Defending democratic institutions and EP’s integrity against malign interference

- Call for more transparency, integrity and accountability
- Reforms should leave room for democratic dialogue with civil society
- Concern over Qatar, Morocco, China, Russia and UAE lobbying activities in Brussels

Parliament calls for effective monitoring and surveillance systems to detect foreign interference in its activity, in a report adopted on Thursday.

Attempts to interfere with democracy are a “widespread phenomenon that must be countered as vigorously as possible”, warn MEPs in their recommendations on the reform of European Parliament’s rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption. Reiterating their “deep shock and condemnation of the allegations of corruption, money laundering and participation in a criminal organisation” by three MEPs, one former MEP and one parliamentary assistant, they call for measures that would strengthen EU institutions when targeted by foreign interference attempts. They point to the “numerous loopholes in Parliament’s integrity and transparency rules” and call for President Metsola’s 14-point proposal to reform Parliament’s rules to be put into concrete action as soon as possible.

Protect whistleblowers more robustly and clarify rules on conflicts of interest

In a report adopted on Thursday with 441 votes in favour, 70 against and 71 abstentions, MEPs demand a rapid revision of the Members’ code of conduct, including effective sanctions. The Code should protect whistleblowers more effectively and strengthen rules on conflicts of interest, asset declarations and disclosure of side income, as well as banning paid side work for entities covered by the Transparency Register.

Although the dialogue between interest group representatives and decision-makers remains a
“vital part of European democracy”, inappropriate means of influencing, bribery and other criminal offences are unacceptable, they stress.

**Foreign interference should have consequences**

MEPs note that countries such as “Qatar, Morocco, but also China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Serbia and Turkey have invested heavily in lobbying efforts in Brussels”. Foreign interference “must not remain without consequences”, they underline, calling for all legislative and non-legislative proposals on cooperation with state authorities attempting to interfere, including EU funding, to be suspended. Funds for civil society organisations and independent media as well as humanitarian assistance should be preserved.

The Transparency Register’s scope and monitoring should be expanded and all MEPs should declare scheduled meetings with interest representatives, including those with diplomatic representatives from non-EU countries.

**Control over former MEPs’ activities**

The new EU ethics body should monitor that former MEPs comply with the six-month cooling-off period and their access to the Parliament should be revoked if they lobby Parliament on behalf of high-risk countries. MEPs also regret that the Commission has taken so long to present its proposal and lacks ambition for the establishment of an independent EU ethics body.

**Quotes**

Following the vote, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola said: "The reform proposals adopted today will offer long-term solutions to help reinforce our capacity to prevent external actors from interfering with our work. They will form our line of defence against autocratic third countries trying to subdue European decision-making and they will help us to protect our open and free societies. They will complement all the immediate measures already put in place to increase integrity."

The co-rapporteur Vladimir Bilčík (EPP, Slovakia) said: “Parliament must remain an open institution, while defending itself against corruption and malign foreign interference. To achieve this, we propose that staff dealing with sensitive issues should get security clearance, we need more public openness about meetings with third parties and political relations with third countries should be conducted only via established parliamentary channels.”

The co-rapporteur Nathalie Loiseau (Renew, France) said: “Today’s vote sends a strong message. Our recommendations shows Parliament’s determination to improve its transparency, fight corruption and better combat malign foreign interference. It also recalls its previous positions in favour of a strong European Ethics Body that would improve both transparency and accountability towards our citizens.”

**Background**
The EP’s Special Committee on foreign interference, transparency and accountability was tasked with writing this report, following the plenary resolution of 15 December 2022. It complements the set of measures taken by and being prepared in other EP bodies.

Further information
Special Committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (INGE 2)

Adopted text will be available here, 13.07.2023

Press Conference by Committee Chair Glucksmann, and co-rapporteurs Bilčik and Loiseau, 13.07.2023

Video recording of the debate, 12.07.2023

Procedure file

EP in-depth analysis - “Legal loopholes and the risk of foreign interference” (05.02.2023)

Free photos, video and audio material

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