



TEXTS ADOPTED

P10_TA(2024)0065

Setting up a special committee on the European Democracy Shield, and defining its responsibilities, numerical strength and term of office

European Parliament decision of 18 December 2024 on setting up a special committee on the European Democracy Shield, and defining its responsibilities, numerical strength and term of office (2024/2999(RSO))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the proposal from the Conference of Presidents,
- having regard to the Commission communication on the European democracy action plan (COM(2020)0790),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act)¹ and Regulation (EU) 2022/1925 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2022 on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector and amending Directives (EU) 2019/1937 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Digital Markets Act)²,
- having regard to its resolution of 20 October 2021 on Europe's Media in the Digital Decade: an Action Plan to Support Recovery and Transformation³,
- having regard to the 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation,

¹ OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1, ELI:
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj>.

² OJ L 265, 12.10.2022, p. 1, ELI:
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/1925/oj>.

³ OJ C 184, 5.5.2022, p. 71.

- having regard to Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law⁴,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2022/2557 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on the resilience of critical entities and repealing Council Directive 2008/114/EC⁵,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market and amending Directive 2010/13/EU (European Media Freedom Act)⁶,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings ('Strategic lawsuits against public participation')⁷,
- having regard to the March 2021 EU toolbox of risk mitigating measures on the cybersecurity of 5G networks,
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission on Defence of Democracy (COM(2023)0630),
- having regard to the Commission proposal of 12 December 2023 for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing harmonised requirements in the internal market on transparency of interest representation carried out on behalf of third countries and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 (COM(2023)0637),
- having regard to the Commission recommendations on inclusive and resilient electoral processes in the Union and enhancing the European nature and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament (C(2023)8626) and on promoting the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making processes (C(2023)8627),

⁴ OJ L 305, 26.11.2019, p. 17, ELI:
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/1937/oj>.

⁵ OJ L 333, 27.12.2022, p. 164, ELI:
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2557/oj>.

⁶ OJ L, 2024/1083, 17.4.2024, ELI:
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1083/oj>.

⁷ OJ L, 2024/1069, 16.4.2024, ELI:
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1069/oj>.

- having regard to its resolution of 9 March 2022 on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation⁸ (INGE 1),
 - having regard to its resolution of 1 June 2023 on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation⁹ (INGE2),
 - having regard to its recommendation of 15 June 2023 to the Council and the Commission following the investigation of alleged contraventions and maladministration in the application of Union law in relation to the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware¹⁰,
 - having regard to the report of 30 October 2024 entitled ‘Safer Together – Strengthening Europe’s Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness’, authored by Sauli Niinistö, former President of the Republic of Finland, in his capacity as Special Adviser to the President of the European Commission,
 - having regard to Rule 213 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas foreign interference constitutes a serious violation of the universal values and principles on which the Union is founded, such as human dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law; whereas evidence shows that malicious and authoritarian foreign state actors and malicious non-state actors are using information manipulation and other tactics to interfere in democratic processes in the Union; whereas such attacks mislead and deceive citizens and affect their voting behaviour, amplify divisive debates, divide, polarise, and exploit the vulnerabilities of societies, promote hate speech, worsen the situation of vulnerable groups which are more likely to become victims of disinformation, distort the integrity of democratic elections and referendums, cast suspicion on national governments, public authorities, the democratic order and the rule of law and have the goal of destabilising European democracy; whereas this has become a question of internal security and safety of Union society as a whole;
- B. whereas a campaign of disinformation of an unparalleled malice and magnitude with the purpose of deceiving both domestic citizens and the international community of States as a whole has continuously been carried out by Russia for many years, with particular intensity since the eve of and during its war of aggression against Ukraine

⁸ OJ C 347, 9.9.2022, p. 61.

⁹ OJ C, C/2023/1226, 21.12.2023, ELI:
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/1226/oj>.

¹⁰ OJ C, C/2024/494, 23.1.2024, ELI:
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/494/oj>.

which started on 24 February 2022; whereas there is a need for continuous support and close cooperation with Ukraine and Moldova in that regard, but also the pro-European forces in Georgia and the countries of the Western Balkans, which all face strong Russian interference into their process of convergence with the Union, leveraging the possibilities of mutual exchange of information and best practices;

- C. whereas attempts by state actors from third countries and malicious non-state actors to interfere in the functioning of democracy in the Union and its Member States, and put pressure on the values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union by means of malicious interference, are part of a wider disruptive trend experienced by democracies worldwide;
- D. whereas malicious actors continue to seek to interfere in electoral processes and take advantage of the openness and pluralism of our societies, and to attack democratic processes and the resilience of the Union and its Member States;
- E. whereas malign autocratic actors are increasingly conducting disinformation campaigns against the work of the Union delegations; whereas this is a clear attempt to hinder the Union's strategic communication abroad;
- F. whereas, before 8 October 2024, the EU and its Member States did not have a specific regime of sanctions relating to foreign interference and disinformation campaigns orchestrated by malicious state actors from third countries, meaning that such actors were in a position to safely assume that their destabilisation campaigns against the Union will face no consequences;
- G. whereas there is a lack of a common definition and understanding of this phenomenon and many gaps and loopholes remain in current legislation and policies at Union and national level intended to detect, prevent and counter foreign interference;
- H. whereas foreign interference, disinformation, and numerous attacks on and threats against democracy are expected to continue in ever-greater numbers and more sophisticated ways;
- I. whereas Parliament's previous recommendations to counter malign foreign interference operations in the democratic processes of the Union have contributed to an overall Union understanding and to a greater awareness of the issue;
- J. whereas the hearings and work of the INGE 1 and INGE 2 special committees have contributed to public recognition and the contextualisation of these issues, and have successfully framed the Union debate on foreign interference in democratic processes and disinformation;

- K. whereas there is a need for global, multilateral cooperation and support among like-minded partners, including between parliamentarians, in dealing with foreign malicious interference and disinformation; whereas democracies have developed advanced skills and counter-strategies in dealing with those threats and attacks;
 - L. whereas addressing foreign interference, disinformation and threats against democracy requires a multifaceted approach in order to foster critical thinking and media and information literacy, and promoting civic engagement and democracy education;
 - M. whereas hybrid threats and attacks may lead to full-scale and cross-sectoral crises with detrimental effects on safety and security, the well-being of citizens and the functioning of society and economy as a whole, constituting a key challenge to the Union's internal affairs; whereas that new reality requires a more robust approach to Union crisis management and civilian and defence preparedness, building strategic foresight and anticipation and strengthening early warning, detection, analysis and operational coordination capabilities;
1. Decides to set up a special committee named 'special committee on the European Democracy Shield' and that it shall carry out, in cooperation and consultation with the competent standing committees where their powers and responsibilities under Annex VI of the Rules of Procedure are concerned, the following responsibilities:
- (a) to assess relevant existing and planned legislation and policies to further detect possible loopholes, gaps and overlaps that could be exploited for malicious interference in democratic processes, including as regards the following matters:
 - (i) policies, legislative proposals and structures to be established under the European Democracy Shield, and already established under the European Democracy Action Plan, as well as relevant instruments under the Strategic Compass such as the EU Hybrid Toolbox;
 - (ii) opportunities of cooperation among Union agencies and national authorities in the area of justice and home affairs, including for the purposes of information sharing, intelligence and advance detection mechanisms;
 - (iii) policies and recommendations outlined in the report of 30 October 2024 entitled 'Safer Together – Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness';
 - (iv) policies contributing to Union democratic processes, democratic resilience through situational awareness, media and information literacy, media pluralism and independent

journalism, the promotion of civic engagement, education, critical thinking and citizens' awareness and participation;

- (v) democratic resilience against home-grown hybrid threats and attacks and malign interference;
- (vi) interference using online platforms, in particular by evaluating, in-depth, the responsibility and effects that very large online platforms have on democracy and democratic processes in the Union;
- (vii) impact of interference on critical infrastructure and strategic sectors, including foreign investment and ownership of property located in the Union;
- (viii) hybrid threats and attacks, including but not limited to: cyberattacks including on military and non-military targets, human-made text and audiovisual content, as well as AI-generated content and 'deepfakes' used for the purpose of foreign interference and disinformation, interference in political institutions, economic influence or coercion, interference through global actors via elite capture, national diasporas, universities and cultural events, covert funding of political activities by malicious foreign actors and donors, foreign information manipulation and interference actions targeting Union action abroad and the exploitation of artificially created migration flows through an increased role of state actors;
- (ix) policies ensuring a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union and resilience against cyberattacks, where related to democratic processes;
- (x) the role of malicious state and non-state actors, their modus operandi and financing, as well as physical sabotage perpetrated by them;
- (xi) the impact of interference on the rights of minorities and other discriminated groups;
- (xii) deterrence, attribution and collective countermeasures, including sanctions;
- (xiii) neighbourhood and global cooperation, and multilateralism;
- (xiv) interference by Union-based actors both within the Union and in third countries;
- (xv) policies and measures to preserve the fairness and integrity of elections, and to strengthen democratic checks and balances;

- (b) to develop, in close cooperation with the competent standing committees, suggestions and proposals on how to further remedy these gaps in order to foster the Union's resilience towards hybrid threats and attacks, including foreign information manipulation and interference, and on how to improve the Union's legal and institutional framework;
 - (c) to assess the activities of the Commission and the European External Action Service regarding the fight against foreign information manipulation and interference and hybrid threats and attacks;
 - (d) to counter information campaigns and strategic communication of malign third countries, including those through domestic Union actors and organisations, that harm the goals of the Union and that are created to influence Union public opinion;
 - (e) to follow up, where relevant, on the implementation of the reports of the INGE 1 and INGE 2 special committees;
 - (f) to contribute to overall institutional resilience against foreign interference, hybrid threats, attacks and disinformation;
 - (g) to maintain relations with other Union institutions and bodies, Member States authorities, other international organisations and interparliamentary assemblies, civil society as well as state and non-state partners in relevant third countries for matters falling under its responsibility, in order to reinforce Union action against hybrid threats and attacks and internal and foreign information manipulation and interference; to engage particularly with state and non-state partners in Ukraine and Moldova and the pro-European partners in Georgia as well as the countries from the Western Balkans; to counter manipulated narratives coming from Russia, given the critical and continuous danger Russia poses to the stability and security in the whole of the Union;
2. Decides that, whenever the special committee work includes the hearing of evidence of a confidential nature, testimonies involving personal data, or exchanges of views or hearings with authorities and bodies on confidential information, including scientific studies or parts thereof granted confidentiality status under Article 63 of Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council¹¹, the meetings shall be held in camera; decides further

¹¹ Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market and repealing Council Directives 79/117/EEC and 91/414/EEC (OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2009/1107/oj>).

that witnesses and experts shall have the right to make a statement or provide testimony in camera;

3. Decides that the list of people invited to public meetings, the list of those who attend them and the minutes of such meetings, shall be made public;
4. Decides that confidential documents that have been received by the special committee shall be assessed in accordance with the procedure set out in Rule 227 of its Rules of Procedure, decides further that such information shall be used exclusively for the purposes of drawing up the final report of the special committee;
5. Decides that the special committee shall have 33 members;
6. Decides that the term of office of the special committee shall be 12 months and that that term of office shall start running from the date of its constituent meeting;
7. Decides that the special committee may present to Parliament a mid-term report; decides further that it shall present to Parliament at the latest during the part-session of January 2026 a final report focusing on the matters set out in paragraph 1 and containing factual findings and recommendations concerning the measures and initiatives to be taken, without prejudice to the competences of the standing committees in accordance with Annex VI to its Rules of Procedure; stresses that the recommendations of the special committee shall be taken into consideration by the competent standing committees in their work.