Foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation

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The European Parliament adopted by 469 votes to 71, with 75 abstentions, a resolution on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation.

Noting that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has highlighted the links between foreign attempts to manipulate information and threats to the EU and its immediate neighbourhood, as well as to global security and stability, Parliament stressed the need to **develop the EU's open strategic autonomy** in order to limit the scope for interference through EU dependence in strategic sectors such as energy, digital and health.

Parliament reiterated its call for a **coordinated EU strategy** against foreign interference, which should include measures to better implement existing provisions, to create a contact point for investigations and strategic responses against foreign interference, and to ensure funding for capacity-building activities to combat disinformation and uphold democratic processes.

According to Members, a **risk-based approach** would function as one of the building blocks of a tiered approach that informs policies and countermeasures against foreign interference, by taking into account the very factor that matters most in evaluating and responding to foreign influence, namely its source country. The approach should include a clear set of potential sanctions, and therefore function as a form of deterrence towards transgressors and as leverage towards emerging malicious actors that could be added to the list. Potential criteria could include:

- engagement in activities of foreign interference,

- an intellectual property theft programme directed against the EU and its Member States,

- legislation that forces national non-state actors to participate in intelligence activities,

- consistent violation of human rights,

- revisionist policy towards the existing international legal order,

- enforcement of authoritarian ideology extraterritorially; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to present specific recommendations for introduction of this approach and direct them to the Council for approval.

Members consider that the EU should **step up its strategic communication** on countering and debunking, information manipulation by widely reporting ongoing operations as they happen (debunking), in particular in the Global South. They called for a European structure to be set up to analyse statistical data, coordinate research projects and draw up reports to increase situational awareness and threat intelligence sharing, attribution and countermeasures in relation to foreign information manipulation and interference.

Resilience

The resolution called for a collective effort by the EU institutions, Member States, partner countries, civil society, the business world and independent media to raise social and institutional awareness and invest in education about disinformation, information manipulation and foreign interference.

Members reiterated their call for Member States to include media and digital literacy, civic education, common European history, respect for fundamental rights, critical thinking and the promotion of public participation in school and university curricula.

Parliament recommended that the Commission develop an effective **'defence of democracy' package**, taking into account the experience and unique final proposals of the Conference on the Future of Europe. It also encouraged the Commission to develop an EU-wide regulatory system to prevent media companies under the editorial control of foreign governments or owned by high-risk third countries from acquiring European media companies.

Interference that takes advantage of online platforms

Member States and technology companies should work together and invest more resources in developing **regulatory and technological solutions to AI-based disinformation**. Members deplored the fact that major platforms such as Meta, Google, YouTube, TikTok and Twitter are still not doing enough to actively combat disinformation. In this context, they regretted the EU's dependence on non-European companies to help preserve the integrity of the European elections.

Parliament expressed its concern about certain players whose services contribute significantly to the spread of disinformation and who are not signatories to the code of practice on disinformation, such as Apple, Amazon, Odysee, Patreon, GoFundMe and Telegram. It called on the Commission to encourage the other players concerned to sign and comply fully with the code.

Critical infrastructure and strategic sectors

Members are concerned about the EU's dependence on foreign actors and foreign technologies in critical infrastructure and supply chains and draw attention to the vulnerabilities created by the use of foreign direct investment as a geopolitical tool. They reiterated their call on the Commission to draw up **ambitious binding legislation** on the security of the information and communication technology supply chain.

Parliament noted that despite these mechanisms for filtering foreign direct investment, Chinese companies such as Nuctech have been awarded contracts for critical European infrastructures, leading to security risks. It therefore called on the Council and Commission to exclude the use of equipment and software from manufacturers based in high-risk countries, notably China and Russia, such as TikTok, ByteDance Huawei, ZTE, Kaspersky, NtechLab and Nuctech.

Members considered that the TikTok application, owned by the Chinese conglomerate ByteDance, breaches the European data protection framework and therefore presents a potential risk and is a source of disinformation supported by China. They recommended **banning TikTok** at all levels of national governments and in the EU institutions.

Interference during electoral processes

Parliament condemned the dangerous phenomenon of **disinformation-for-hire**, whereby providers offer disinformation services to government and non-government actors, for example over the dark web, setting out lists of services and prices; deplores that this kind of service has been used to attempt to undermine electoral processes, among many other uses.

The resolution stressed the utmost importance of protecting the **security, resilience and reliability of the election infrastructure**, including, among other things, IT systems, voting machines and equipment, election office networks and procedures, voter registration databases and storage facilities.

Parliament welcomed the work carried out by the Authority for European Political Parties and Foundations (APPF), in particular as regards preventing and combating prohibited financial payments from third countries into the EU political system. It called on the Commission and the co-legislators to strengthen the APPF's toolbox and to enable donations to be effectively traced back to the ultimate payer.

Convert funding of political activities by foreign donors

Parliament reiterated its concerns about the regular revelations of **massive Russian funding** of political parties and politicians and former politicians and civil servants in a number of democratic countries in an attempt to interfere and gain leverage in their domestic processes. It expressed concern about Russia’s connections with several political parties and politicians in the EU and its wide-ranging interference with secessionist movements in European territories and in the EU.

Members welcomed the Commission's proposal for new rules to establish common cybersecurity and information security for all EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies. They reiterated their call to impose costs on perpetrators of foreign interference by means of a strong attribution capacity.

Interference through global actors

Parliament denounced in the strongest terms the alleged attempts by foreign countries, including Qatar and Morocco to influence Members, former Members and staff of the European Parliament through acts of corruption, which constitute serious foreign interference in the EU’s democratic processes. It underlined the need to step up efforts to **enhance the transparency and integrity** of the EU institutions, and to combat corruption, manipulation, influence and interference campaigns. It reiterated its call for updated transparency rules and ethics, mapping foreign funding for EU-related lobbying, including funding for non-profit organisations and proper regulation and monitoring of friendship groups.