

Resolution 2593 (2025)¹

Foreign interference: a threat to democratic security in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Intentional, covert and manipulative interference by foreign powers, their proxies or private actors jeopardises security, democratic values and governance across Europe. This foreign interference aims to undermine sovereignty, destabilise political systems, weaken public trust and distort democratic processes. These orchestrated efforts continue to increase in volume and velocity, targeting the foundations of European societies and attempting to exploit democratic principles as systemic vulnerabilities.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly recognises foreign interference, in its many forms, as a substantial and persistent threat to democratic security. It condemns deliberate and systematic efforts by foreign actors to undermine electoral and democratic processes and institutions.
3. The Assembly notes the escalation in hostile interference originating from the Russian Federation since the beginning of its full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine. This has been underlined by the extensive efforts to spread disinformation, covertly fund political campaigns and buy votes in the Republic of Moldova's presidential election and constitutional referendum of 20 October 2024. Furthermore, the disruption of Romania's presidential election of 24 November 2024, due to the manipulation of digital technology and artificial intelligence conducted from abroad, highlights the urgent need to fortify democratic processes against hostile threats and co-ordinated inauthentic behaviour online.
4. This activity forms part of a wider pattern that has included attempts by the Russian Federation to interfere in electoral processes and referendums across the continent over the past decade, with evidence of covert interference during the 2016 Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, the 2016 US presidential election, the 2017 *coup d'état* by Catalan regional government leaders against the Spanish constitutional order, the 2017 French presidential election, the 2024 Romanian and Moldovan presidential elections, and in German politics.
5. Social media serves as a key instrument for authoritarian regimes to disseminate false and misleading information as part of State policy. Among those engaged in such activities are so-called journalists, bloggers and influencers, who spread covert propaganda while being financed by the Russian authorities. Presented as independent journalists and having a large audience, they systematically promote Russian propaganda to divide European society and destabilise European countries from the inside to justify the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine and to manipulate public opinion in favour of the Russian Federation.
6. In addition to interfering in electoral processes and referendums, the Russian Federation actively intervenes in the political and social life of Europe through the use of hybrid methods, including the systematic dissemination of disinformation and propaganda. This is carried out via Russian State-funded media such as RT (formerly *Russia Today*) and Sputnik, as well as media outlets affiliated with or financed by the Russian Federation, alongside co-ordinated efforts on social media platforms.
7. Another form of foreign interference involves Russian oligarchs and influential figures who reside in Europe and use their assets to exert political and financial pressure on member States.

1. *Assembly debate* on 8 April 2025 (12th and 13th sittings) (see [Doc. 16131](#), report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Ms Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 8 April 2025 (13th sitting).

See also [Recommendation 2292 \(2025\)](#).



8. The Assembly recognises that the Russian Federation is using all the tools available to it to influence the foreign and domestic policies of European countries, including through the development of new technologies and new methods of deception, and it can use representatives of so-called anti-war movements in information and other special operations.

9. Democracies must defend themselves against the threat posed by foreign interference as part of an adaptation to this increasingly hostile international environment where the principles of sovereignty, self-determination and democracy are under attack. The resilience of democratic institutions is crucial in countering these dangers and ensuring that the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law prevail.

10. At the same time, addressing foreign interference requires a delicate balance. Measures to counter undue influence or to enhance transparency must align with human rights standards, particularly those safeguarding freedom of expression, association, assembly and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Overly restrictive laws designed without adequate attention to this balance risk stifling legitimate democratic activity and freedom of expression, chilling civil society engagement or being misused for political purposes.

11. The Assembly underscores that building resilient societies with strong democratic institutions, an active and informed civil society and transparent governance is the most effective way to counter foreign interference and ensure democratic security.

12. Measures to enhance transparency in public life in order to combat foreign interference must be implemented in a manner that respects and upholds the freedoms and autonomy of civil society organisations. While safeguarding national interests is crucial, transparency measures should not be used as a pretext for imposing undue restrictions on civil society actors, who play a fundamental role in fostering democratic values, public accountability and social cohesion.

13. The Assembly notes that the Council of Europe has a wide range of international standards and guidelines aimed at strengthening democratic resilience that are relevant for combating foreign interference. These include measures to ensure transparency and accountability in public life, international standards and guidelines for political party funding and elections and strategies to combat disinformation. These tools are further strengthened by the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law (CETS No. 225, the Vilnius Convention), which aims to fill legal gaps that may result from rapid technological advances.

14. The Assembly recalls that, at their 4th Summit in Reykjavik in 2023, the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe reiterated their commitment to countering disinformation that poses a threat to democracy and peace, in a manner compatible with international law and the right to freedom of expression and freedom of opinion, as well as their commitment to take appropriate measures against interference in electoral systems and processes.

15. The Assembly stresses the need for comprehensive and holistic strategies to combat the use of multiform foreign interference tactics. A whole-of-society approach that includes parliaments, governments, government agencies, local authorities, private enterprises, journalists, civil society and citizens is encouraged so as to foster societal resilience and counter foreign interference operations.

16. In light of the threat to democratic security posed by foreign interference, the Assembly calls on the member States of the Council of Europe to:

16.1. integrate foreign interference into national security frameworks that recognise the interconnected nature of hostile cyber, economic, political and information activities;

16.2. secure democratic institutions, critical infrastructure and electoral systems against cyber threats;

16.3. enhance co-ordination between security agencies, both nationally and internationally, to detect and counter foreign interference activities;

16.4. consider updating laws and regulations to include specific foreign interference offences covering covert conduct aimed at having a manipulative effect carried out on behalf of foreign actors.

17. As part of a whole-of-society approach to enhance resilience, reinforce public trust and safeguard institutional integrity, the Assembly calls on member States to:

17.1. promote digital and media literacy initiatives aimed at countering disinformation and building resilience among citizens to help them protect themselves against manipulation;

17.2. introduce media literacy into national curriculums from an early age to develop essential critical thinking skills for exercising judgment, evaluating the credibility of information sources, identifying biased or misleading content, and for critically and effectively engaging with information online;

17.3. in line with its [Resolution 2192 \(2017\)](#) “Youth against corruption”, devise appropriate empowerment strategies to raise young people’s awareness and understanding of corruption and the ways it undermines democratic societies;

17.4. encourage and support “prebunking” and fact-checking systems as well as partnerships with independent media organisations and civil society to counteract false narratives without undermining freedom of expression;

17.5. intensify actions to better protect journalists, safeguard press freedom and to fund and promote media pluralism and independence, including by working with the European Union and other international stakeholders to ensure the continued funding of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and other independent media;

17.6. in line with its [Resolution 2552 \(2024\)](#) “Strengthening democracy through participatory and deliberative processes”, foster more robust civic engagement with deliberative technologies and participatory processes.

18. In light of the risks presented by disinformation as a strategic foreign interference tool to distort realities, divide societies and weaken democracies, the Assembly:

18.1. welcomes the United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity as an international initiative to foster healthier and safer information spaces, and calls for consultations with the public and with private industry on steps that may be taken to implement them;

18.2. calls on Council of Europe member and observer States who have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Vilnius Convention and ensure its implementation with due regard to the impact of artificial intelligence technologies on the production and dissemination of disinformation and illegal propaganda;

18.3. encourages the use of artificial intelligence as a tool for democratic innovation, including for strengthening public participation, improving transparency and accountability in governance, supporting fact-checking and electoral integrity and fostering inclusive, efficient and resilient public services;

18.4. calls on member States to increase their expertise and technical capabilities for combating disinformation online and address emerging threats posed by artificial intelligence;

18.5. calls on member States to explore the development of information verification systems to safeguard online communities against deceptive election content generated by artificial intelligence;

18.6. calls on online platforms to provide clear policies on political advertising, algorithmic amplification and the removal of harmful content or disinformation, while safeguarding the freedom of expression and refraining from censorship;

18.7. considers that any measures in support of so-called anti-war movements should be applied only in exceptional cases and to persons who have genuine and substantiated evidence of persecution and pressure from the Russian authorities for their true and sincere anti-war beliefs.

19. In light of attempts by hostile actors to interfere improperly or illicitly in democratic decision-making processes, the Assembly:

19.1. reiterates its condemnation of massive covert Russian funding of political parties and politicians in democratic countries that attempts to interfere in the democratic processes of these States;

19.2. calls on member States to ensure legislative and policy frameworks that protect against interference in electoral systems and to carry out comprehensive investigations into allegations of interference in elections and referendums;

19.3. calls on member States to review and enhance national frameworks governing financial contributions to political parties, advertising and electoral campaigns to mitigate the risk of inappropriate or illicit foreign financial interference;

19.4. in line with its [Resolution 2406 \(2021\)](#) “Fighting corruption – General principles of political responsibility”, calls on national governments to enhance measures for preventing corruption and, in line with recommendations of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), adopt and update codes of conduct for all holders of public office;

19.5. encourages member States to explore measures that increase the transparency and integrity of legitimate foreign influence activities;

19.6. encourages member States to consult the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) at an early stage when developing public governance tools to strengthen the transparency and integrity of foreign influence activities.

20. In light of the need for collective action to respond to the global challenge posed by foreign interference, the Assembly:

20.1. stresses the importance of co-operation among Council of Europe member States to address foreign interference as a shared threat. In this regard, it advocates for closer collaboration with the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), competent bodies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other international organisations in developing co-ordinated responses;

20.2. encourages support for multi-partner rapid response initiatives to identify and respond to diverse and evolving threats to democracies, including through sharing information and analysis and through identifying opportunities for co-ordinated responses;

20.3. supports the use of targeted and co-ordinated sanctions against individuals, entities and State actors engaged in foreign interference, including election meddling, media manipulation, illicit funding and cyberattacks;

20.4. calls for the strengthening of legal avenues to hold foreign and domestic actors accountable for facilitating interference in democratic processes;

20.5. encourages member States to assess the feasibility of developing a broad-based, operational, non-binding definition of foreign interference so as to enhance co-ordination in countering related threats and to improve clarity on legitimate influence activities of member States;

20.6. welcomes the establishment, on its own initiative, of the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections as an important step for addressing emerging challenges that threaten electoral integrity, enhancing co-operation with national and international partners on electoral matters and promoting Council of Europe reference standards in this field.