an integrated government response to protect Canada's democratic institutions, efforts have been undertaken to strengthen relationships with key partners across the government to better understand respective roles and priorities, and to raise awareness of the PDU's mandate. In addition to ongoing engagement with individual departments, efforts in this space include:
  - o *Directors' Coordinating Group on Protecting Democracy*: This interdepartmental group was established in May 2023 and it aims to strengthening ties with existing partners, as well as the opportunity

For Public Release

- [APG] - UNCLASSIFIED

to engage with departments that were not previously involved in the work under the Plan to Protect Canada's Democracy. The October 2023 meeting focused on disinformation. Meetings are expected to take place quarterly.

- o *Inter-departmental Research Working Group*: In July 2023, PDU hosted a first meeting of the Inter-departmental Research Working Group. This working-level network serves as a mechanism to share research-related information, identify opportunities for collaboration, and rapidly mobilize expertise and findings related to research in areas such as disinformation and election interference.
- o *Disinformation Guidebook*: As part of its work in delivering on your commitment in the April 5 report to implement a counter disinformation toolkit inspired by the UK's RESIST model, the PDU engaged working-level employees and executives across policy, research, and communications areas within the public service who are either working on, or with a linkage to, the disinformation file. The draft guidebook is in approvals within the department and will be sent to you, for your approval, under separate cover this Fall.
- o *Training for public servants*: The PDU has advanced its work with the Canada School of Public Service on two learning events, which includes a one-time panel event with subject matter experts on the topic of disinformation that will take place in January 2024, and the development of an online, self-paced training module focused on disinformation and made available to all public servant that will have a longer lasting and broader impact. This work will help deliver on your commitment to offer training and awareness raising activities to public servants, as outlined in the April 5 report.
- o It is important to note that PCO is also involved in various interdepartmental groups at senior levels. For instance, I am part of the Deputy Minister's Committee on Foreign Interference (chaired by Public Safety Canada) and the Election Security Coordinating Committees (co-chaired by Elections Canada and PCO-Security and Intelligence). These groups provide opportunities to showcase the work of the PDU and ensure complementarity of efforts.

#### *Intergovernmental and International Engagement*

- o Bilateral engagement continues with provincial and territorial officials responsible for electoral law and policy to understand their needs and determine potential areas for future multilateral engagement. We will determine the feasibility of creating a one-stop hub of protecting democracy materials for other levels of government.



For Public Release

- [APG] - UNCLASSIFIED

- o PDU is involved in multiple international fora where issues related to foreign interference and disinformation are being discussed. In particular, the team is closely involved in the work of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), including its newly created DIS/MIS Resource Hub and the launch of its second annual trust survey across more than 25 countries.
- o In addition, per the commitment in your April 2023 report to the Prime Minister, PDU will re-engage with the partners in Principle 3 of the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace.

### PCO Comment

- o The activities outlined in this note move forward on your commitment to engage with stakeholders on the issues within your mandate and provide numerous opportunities to both promote the protecting democracy toolkits, the counter disinformation guidebook for public servants, and the Paris Call Compendium as well as to discuss the Plan to Protect Canada's Democracy and to seek feedback and ideas.
- o To further promote and complement the engagement activities, work is underway with PCO-Communications on an engagement strategy to promote tools such as the protecting democracy toolkits and the counter disinformation guidebook for public servants. A draft was circulated to your office.
- o The work of the PDU falls within the broader efforts of the Government to build resilience. For instance, work continues on the Communications Security Establishment's online disinformation advertising campaign, which includes an advertising and marketing budget. Phase 2 is set to begin in January 2024 and will include a component focused on who creates disinformation and why.
- o Further, Canadian Heritage's Digital Citizen Initiative is a significant investment, as part of the Plan to Protect Canada's Democracy, to provide funding to civil society organizations to build partnership and raise awareness. Investment levels were substantially increased in Budget 2022 to approximately \$10M annually. s. 39 - Cabinet Confidence

Paul MacKinnon  
Deputy Secretary to the  
Cabinet (Governance)

For Public Release

- [APG] - UNCLASSIFIED

Attachment (s)

Stinson,