

Memorandum of Understanding For the Participation in the Research and Infrastructure Network of Monitoring Electoral Democracy (MEDem Networks)

THE SIGNATORIES, CONSIDERING:

The MEDem MISSION

Monitoring Electoral Democracy (MEDem) aspires to be added to the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures' Roadmap 2026 and become the dedicated European Research Infrastructure for Democracy Research that will serve as a catalyst for comprehensive, impactful, and innovative comparative research on democracies. MEDem will leverage the power of interconnected and harmonized data, unlocking vast amounts of research data in the Social Sciences and Humanities and ensuring their interoperability. By harnessing this networked approach, MEDem will enable ground-breaking discoveries in Democracy Research that surpass the limitations of individual research groups or projects that are often restricted in resources.

Operating within an open science and open data framework, MEDem unites and guides quantitative democracy research networks and researchers across countries, institutions, and disciplines, offering a framework for pre- and post-harmonization of a wide range of democracy research data that will lay the groundwork for large scale interoperability. It will provide a one-point entry that enables seamless integration, linking, and comprehensive analysis of all types of democracy research data, dealing with the intricacies of micro-level mechanisms to the broader meso- and macro-level determinants that shape democratic systems throughout Europe, while also securing resource efficiency.

MEDem will generate the necessary synergies within the field of Democracy Research that are needed to acquire a comprehensive understanding of democracies, encompassing their processes, developments, and future prospects. MEDem will emerge as the infrastructure that brings clarity and depth to the study of democratic systems and their challenges, extending its impact to researchers and the broader society. In short, MEDem aims to become:

The European infrastructure for unlocking the true potential of data-driven Democracy Research.

The MEDem Networks

As a European research infrastructure, MEDem connects and integrates (inter)national projects, infrastructures, and research groups in the Research and Infrastructure Network of MEDem (MEDem Networks). Collaboration with such leading research groups, projects, and infrastructures is key to the work and success of MEDem. The MEDem Networks play a crucial role by providing datasets, instruments, data operations, and a unique vision of their field that feed into the MEDem infrastructure.

By jointly developing methodological standards for already collected data and their documentation, as well as for prospective data collections within the MEDem framework, the MEDem Networks play a pivotal role in promoting data harmonization. This ensures that past as well as future data in the field of democracy research are made *findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable* (FAIR). MEDem facilitates this process by offering a framework for the exchange of existing research, data, instruments, and tools within the research community, opening up new avenues for data collection and analysis for democracy researchers throughout Europe and across the globe.

Participation in MEDem Networks

The MEDem Steering Committee currently serves as the primary management body of MEDem, fostering joint efforts and collective engagement in the development of MEDem. After acceptance onto the ESFRI roadmap – and based on the currently proposed governance structure –, the MEDem Steering Committee will transition into becoming the Board of Directors. The MEDem Networks are integrated as central components of the MEDem governance structure and can even actively shape decision-making processes within the infrastructure’s primary management body.

In the prospective governance structure, each network can name up to two representatives to and has one vote in the MEDem Scientific Council, which appoints members to the Board of Directors. Furthermore, the Scientific Council ensures that broader trends in data collection as well as valuable suggestions and concerns within the MEDem Community are brought to the attention of the Board of Directors in a formalized way. The Scientific Council’s expertise and insights contribute to the overall governance and strategic direction of MEDem, particularly in decisions regarding standards in data documentation, harmonization, and interoperability. MEDem Networks commit to the obligations listed below and sign the Memorandum of Understanding.

Obligations of Participants in MEDem Networks

The MEDem Networks demonstrate their commitment through the following actions regarding already collected data as well as prospective plans regarding data collection:

- **Active participation in developing joint standards:** MEDem Networks actively participate in developing and refining joint standards. These standards aim to harmonize existing data and govern future data collection and management. By engaging in ongoing discussions and providing insights and expertise, MEDem contributes to the standardization efforts within the infrastructure, ensuring effective data pre- and post-harmonization.
- **Incorporating common MEDem standards into future data collections:** The MEDem Networks strive to co-develop and adopt common standards for their future data collections. By aligning methodologies and practices with these standards, they facilitate comparative research across multiple countries, datasets, and time periods. This approach promotes data integration and compatibility, enabling researchers to derive meaningful insights into European democracies from diverse sources.
- **Adherence to FAIR principles for data:** MEDem Networks firmly support the FAIR principles, which emphasize data being findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable. They actively apply these principles by openly sharing newly collected data with the scientific community as soon as possible, in compliance with data protection regulations or funders' requirements. Data is made available for post-harmonization, ensuring that researchers can utilize it effectively.

- Sharing comprehensive metadata: MEDem Networks share essential metadata related to their studies, including information on study design, funding, and the political context. This sharing is done in accordance with agreed-upon standards and without any embargoes. By providing detailed metadata, participants in MEDem Networks contribute to the richness and depth of the collective datasets within MEDem, enhancing visibility and understanding of the data. Participants in MEDem Networks contribute to the richness and depth of the collective datasets within MEDem, increasing the visibility and understanding of the data.

Through these commitments, the MEDem Networks actively contribute to the advancement of research, collaboration, and data harmonization within the MEDem infrastructure.

THEREFORE AGREE, WITHOUT MAKING A LEGAL COMMITMENT, AS FOLLOWS:

PARAGRAPH 1: PURPOSE AND NATURE OF THIS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (hereinafter “MoU”) is to settle the intent of the Signatories regarding the following steps to be taken toward the setting up of MEDem. To this end, the Signatories shall exchange all necessary and relevant information required to fulfil their obligations.

Nothing in the MoU will be deemed to constitute any commitment to become a Member of the MEDem infrastructure or any other legal entity governing the MEDem infrastructure. The MoU is neither a contract nor a treaty, but a declaration of intention and therefore legally not binding.

Nothing in this MoU shall be interpreted as granting any rights to use the names, logos, or trademarks of the Parties in advertising or other publicity without the consent of the Parties.

PARAGRAPH 2: COMING INTO EFFECT AND DURATION

The MoU shall come into effect on the day the Signatories have signed it.

It shall remain in effect until MEDem or any other legal form has been established.

As this MoU is legally not binding, the Signatories may decide to terminate it earlier. In this case, the Signatory deciding the termination will inform the other Signatories in writing, subject to three months prior notification. The remaining Signatories may decide to maintain the MoU in effect among them for the initial duration as specified in the present paragraph or to terminate it.

If the MoU is terminated by one, several, or all Signatories, no Signatory shall be liable to the other Signatory or Signatories for any monetary or other losses that may result.

PARAGRAPH 3: AMENDMENT AND ASSIGNMENT

Any modification of the MoU – with the exception of termination – requires the written agreement signed by all the Signatories hereto.

No rights or obligations of any of the Signatories arising from the MoU may be assigned or transferred in whole or in part to any third party without the other Signatory’s or Signatories’ prior written approval.

PARAGRAPH 4: RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

Disputes that might arise concerning the MoU will be settled amicably. If no amicable solution is possible, the Signatories will terminate the MoU.

PARAGRAPH 5: COPIES

Done in as many copies as there are Signatories, each of them being equally valid.

Signatory full legal name:

Acronym:

Name of the person authorized to sign (Title, Family name, First name):

Position:

Date:

Signature:

Stamp or seal of the Signatory:

