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UNCLASSIFIED**UPDATE ON ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES
(FALL 2023/WINTER 2024)**

(For Information)

SUMMARY

- This note follows-up on the June 23, 2023 recommendation sent to the Minister on establishing a ministerial roundtable on issues related to protecting democracy. Following direction from the Minister's Office not to pursue the organization of a roundtable at this time, this note provides the Minister's Office with updates on a number of other engagement opportunities being pursued over the coming months.
- The Protecting Democracy Unit (PDU) continues to advance elements of a broader engagement strategy related to protecting democracy, in particular with respect to disinformation. A detailed engagement plan is included for information (**TAB A**).
- The engagement plan reflects opportunities to enhance ties with external stakeholders, as well as efforts to strengthen interdepartmental coordination, and to engage with provincial and territorial governments.
- These activities contribute to advancing the Minister's commitment to work with stakeholders and communities, as well as to seek views on best practices to mitigate the impact of foreign interference and disinformation on Canada's democratic institutions, as stated in the April 2023 report to the Prime Minister (*Countering an evolving threat: Update on recommendations to counter foreign interference in Canada's democratic institutions*).

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Background

- Significant progress has been made over the past year in establishing the Privy Council Office's (PCO) Protecting Democracy Unit (PDU) and advancing key priorities to coordinate, develop, and implement government-wide measures designed to combat disinformation and protect Canada's democracy.
- 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 (**TAB A**).

Government of Canada Interdepartmental Coordination

- As part of the Minister's mandate to lead an integrated government response to protect Canada's democratic institutions, relationships with key partners across the government have been strengthened to better understand respective roles and priorities, and to raise awareness of the PDU's mandate. In addition to ongoing collaboration with individual departments, efforts in this space include:
 - *Directors' Coordinating Group on Protecting Democracy*: This interdepartmental group was established in May 2023, membership includes representatives from 18 departments and agencies. Meetings take place quarterly. The first two meetings served to strengthen ties with existing partners, as well as to reach out to departments that were not previously involved in the work under the Plan to Protect Canada's Democracy (for example, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada). During these meetings, members updated on current initiatives being undertaken by their departments and highlighted existing gaps in the Government of Canada's approach to combat disinformation, providing opportunities for enhancement.
 - *Inter-departmental Research Working Group*: In July 2023, PDU established the Inter-departmental Research Working Group, bringing together 13 departments and agencies with a coordinated research agenda to support policy development, implementation, and evaluation. This working-level network serves as a mechanism to share research-related information, identify opportunities for collaboration, and rapidly mobilize expertise and research findings in areas such as disinformation, emerging technologies and election interference. Through initial consultations, the Working Group identified the need for a strategic direction for Government of Canada research on disinformation. Engagement also enabled the compilation of an environmental scan of ongoing research activities

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around the federal government and identification of knowledge gaps with a view to develop an overarching research strategy.

- *Disinformation Guidebook*: As part of its work in delivering on the Minister's commitment in the April 2023 report (*Countering an evolving threat: Update on recommendations to counter foreign interference in Canada's democratic institutions*) 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 in 21 federal departments and agencies who are either working on, or have a linkage to, the disinformation file. The draft guidebook is in approvals within PCO and will be sent under separate cover this Fall.
- *Training for public servants*: The PDU has advanced its work with the Canada School of Public Service on two learning events, which include a one-time panel event with subject matter experts on the topic of disinformation, taking place in January 2024. This event will bring together Canada's Paris Call partners (Microsoft and the Alliance for Securing Democracy) and will provide an opportunity to continue to leverage the compendium of good practices developed in collaboration with them. PDU is additionally working with the Canada School to develop an online, self-paced training module focused on disinformation which will be made available to all public servants, bringing awareness and tools to public servants that will have a longer lasting and broader impact. This work will help deliver on the Minister's commitment to offer training and awareness raising activities to public servants, as outlined in the April 2023 report.
- o PCO is also involved in various interdepartmental groups at senior levels. For instance, we are at the table for the regular FI coordination meetings (chaired by Public Safety Canada's FI coordinator), 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.

Engagement with External Stakeholders

- o The PDU continues to engage with external partners with a view to leveraging civil society's efforts and inform broader policy development efforts. Current activities include:
 - *DemocracyXChange*: Building on last year's successful workshop on the margins of the DemocracyXChange Summit in Toronto, the

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PDU has initiated discussions with Toronto Metropolitan University to organize a similar event during the April 2024 Summit. It is expected the organizers will invite the Minister to speak during the Summit, and PCO will return with a recommendation in this regard under separate cover.

- *Youth Engagement*: Preliminary discussions have been initiated with the Public Policy Forum to explore options for engagement with youth on the issues of disinformation and trust in Canada's democratic institutions, as well as how disinformation impacts their participation in Canada's democratic processes.
- *Public Libraries*: PDU has launched discussions with the Council of Canadian Urban Libraries to explore potential partnerships in efforts to build citizen resilience to disinformation.
- *Academic research*: Further to the eight research projects undertaken last year, which focused on understanding the state of disinformation, PDU has also initiated a second round of discussions with selected academics to commission further research to deepen our understanding by focusing on the impact of disinformation in Canada, which will provide insight and help inform potential response options. This is in addition to the ongoing engagement with the Canadian Digital Media Research Network and other leading civil society organizations.

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. Work is underway to determine the feasibility of creating a one-stop hub of protecting democracy materials for other orders of government, as part of a broader effort to ensure provinces and territories have access to the tools and information they need to be resilient to foreign interference threats to their elections. Other elements of this approach include engagement with PTs to share experience and good practice on electoral law and policy (PDU); sharing good practice on protecting democracy and countering FI measures (PDU, PS, RCMP, CSIS, CSE); and threat briefings to electoral management bodies and security officials (RCMP, CSIS, CSE). Initial discussions have taken place about a broader federal strategy to ensure a coordinated offer of service to PTs in well in advance of their PT elections.
- o PDU is also 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

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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 30 countries. The survey is being conducted in October and November 2023; results will be publicly available in June or July 2024.

- o In addition, per the commitment in the 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, Microsoft and the Alliance for Securing Democracy.

PCO Comment

- o To further promote and complement these engagement activities, work is underway with PCO-Communications on a public-facing communications strategy to promote tools, such as the protecting democracy toolkits and the counter disinformation guidebook for public servants.
- 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 and updates to its report on cyber threats to Canada's democratic processes; Canadian Heritage's Digital Citizen Initiative continues to provide funding to civil society organizations to build partnerships and raise awareness; and Canadian Security Intelligence Service's Academic Outreach and Stakeholder Engagement publishes guidance pamphlets to help support individuals and groups in industry, academia, government, and broader civil society in understanding threats and taking action to protect themselves and their interests.

Attachment (1)

Stinson