Findings and recommendations of the Special Committee on the European Democracy Shield

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The European Parliament adopted by 420 votes to 220, with 26 abstentions, a resolution on the findings and recommendations of the Special Committee on the European Democracy Shield.

More ambitious measures to combat foreign interference

While welcoming the joint communication on the European Shield for Democracy, Members believe that the measures set out in the communication do not fully reflect the level of ambition, foresight and capacity required and should be further developed and progressively strengthened over time, with a view to ensuring the effective establishment of **robust and binding actions** to protect democracy. The fight against foreign interference, hybrid threats and disinformation requires ambition and strong action as the fragmentation of the EU remains a vulnerability in the defence of democracy.

Members noted with concern the evolving threat landscape undermining democratic processes and institutions in the EU and its Member States, characterised by foreign information manipulation and interference activities, hybrid attacks, and disinformation campaigns orchestrated by malicious third-country actors and their proxies in the EU. In this context, Parliament stressed the need for a comprehensive approach aimed at addressing concerns relating to the rule of law and reinforcing social cohesion, democratic legitimacy and societal trust across the EU and its Member States.

Russia, the main external threat

Parliament considered Russia to be the primary external threat to Europe’s security and democratic integrity and reiterated its view that Russia is a state sponsor of terrorism. It also condemned the politically motivated use by foreign governments, not least Russia, of **blacklists**, visa bans and other restrictive or retaliatory measures targeting EU citizens, representatives of state authorities and commercial organisations, journalists and democratically elected Members of Parliament which it describes as a hybrid instrument of warfare. Members called for expanded **sanctions** on the enablers of disinformation and on those that help circumvent existing sanctions. They want the sanctions adopted by the EU following Russia's invasion of Ukraine to be more effective and to have a more noticeable impact.

European Centre for Democratic Resilience

Parliament welcomed the Commission’s proposal for a European Centre for Democratic Resilience as a necessary and logical step towards **enhanced coordination of efforts** to withstand evolving common threats, in particular foreign information manipulation and interference and disinformation. However, it regretted that the Centre, as set out in the proposal, lacks a clear mandate and empowerment through a legal act, as well as dedicated budgetary resources and personnel, a specific governance structure and a timeline. It called on the Commission to endow the Centre with a **clear mandate, decision-making mechanisms and competence to act, thus allowing it to function as an independent centre of excellence** for detecting, analysing and combating foreign information manipulation and interference activities and to coordinate actions at the national level. This new structure should not duplicate existing instruments but rather consolidate current EU-level actions within a single entity. Participation should be mandatory for all Member States and parliamentary oversight should be ensured.

Digital resilience

Parliament called for the full implementation and **effective enforcement of the entire digital-related EU acquis**, across all Member States and in full respect of fundamental rights.

Engagement-based recommendation systems of certain very large online platforms often cause systemic risk to civic discourse and electoral processes, as they amplify divisive, polarising or misleading content, often fuelling disinformation from foreign and domestic actors, while disproportionately favouring sensationalist material over fact-based content.

Members called on major platforms to **mitigate these risks** by ensuring that synthetic or manipulated content (e.g., deepfakes) can be clearly distinguished from authentic material, and that editorially independent and pluralistic media and verified sources have due prominence. They called on the Commission to: (i) investigate compliance with Digital Services Act obligations in this regard and take appropriate measures; (ii) **promote greater transparency and accountability** in the design of algorithmic recommendation and advertising systems, in order to enhance user choice and ensure non-manipulative default settings, all while promoting freedom of expression and information.

The resolution emphasised that the European Shield of Democracy must protect and defend **freedom of expression and information** as a fundamental right applicable both offline and online. Members of Parliament call on the Commission to ensure that platforms are held **accountable** in this regard, while clarifying that freedom of expression and information was designed to protect human beings, not machines or software that exhibit inauthentic behaviour.

Protecting critical infrastructure

Parliament stressed that **existing structural dependencies**, through market concentration and foreign control, including the dominance of US big tech companies, in the EU's digital infrastructure pose a high risk to democracy, freedom, security and competitiveness within the EU. It called on the Commission to systematically integrate dependency reduction and European industrial capacity-building objectives into the implementation of the European Democracy Shield.

Members reiterated the need to be guided by a '**buy European**' policy for critical infrastructure.

Electoral resilience

Parliament proposed that the European Democracy Shield initiative should support the coordination of efforts, both online and offline, to **maintain the integrity of European elections**, including efforts addressing hybrid threats, cyberthreats, the financing of interference and information manipulation. Members proposed classifying electoral infrastructure as **critical infrastructure**. They called for a 'know your donor' principle for cryptocurrency-based political donations, for measures against malicious deepfakes and fraudulent ads, and for increased protection for female candidates.

Media and information integrity

Parliament takes the view that measures to promote and support **free, credible and editorially independent media** are a central part of achieving the objectives set by the European Democracy Shield. Safeguarding the media sector from political, economic or structural capture is a precondition for ensuring democratic resilience. Members stressed the need to carefully assess the potential impact of EU initiatives on journalism and editorial media, with particular with regard to **safeguarding media pluralism**. They recognised the essential role of public service media in ensuring that all citizens, including those in remote and minority communities and candidate countries, have access to reliable, impartial and diverse news across multiple platforms.

Lastly, Parliament stressed the crucial role played by **an active, vibrant, and independent civil society** as one of the core pillars of defending democracy. It welcomed the Commission's EU Strategy for Civil Society and called on it to strengthen its work on civil dialogue and to establish new tools for this purpose.