



Special Committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation, and the strengthening of integrity, transparency and accountability in the European Parliament

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DRAFT REPORT

on recommendations for reform of European Parliament's rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption
(2023/2034(INI))

Special Committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation, and the strengthening of integrity, transparency and accountability in the European Parliament

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on recommendations for reform of European Parliament's rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption (2023/2034(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 9 March 2022 on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 December 2022 on suspicions of corruption from Qatar and the broader need for transparency and accountability in the European institutions²,
 - having regard to the measures for strengthening integrity, independence and accountability adopted by its Conference of Presidents on 8 February 2023,
 - having regard to its decision of 14 February 2023 amending the decision of 10 March 2022 on setting up a special committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (INGE 2), and adjusting its title and responsibilities³,
 - having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2023 on following up on measures requested by Parliament to strengthen the integrity of the European institutions⁴,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the (mid-term) report of the Special Committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation, and the strengthening of integrity, transparency and accountability in the European Parliament (ING2) ([A9-0000/2023]),
- A. whereas ongoing investigations led by the Belgian authorities have uncovered suspicions of corruption, money laundering and participation in a criminal organisation involving, to date, three sitting Members of the European Parliament and one former Member, all from a single political group in Parliament, as well as one accredited parliamentary assistant (APA); whereas these suspicions relate to influence from Qatar and there are allegations that Morocco may also be involved, as well as other states;
- B. whereas Parliament reacted swiftly to the suspicions of corruption affecting several MEPs and its staff;
- C. whereas the suspicions of corruption linked to Qatar go beyond Parliament and also affect the European Trade Union Confederation, as well as national politicians and

¹ OJ C 347, 9.9.2022, p. 61.

² Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0448.

³ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2023)0030.

⁴ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2023)0054.

influential voices in some Member States, such as researchers; whereas Qatar has regularly been identified as a state that finances the spread of radical ideology and extremist Islamic organisations;

- D. whereas certain Islamist organisations supported by Qatar and Turkey have requested European funds; whereas these organisations lobby extensively within Parliament;
- E. whereas the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been suspected of seeking to influence European decision-makers; whereas money originating in the UAE has been lent to a European political party on at least one occasion;
- F. whereas some foreign states have looked for unconventional ways to interfere in the EU's affairs by using the newest methods made possible by contemporary technological developments, as well as resorting to economic and energy coercion and illegal financing;
- G. whereas interference with EU and national institutions has existed for many years but the number of instances of such interference has increased following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine;
- H. whereas, in its resolution of 9 March 2022, Parliament identified Russia and China as the primary sources of foreign interference in Europe; whereas Russia seeks out contact with political parties, figures and movements in order to use them as players within the EU institutions with a view to legitimising its positions and proxy governments, lobbying for sanctions relief and mitigating the consequences of its international isolation; whereas Russian-backed groups launched a cyberattack on Parliament following the adoption of a resolution recognising Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism⁵;
- I. whereas several political parties represented in Parliament have sought financial support from entities outside Europe, including from Russia;
- J. whereas there are still cases of staff members at Parliament with Russian citizenship and known links to the Russian authorities; whereas such a situation creates a blatant risk of malign foreign interference;
- K. whereas some organisations focusing on social issues and lobbying within Parliament receive funding from outside the EU and intend to influence the European way of life;
- L. whereas the EU Transparency Register was significantly strengthened following the Interinstitutional Agreement of 20 May 2021⁶, which set high standards of transparent and ethical interest representation in the EU; whereas the register serves to increase the transparency of foreign influence but cannot deter foreign interference; whereas not all paid outside activities lead to conflicts of interest;
- M. whereas the use of targeted surveillance technology by repressive governments worldwide to track political opponents or monitor regime critics is on the rise; whereas

⁵ European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2022 on recognising the Russian Federation as a state sponsor of terrorism. Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0405.

⁶ Interinstitutional Agreement of 20 May 2021 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on a mandatory transparency register. OJ L 207, 11.6.2021, p. 1.

typically vulnerable groups, such as human rights defenders, civil society activists and political opponents, are among the main targets, including within the EU; whereas the EU toolkit needs to be strengthened and better tailored to the challenges that global spyware and surveillance tools pose to EU institutions;

- N. whereas more clarity is needed regarding foreign interference, be it through foreign officials or through interest representatives at EU level, including interference perpetrated in cooperation with some NGOs;
- O. whereas strengthening the transparency requirements for foreign-funded NGOs could serve the purpose of tracing foreign interference; whereas the requirements should not stigmatise legitimate foreign funding;
- P. whereas NGOs must be subject to scrutiny, due diligence and transparency rules;
- Q. whereas urgency resolutions must be adopted in line with Parliament's guidelines and scope and should never be misused by anyone, namely for any agenda other than the urgent need to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of those facing an imminent threat in non-EU countries;

Introduction

1. Notes that rules cannot fully replace the individual responsibility of MEPs, former MEPs, political group staff, APAs, and officials of Parliament and other European institutions; insists that potential loopholes in the institutions' rules and procedures that facilitate unlawful behaviour need to be systematically detected and thoroughly closed; highlights that some existing mechanisms need to be reviewed with the aim of preventing, deterring and detecting foreign interference;
2. Welcomes and fully supports the 14 points endorsed by Parliament's Conference of Presidents following a proposal by President Metsola to reform Parliament's rules and procedures; notes that these proposals are at the centre of Parliament's internal reform process; underlines that any measure taken should be compatible with the freedom of mandate set out in Article 2 of the Decision of the European Parliament of 28 September 2005 adopting the Statute for Members of the European Parliament⁷;
3. Recalls its consternation and serious concern about the alleged acts of corruption, money laundering and participation in a criminal organisation by MEPs, former MEPs and an APA in exchange for influence over Parliament's decisions; wholly supports Parliament's full cooperation with the ongoing criminal investigations; notes that the suspected cases of corruption took place despite internal monitoring and the alert mechanisms of the EU institutions; underlines that the criminal behaviour and intentions demonstrated by the three MEPs under investigation are not representative of Parliament as a whole, since a very large majority of MEPs comply with the existing rules and are fully committed to serving on behalf of EU citizens; recalls that the current efforts to further strengthen the existing rules are testament to the seriousness of MEPs' commitment to protecting and defending European democracy;

⁷ OJ L 262, 7.10.2005, p. 1.

4. Recalls that the EU institutions overall, as well as the Member States' institutions, are targets of foreign political interference, spying attempts and attempts at corruption, as highlighted by the work of the INGE and ING2 committees; recalls that the current geopolitical context adds to, rather than replaces, pre-existing threats to European democracy; urges Parliament's administration and MEPs to be particularly vigilant and to combat any attempts to interfere in the run-up to the 2024 European elections;

Reinforcing the security culture within Parliament in order to combat foreign interference more effectively

5. Highlights the need to reinforce the security culture within Parliament; recalls that Parliament is a regular target of interference attempts, as a result of the impact that its positions have on the wider world; calls, therefore, for proper and regular security and interference training for all MEPs and staff; notes that this should include digital security training;
6. Recommends an appropriate security clearance process for Parliament officials, APAs and political groups' staff; notes that such security clearances are particularly necessary when dealing with foreign affairs, security and defence or trade issues; calls, therefore, for appropriate cooperation with national security services to ensure that such security clearances are processed swiftly;
7. Calls for Parliament's services to screen trainees, APAs, political group staff and Parliament staff for possible vulnerability to non-European influence before they take up their duties, as well as after their employment; is of the opinion that staff working in certain sensitive fields should be considered politically exposed persons pursuant to the definition in the Anti-Money Laundering Directive⁸;
8. Recalls that, to ensure the proper and safe functioning of Parliament, private contractors are hired to perform maintenance on its buildings, IT systems and cameras; calls on Parliament's administration to exclude any non-EU private companies from such contracts; calls, in this regard, for particular attention to be paid to companies owned by non-EU companies or states, such as Russia and China;
9. Considers that access to Parliament buildings by visitors, including representatives of NGOs, lobbyists and non-EU countries, should be controlled more strictly; requests its Secretary-General to swiftly submit new proposals in this regard; calls for sanctions against any representatives and lobbyists from non-EU countries and NGOs that abuse their privileged access;
10. Recalls that any visitors must be accompanied while on Parliament's premises; calls for the strict enforcement of appropriate restrictive measures in the event of non-compliance, such as preventing the relevant staff member or MEP's office from granting access to visitors for a limited period of time; welcomes the proposal to create an entry log for all persons aged 18 years old and above who visit Parliament, indicating information such as the date, time and purpose of the visit, their contact details and the

⁸ Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2015 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, amending Regulation (EU) No 648/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Directive 2005/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Directive 2006/70/EC. OJ L 141, 5.6.2015, p. 73.

person responsible for them during the visit;

11. Welcomes the reform of the access rules for former MEPs and former staff, in particular the announcement of a new daily access badge to replace the current badges; insists that former MEPs and former staff should no longer have the right to grant entry to anyone else;
12. Notes that the EU institutions should treat potential cases of ‘revolving doors’ more stringently in order to prevent conflicts of interest and avoid reputational damage;
13. Reiterates its call for the swift establishment of an independent EU ethics body; considers that the body’s mandate should include scrutiny, on a case-by-case basis, of MEPs’ intentions to work for any non-EU government or entity controlled by a non-EU government after the end of their term; calls on MEPs to uphold Parliament’s values and standards and not to accept employment by authoritarian, non-democratic governments or related state-owned entities after the end of their term; restates its intention to establish a six-month cooling-off period for MEPs and stresses that this period should start immediately following the end of their term and that MEPs should be prohibited from lobbying Parliament during this period;
14. Recommends that European agencies proactively monitor the professional activities of their senior staff members in order to strengthen their internal procedures and controls concerning potential revolving-door situations, in line with the European Court of Auditors’ 2021 recommendations⁹;
15. States that continued investment is required in order to ensure a robust security structure within Parliament; calls, in this regard, for a full and in-depth audit of Parliament’s security measures by an independent body;
16. Urges more action to ensure that Parliament’s name is not misused by external actors to create a false image of legitimacy;

Relations with non-EU countries and entities: official missions (including election observation missions), trips and friendship groups

17. Calls for the Commission and the Council to work with Parliament, as a co-legislator, to enhance the toolbox of the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations (APPF) and enable the effective tracing of donations to the ultimate payer, thus preventing the rules on donations from being circumvented through the use of intermediaries; calls, in particular, for the APPF to be mandated to obtain information directly from donors and their banking institutions, and for the establishment of a system of push notifications, to be sent from the Financial Intelligence Units in the Member States to the APPF when suspicious transactions are identified;
18. Notes that the APPF should be strengthened in terms of staff and resources with the aim of enhancing its scrutiny capacity and promoting cooperation with the Member States for flagging potential cases of illicit funding;

⁹ As set out in the report of 27 October 2022 entitled ‘Annual report on EU agencies for the financial year 2021’.

19. Highlights the importance of promoting full transparency concerning the revenues and expenditures for European Parliament election campaigns by national parties;
20. Stresses that missions to non-EU countries can be used as an opportunity to exert influence on MEPs; recalls that mandatory, dedicated security briefings focused on foreign interference risks, tailored to the destination country, should be given to MEPs before any missions; underlines the need to better protect MEPs and Parliament staff against cyberattacks and hacking when they travel on missions to non-EU countries;
21. Proposes strengthening the rules regarding official missions carried out on behalf of Parliament, in particular:
 - (a) only the chair of the official mission should be allowed to speak publicly on behalf of Parliament;
 - (b) during the mission, and particularly during meetings with foreign representatives, other MEPs should not be allowed to espouse different positions to those adopted by Parliament during the most recent votes; MEPs not adhering to this rule should be barred from participating in upcoming missions;
22. Recalls the importance of election observation missions in providing relevant information and issuing specific recommendations to make the electoral system more resilient and help counter foreign interference in electoral processes; believes that Parliament should continue the practice of barring unauthorised, unofficial election observation by individual MEPs; stresses that MEPs should only participate in missions decided and authorised by the Conference of Presidents; recalls the establishment of the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group procedure for ‘cases of individual unofficial election observation by Members of the European Parliament’ (adopted on 13 December 2018), which allows for the exclusion of MEPs from Parliament’s official election observation delegations for the duration of the parliamentary term; urges Parliament’s administration to adopt stricter sanctions, including substantial fines and other restrictive measures, against MEPs who participate in unofficial electoral missions, as well as those who, while participating in Parliament’s authorised observation missions, do not strictly respect the applicable rules;
23. Insists that individual trips undertaken by MEPs are an integral part of their freedom of mandate; reiterates its call for mandatory transparency rules for trips by officials of the EU institutions that are paid for foreign countries and entities, with the details to be provided including, but not being limited to, the name of the paying agent, a list of expenditure and the justification; recalls that such organised trips must not be considered official Parliament delegations and calls for the MEPs involved in such trips to avoid any confusion in that respect, and for strict sanctions for the failure to do so; believes that similar rules should be established for trips made by APAs or political group staff;
24. Considers that Parliament must give absolute priority to the work of its official delegations in relation to non-EU countries; considers that MEPs acting counter to this principle should face consequences, including substantial fines and other restrictive measures;
25. Condemns the use of some informal friendship groups as entry points for foreign

interference; highlights, furthermore, that some friendship groups have had a detrimental effect on official Parliament bodies and the reputation and consistency of Parliament's actions; calls, therefore, for a ban on friendship groups with non-EU countries, while recognising that friendship groups should continue to exist, on a case-by-case basis, for activities relating to certain non-sovereign subregions or local persecuted minorities for which an official Parliament delegation does not exist; underlines that any such exceptions should be contingent on official declarations being filed in an ad hoc transparency register, to feature the name of all the MEPs and stakeholders involved, as well as all the meetings held;

26. Urges MEPs to be vigilant about certain associations that, under the pretence of dealing with social issues, are vectors of influence and undeclared interference by foreign countries;

Integrity of parliamentary work

27. Recalls the importance of urgency resolutions as part of Parliament's action to protect human rights around the globe; denounces any attempts at interfering with them; acknowledges that they must retain their urgency, but proposes that a more suitable amount of time be allowed for their drafting in order to ensure due protection against external influence; reiterates that their scope should be strictly observed;
28. Recommends that reports voted on by Parliament on international issues be accompanied by an annex containing a list of persons or institutions met by the rapporteur, with the exception of individuals whose security would be put at risk if they were mentioned; recommends, therefore, making it mandatory for MEPs who draft reports or opinions to attach a list to demonstrate the range of outside expertise and opinions that the rapporteur has received;
29. Recalls that committee chairs, rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs are obligated to publicly disclose all scheduled meetings with third parties related to a report or resolution; points out, however, that the system for declaring such meetings should be updated, in particular as it still does not take into account subcommittees; calls for Parliament delegations also to be included; believes that similar rules should be established for meetings attended by Parliament officials, APAs and political group staff;
30. Calls for MEPs and their offices to be required to declare meetings with representatives of non-EU countries and other interest representatives;
31. Insists on the obligation to declare participation in any conference or event organised or funded by a foreign state, NGO, think tank or private company;
32. Is concerned by the fact that some MEPs are members of political parties that have received financial support from non-EU entities, including from Russia, and that their political positions have clearly been influenced by this support;
33. Reiterates that MEPs, their staff and political group staff should systematically refuse to use prewritten amendments proposals from embassies, lobbyists or NGOs;
34. Strongly insists on the need for transparency on the funding received by NGOs and

think tanks that wish to be involved with Parliament, in particular when they request support or sponsorship from MEPs to organise meetings on Parliament's premises, when they are invited to a hearing, or when they participate in a study or research on behalf of Parliament; welcomes, in this regard, the proposal for stronger checks on interest representatives, such as the prerequisite of being listed in the Transparency Register in order to be able to appear at committee meetings; encourages the adoption of specific provisions for interest representatives whose activities do not fall within the scope of the Transparency Register;

35. Calls for the comprehensive financial screening of NGOs before they are listed in the Transparency Register; requests that a clear legal definition of 'NGO status' be drawn up, which would apply to all organisations wishing to be listed in the Transparency Register and become eligible to receive EU funding; underlines that those NGOs that receive money from third parties that are not required to be listed in the Transparency Register must disclose the sources of their funding by providing the same information as for all regular registrants;
36. Calls for enhanced controls on or audits of NGOs working closely with Parliament to be put in place in order to identify irregularities, fraud or breaches of obligations, including the violation of EU values, and for contracts to be suspended or terminated, or for their duration to be reduced, and for funds to be recovered in the event that any such infringements occur;
37. Supports the overhaul of Parliament's website, which aims at making the information thereon more easily accessible to the public and clearer;

Cooperation with other EU and national institutions

38. Welcomes the Commission's proposed package on the defence of democracy, including a directive, aimed at introducing common transparency and accountability standards for interest representation services directed or paid for from outside the EU, contributing to the proper functioning of the internal market and protecting the EU democratic sphere from covert outside interference;
39. Welcomes the Commission's recommendation on covert interference from non-EU countries within the framework of the initiative on the defence of democracy, which would complement the directive and establish harmonised transparency requirements for the provision of services from outside the EU;
40. Welcomes the Commission's planned anti-corruption package, including the proposal to update the EU rules on fighting corruption through criminal law;
41. Calls on the Commission to come forward with a legislative proposal to amend the current EU global human rights sanctions regime by extending its scope to include acts of corruption; underlines the importance of ensuring that this EU legislation also targets economic and financial sources of corruption and human rights abuses;
42. Welcomes the Commission's commitment, in February 2023, to swiftly drawing up a proposal on the establishment of an independent, interinstitutional EU ethics body; calls for the institutions to promptly agree on the terms of its establishment in order to ensure

more consistency with regard to ethical obligations between the different rules of procedure and codes of conduct of the institutions; reiterates Parliament's intention to unilaterally ensure that MEPs have swift, easy and systematic access to advice on possible conflicts of interest from the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members; underlines that this should only be a temporary solution, to be in place prior to the establishment of the independent EU ethics body;

43. Calls on the Secretariat of the Transparency Register to ban any entities with direct or indirect relations with the Government of the Russian Federation, pursuant to the Council Decision of 3 June 2022 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine¹⁰ and the conduct of Russia's illegal war against Ukraine; calls for a similar approach to be applied when it comes to entities linked with China;
 44. Calls for the conditions governing MEPs' exercise of parliamentary immunity to be harmonised between the different Member States; calls, in this respect, for a review of Protocol No 7 to the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on the privileges and immunities of the European Union;
 45. Resolves to strengthen its dialogue and cooperation with the intelligence, judicial and law enforcement authorities of the three Member States in which it is located, in order to ensure Parliament's security and protect it against attempted interference from non-EU countries; calls for appropriate cooperation with other Member State security services, as deemed necessary;
 46. Calls for the EU institutions to work towards tighter internal regulations among the Member States regarding the procurement of spyware and surveillance tools from non-EU countries; notes that the EU should use existing regulatory measures to hold malign international operators in the commercial spyware and surveillance technologies industries legally accountable;
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47. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

¹⁰ Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/884 of 3 June 2022 amending Decision 2014/512/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine. OJ L 153, 3.6.2022, p. 128.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

On 14 February 2023, the European Parliament decided to give a new responsibility to the ING2 committee and to rename it. It is henceforth called ‘Special Committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation, and the strengthening of integrity, transparency and accountability in the European Parliament’.

With the amended mandate, the European Parliament tasks the Special Committee with identifying the shortcomings in the European Parliament’s rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption, considering other medium- to longer-term measures and issuing recommendations for reforms, by building on the European Parliament’s resolutions and the best practice of other parliaments and institutions and working in close cooperation with the Committee on Constitutional Affairs and the Committee on Foreign Affairs. It further instructs the Special Committee to present its final report for adoption in plenary by the July 2023 plenary part-session at the latest.

This report follows up on the amended mandate.