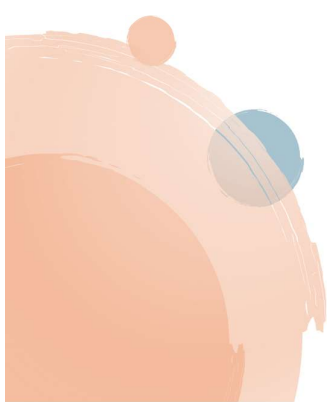




Event Report – WP1

**Project: DIGIVOTE – Digital Democracy: Trust,
Transparency and Engagement in Voting
Systems**



Event Dissemination Report – WP1

Project: DIGIVOTE – Digital Democracy: Trust, Transparency and Engagement in Voting Systems

Programme: CERV

Project No.: 101252326

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Event: Launch Conference – Voting Reimagined: Starting the Digital Conversation

Date: 10 February 2026

Location: Koper, Slovenia

Work Package: WP1 – Awareness Raising and Dissemination

Deliverable type: Event Report

Project's website: <https://emuni.si/digivote/>

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Event Overview

The DIGIVOTE project was officially launched through its opening public conference held on 10 February 2026 in Koper, Slovenia. The event represented the first major dissemination milestone of this 24-month European initiative funded under the CERV Programme and implemented by a consortium of nine partner organisations from seven countries.

The conference established the conceptual and institutional starting point for the project's broader work by initiating a structured European dialogue on digital voting. Discussions confirmed that digital voting cannot be approached merely as a technological upgrade of electoral procedures. Instead, it represents one of the most sensitive contemporary challenges for constitutional democracy, raising fundamental questions of ballot secrecy, electoral integrity, equality of participation, accessibility, and the long-term sustainability of public trust in democratic institutions.

From the outset, the event demonstrated that debates on electoral digitalisation are inseparable from wider concerns about democratic legitimacy, political culture, cybersecurity preparedness and citizen confidence. The Launch Conference therefore served not only as a dissemination activity, but also as an essential platform for interdisciplinary reflection on the future trajectory of elections in Europe. The event brought together legal scholars, cybersecurity experts, civil society representatives, public administration practitioners, and international project partners. This broad participation reflected the interdisciplinary ambition of DIGIVOTE to contribute to evidence-based European debate on the future of voting in the context of rapid digital transformation.

The event was **linguistically broadly accessible**, as throughout the conference, a system of automatic AI subtitling into **English (the original language for most speakers), Slovenian, Italian and Arabic** was displayed on the screen. Furthermore, the event was transmitted live through the EMUNI's YouTube channel and its recording is currently available [here](#). All the participants signed a written consent, that the acquired video material from the conference is distributed publicly and that the conference is streamed live online.

Objectives of the Launch Conference

The Launch Conference was designed as the first dissemination and stakeholder engagement activity under WP1. Its main objectives were

- to officially introduce the DIGIVOTE project, its consortium partnership, and its thematic scope;
- to open an informed European debate on the constitutional, societal and technological dimensions of digital voting;
- to present comparative national experience, particularly Estonia's long-standing practice of internet voting;
- to identify key risks and opportunities associated with electoral digitalisation, including secrecy, autonomy, cybersecurity and inclusion;
- to engage academic experts, practitioners and civil society actors in a shared reflection on democratic resilience;
- to provide qualitative input for the project's forthcoming participatory activities and policy-oriented outputs.

The event directly contributed to the objectives of the CERV Programme by strengthening civic dialogue, democratic participation and European cooperation on sensitive questions of institutional trust.

Methodological Approach

The Launch Conference was organised as a structured interdisciplinary forum combining constitutional analysis, technological expertise, and civil society perspectives. Its methodology was based on moderated thematic panel discussions guided by predefined questions addressing both the normative and practical dimensions of digital voting. The conference ensured balanced contributions from key stakeholder groups, including constitutional and electoral law experts, cybersecurity professionals, civil society organisations, researchers in governance, and representatives of public administration. Rather than promoting digital voting as a predetermined solution, the event served as an open deliberative platform for critical reflection on the democratic conditions under which digital voting could be compatible with electoral integrity and institutional trust. As the first dissemination milestone under WP1, the conference contributed to DIGIVOTE's broader approach combining comparative analysis, stakeholder engagement, and policy-oriented reflection. The qualitative insights gathered will

inform forthcoming project activities, including citizen consultations, thematic debates, and the development of strategic recommendations within the European Digital Voting Blueprint.

Conference Structure and Programme

The Launch Conference consisted of opening remarks followed by three thematic panel discussions and audience exchange. The structure ensured a progressive development of the debate, moving from constitutional foundations, through societal and systemic implications, towards technological challenges and future-oriented reflections.

A simplified overview of the programme is provided below.

Table 1. Conference Timetable

Time	Session
14:00 – 14:15	Opening Remarks and Project Introduction
14:15 – 15:00	Panel 1: Basic Principles Reimagined through Digital Voting
15:00 – 15:10	Q&A Session
15:10 – 15:55	Panel 2: Electoral Structures, Participation and Accountability
15:55 – 16:05	Q&A Session
16:05 – 16:30	Panel 3: Technological Challenges, Cybersecurity and Future Steps
After 16:30	Informal Networking and Stakeholder Exchange

The conference was chaired by Asst. Prof. DDr. Maja Pucelj (EMUNI).

Panellists of the conference in-person were:

- Prof Dr Rado Bohinc (EMUNI, Slovenia),
- Nena Bibica (PiNA, Slovenia),
- Ave Anniste (EHRC, Estonia),
- Prof Dr Ivan Svetlik (FDV, Slovenia),
- M.Sc. Simon Delakorda (INEPA, Slovenia),
- Emil Milan Pintar (Movement for Social Renewal – SINTEZA, Slovenia) and
- Gorazd Božič (SI-CERT, Slovenia).

Panellists of the conference online were:

- Prof Dr Jurij Toplak (PF Maribor, Alma Mater Europaea, Slovenia, Fordham University, New York),
- Maria Francesca De Tullio (PRORIGHTS, Italy) and
- Alessia Sciamanna (PEGASO, Italy).

Event successfully engaged 33 participants in person (16 female and 17 male participants) from 8 countries (Slovenia, Germany, Estonia, Poland, Greece, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria) (as seen from EDS in **Appendix 1**) and additionally (non-counted online) 17 participants from Poland, Bulgaria, Germany and Italy. From the table below it can be seen that the KPI's for the event were reached and in case of countries participations even exceeded.

Table 1. Achieved KPI's

KPI'S	NUMBER OF THE PARTICIPANTS FORSEEN	NUMBER OF THE PARTICIPANTS ACHIEVED	NUMBER OF THE COUNTRIES INVOLVED FORSEEN	NUMBER OF THE COUNTRIES INVOLVED ACHIEVED	COMMENT
Participation	25-50	33	7-9	8	Achieved

Main Content of the Conference

Opening Session and European Framework

The conference was formally opened by Dr. Rado Bohinc, President of EMUNI University, who framed the topic within the constitutional function of elections. He emphasised that electoral systems are not merely technical instruments for converting votes into seats, but foundational mechanisms through which democratic legitimacy is produced.

He highlighted that many European electoral arrangements face structural weaknesses, including limited accountability, strong party dominance, and weak personalisation of representation. In this context, digital voting must not be treated as a purely technical reform, but as a broader democratic and constitutional question touching upon sovereignty, equality and public trust.

Bohinc also suggested that digital voting represents a “democratic maturity test”: it requires not only technical feasibility but also societal readiness, civic responsibility and robust institutional safeguards.

The European civic framework was introduced by Nena Bibica (PiNA, Slovenia), who presented the objectives of the CERV Programme and its role in strengthening democratic participation, civic engagement and resilience through transnational dialogue. She emphasised that DIGIVOTE contributes directly to these aims by opening spaces for informed debate on European democratic values in the digital age.

The Project Leader, DDr. Maja Pucelj (EMUNI University) presented the DIGIVOTE project, the consortium partnership and the broader scope of the initiative. She underlined that the project approaches digital voting comprehensively, encompassing e-voting, i-voting and future-oriented developments such as mobile voting, while maintaining a strong focus on inclusiveness, democratic safeguards and comparative European learning.

Estonia’s Experience with Internet Voting

A key introductory contribution was delivered by Ave Anniste (Estonian Human Rights Centre), who presented Estonia’s long-standing experience with internet voting. Estonia has offered i-voting since 2005, making it the most established European example of digital voting in practice.

Anniste explained that i-voting in Estonia is embedded within a wider digital state infrastructure. Digital identity systems and everyday e-governance services form the institutional background against which internet voting has become a normalised channel for many citizens.

At the same time, she stressed that Estonia’s experience illustrates the ongoing centrality of trust. Even in a highly digitalised governance environment, public debates remain focused on cybersecurity, transparency and confidence in electoral technologies. She noted that scepticism persists among significant parts of the population, demonstrating that technological availability alone does not automatically translate into democratic legitimacy. The Estonian case therefore served as both an important comparative reference and a reminder that trust remains fragile even in advanced digital contexts.

Panel Discussions

Panel 1 – Constitutional Foundations, Representation and Democratic Legitimacy

The first panel addressed the structural limitations of existing electoral systems in relation to accountability, representation and citizen influence.

Maria Francesca De Tullio (PRORIGHTS, Italy) situated the discussion within broader European challenges of democratic legitimacy, fragmentation and declining confidence in representative institutions. She emphasised that debates on digital voting must be understood against the background of a wider crisis of political representation and weakening party structures. Digital tools may offer complementary channels of participation but cannot substitute the constitutional foundations of representative democracy.

A substantial constitutional critique was developed by Dr. Jurij Toplak, who stressed that voting remains a uniquely sensitive democratic act requiring the strongest guarantees of secrecy and voter autonomy. He highlighted that remote digital voting environments make it structurally difficult to prevent coercion, family influence or vote-buying, since voters may be pressured outside the protected space of the polling station. Toplak further raised concerns regarding reliance on externally developed software infrastructures, as well as the broader societal trend of declining privacy expectations. While acknowledging that digitalisation may expand over time, he underlined that this development raises profound constitutional questions and requires careful societal debate.

Dr. Ivan Svetlik expressed a cautious position, noting that trust is already fragile in many democratic societies. He suggested that introducing digital voting too rapidly may deepen scepticism and weaken legitimacy rather than strengthen participation. Svetlik advocated gradual approaches, incremental learning processes and careful societal preparation.

Panel 2 – Electoral Structures, Participation Patterns and Democratic Accountability

The second panel continued the discussion by focusing on electoral structures, citizen influence and the broader democratic consequences of digital transformation.

A particularly important contribution was made by Emil Milan Pintar (Movement for Social Renewal – SINTEZA), who distinguished between the procedural quality of elections and the democratic quality of electoral systems. He noted that while elections in Slovenia are generally well administered and accessible, the electoral model itself raises broader questions of accountability and voter influence.

Pintar emphasised that citizens must understand how their vote translates into mandates, and he suggested that combined electoral models could strengthen the democratic link between voters and representation. He warned that fully digital voting could significantly reshape participation patterns across demographic groups, with unpredictable political consequences.

Drawing on comparative experience, Pintar differentiated between electronic voting machines used in high-volume contexts and internet voting systems. He referred to cases where electronic voting was abandoned after vulnerabilities were identified, illustrating that digitalisation can reduce trust rather than enhance it if introduced without consensus and institutional robustness. Pintar underlined that the future of digital voting is ultimately not only a technical question, but one of political compromise and democratic culture.

From a civil society perspective, M.Sc. Simon Delakorda (INEPA, Slovenia) stressed that digital voting cannot serve as a purely technical solution if deeper democratic deficits remain unresolved. Digital channels, in his view, should complement rather than replace broader democratic improvements such as transparency, accountability and inclusive participation.

Alessia Sciamanna offered a perspective shaped by her dual role as a scholar working at the intersection of law and economics and as a national public official who has supported Italian institutions in recent years, particularly in the context of introducing digital public services under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan during and after the pandemic. Drawing on this experience, she emphasised that the development of digital public services — including potential forms of digital voting — cannot be treated merely as a technical or operational matter but instead requires a holistic and systemic approach. In her view, digitalisation must

be understood as a complex process that involves legal, organisational, infrastructural, logistical, and social dimensions simultaneously. She highlighted the importance of ensuring proximity and accessibility of services, especially for ageing populations, and stressed that addressing the digital divide is essential if digital transition is not to create new forms of exclusion. Sciamanna pointed to the need for adequate technical standards, connectivity infrastructure, special assistance mechanisms, and workforce capacity-building within public administration, particularly in countries such as Italy where administrative staff structures have aged over decades and may struggle with change management processes.

She also underlined that digital transition requires significant financial resources and strategic prioritisation, noting that constitutional constraints — including the requirement that public initiatives be supported by appropriate funding (as reflected, for example, in Article 81 of the Italian Constitution) — play an important role in shaping feasible reforms. In concluding, she warned against top-down approaches to technology deployment that may generate feelings of imposition rather than inclusion and argued that equity of access must remain central when designing digital voting systems as a fundamental democratic service. She further noted that complex digital identity requirements can represent a serious barrier for vulnerable groups, particularly the elderly, and referred to emerging practices such as community-based access hubs and supportive outreach measures as possible ways to strengthen trust, accessibility, and social fairness in the digital transformation of public services.

Panel 3 – Technological Challenges, Cybersecurity and Future Steps

The third panel focused on the technological and operational dimension of digital voting, with particular emphasis on cybersecurity and institutional preparedness.

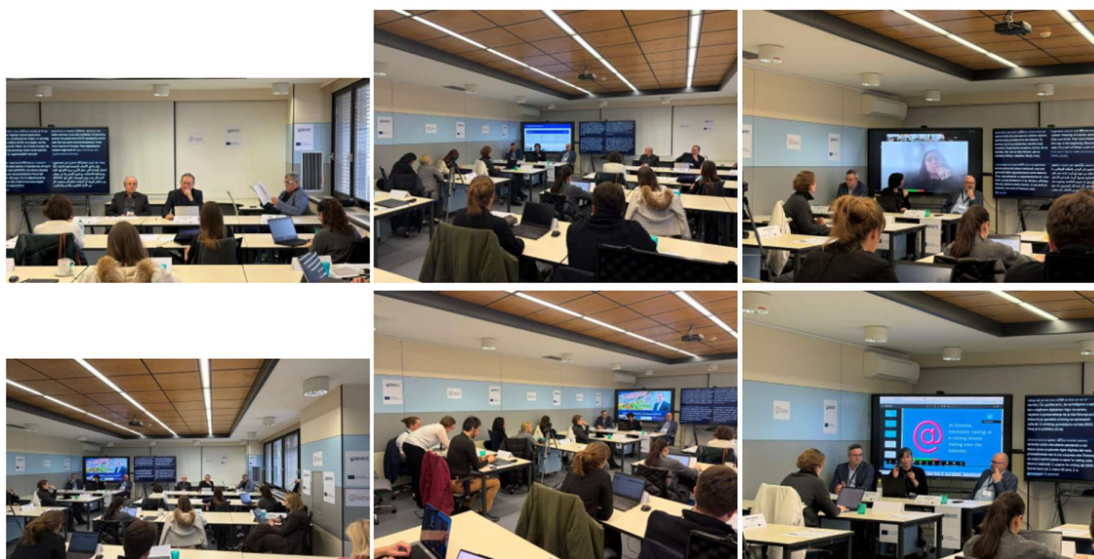
Gorazd Božič (SI-CERT, Slovenia) emphasised the transparency and social verifiability of traditional paper-based elections. He noted that digital systems rely on complex infrastructures that most citizens cannot independently verify, introducing additional layers of technical risk. Božič stressed that digital voting requires not only regulation, but strong operational capacity, contingency planning and incremental pilot-based learning rather than rapid implementation. He highlighted that software systems inevitably contain vulnerabilities, and

therefore electoral digitalisation demands robust institutional scenarios for crisis management and public accountability.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of accessibility and the digital divide. Participants stressed that digitalisation must not deepen inequalities of participation, particularly for elderly or vulnerable groups, and that inclusiveness remains a constitutional requirement for any future reform.

In the concluding reflections, Dr. Bohinc returned to trust as the central condition. Trust operates on multiple levels: trust in technology, trust in electoral procedures, and trust in democratic institutions more broadly. Civic education and democratic culture-building were identified as prerequisites for any sustainable transition.

Pictures of the event





Source: <https://emuni.si/digivote-details/>

Key Outcomes and Findings

The Launch Conference confirmed that trust is the decisive condition for any future transition towards digital voting. Participants broadly agreed that ballot secrecy and voter independence remain structurally difficult to guarantee in remote internet voting environments. Cybersecurity risks and operational preparedness were identified as essential prerequisites, highlighting that regulation alone is insufficient without institutional capacity, trained personnel and contingency planning.

The discussion also underlined that accessibility, and inclusion must remain central in order to prevent digitalisation from deepening inequalities of participation. Finally, speakers emphasised that incremental, evidence-based and socially legitimate approaches are necessary, and that digital voting cannot be separated from wider democratic culture, institutional accountability and political compromise.

Relevance for WP1 and Next Steps

The DIGIVOTE Launch Conference successfully delivered the first deliverable of the project with successful conclusion of WP1 by establishing a shared European understanding that digital voting is fundamentally a constitutional and societal issue requiring careful safeguards, institutional preparedness and inclusive democratic reflection.

The insights gathered provide a strong foundation for forthcoming DIGIVOTE activities, including citizen engagement events, youth debates, stakeholder workshops and the development of strategic recommendations within the European Digital Voting Blueprint. Through its integrated sequence of activities, DIGIVOTE aims to contribute to a more inclusive, trustworthy and democratically resilient European debate on the future of voting in the digital age.

Project Consortium

The DIGIVOTE consortium brings together academic, civil society, and human rights expertise from across Europe:

EMUNI University (Slovenia) – Project Coordinator



FECE (Bulgaria)



Estonian Human Rights Centre (Estonia)



Odyssea (Greece)



PRO RIGHTS (Italy)



Culture Goes Europe (Germany)



Nicolaus Copernicus University (Poland)



This project is funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme of the European Union. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Appendix 1. Event description sheet

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

(To be filled in and uploaded as deliverable in the Portal Grant Management System, at the due date foreseen in the system.)

 *Please provide one sheet per event (one event = one workpackage = one lump sum).)*

PROJECT	
Participant:	01 – Euro-Mediterranean University - EMUNI
PIC number:	964602436
Project name and acronym:	Enhancing Trust, Transparency, and Engagement in Digital Voting - DIGIVOTE

EVENT DESCRIPTION			
Event number:	1		
Event name:	Digivote Launch Conference		
Type:	Expert public discussion		
In situ/online:	in-situ and online		
Location:	Slovenia, Koper		
Date(s):	10.2.2026		
Website(s) (if any):	https://emuni.si/digivote-expert-public-discussion/		
Participants			
Female:	16		
Male:	17		
Non-binary:	0		
From country 1 [Slovenia]:	22		
Total number of participants:	33	From total number of countries:	8
Description			

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

The DIGIVOTE Launch Conference, organised under WP1 (Awareness Raising and Dissemination), took place on 10 February 2026 at EMUNI University in Koper, Slovenia. The public conference officially launched the DIGIVOTE project and initiated a structured European dialogue on digital voting, democratic legitimacy, trust, and institutional resilience.

The event brought together academics, legal scholars, cybersecurity experts, civil society representatives, and policy stakeholders from several European countries and the United States. The programme included an opening session introducing the project objectives and the CERV framework, followed by thematic panel discussions addressing constitutional principles, ballot secrecy, voter autonomy, cybersecurity, institutional preparedness, inclusiveness, and governance challenges related to digital voting.

Speakers provided comparative perspectives, including Estonia's experience with internet voting, and critically examined both the potential benefits and structural risks of electoral digitalisation. The discussions emphasised that digital voting must be approached as a constitutional and societal issue, not merely a technological innovation.

The conference concluded with a forward-looking discussion on future DIGIVOTE activities, focusing on comparative research, citizen engagement, stakeholder dialogue, and the development of strategic recommendations for a European Digital Voting Blueprint. The event also facilitated networking among consortium partners and stakeholders, contributing to dissemination and awareness-raising objectives under WP1.

We had 33 participants on site from 8 eligible countries, of which:

Country	Gender	Speaker/Other direct participant	Number
Slovenia	Female	Speaker	2
Slovenia	Male	Speaker	5
Slovenia	Female	Other direct participant	5
Slovenia	Male	Other direct participant	10
Germany	Male	Other direct participant	1
Estonia	Female	Speaker	1
Poland	Female	Other direct participant	3
Bulgaria	Female	Other direct participant	2
Greece	Female	Other direct participant	2

Spain	Female	Other direct participant	1
Italy	Male	Other direct participant	1

We also had 17 online participants, which we did not report in participants list for EDS reporting:

Country	Gender	Speaker/Other direct participant	Number
Germany	Male	Other direct participant	4
Poland	Male	Other direct participant	4
France	Male	Other direct participant	1
Italy	Female	Speaker	2
Italy	Female	Other direct participant	2
Italy	Male	Other direct participant	2
Lebanon	Male	Other direct participant	1
New York (USA)	Male	Speaker	1

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	16.2.2026	EMUNI
1.1	27.3.2026	EMUNI - readjusted participants tables for more information input and adding the explanation for the participants. The participants from Palestine, Algeria and Tunisia were counted as Slovenian participants, as they came to event from Slovenia, not from the country of their origin. Having that in mind, we readjusted the number of eligible countries to reflect that.