



EUROPEAN ORGANISATION FOR STRATEGIC POLICY

STRATEGIC BRIEF · SB 05 / 2026

Democratic Resilience Under Pressure: An Operational Doctrine for Foreign Interference

Situational awareness, institutional response and public trust under conditions of persistent manipulation.

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EXECUTIVE JUDGEMENT

Europe should counter foreign information manipulation through an operational doctrine that connects early warning, evidence standards, platform accountability, political communication and societal resilience without turning legitimate disagreement into a security category.

KEY FINDINGS

- Foreign interference exploits institutional seams and social grievances rather than relying on false content alone.
- Rapid response requires shared evidence thresholds and clearly assigned public authority.
- Overbroad counter-disinformation measures can damage trust and political freedom.
- Independent media, civic education and transparent political finance are security capabilities as well as democratic goods.

Define the threat precisely

Foreign information manipulation and interference involves coordinated behaviour intended to deceive, coerce or covertly influence political processes. It should be distinguished from error, satire, partisan speech and lawful advocacy. A precise definition protects fundamental rights and focuses scarce analytical capacity on conduct, networks, financing and operational coordination.

A graduated response architecture

Institutions need pre-agreed thresholds for monitoring, public attribution, platform engagement, diplomatic action and sanctions. Evidence should be reviewed across cyber, financial, diplomatic and open-source channels. Communication must state what is known, what remains uncertain and why a response is proportionate; unsupported certainty can deepen the mistrust that hostile actors seek.

Resilience beyond the platform

The information environment cannot be secured by content moderation alone. Strong local media, transparent ownership, protection for journalists, civic education and trusted election administration reduce vulnerability. Governments should fund these capacities without controlling their editorial or political content, and they should publish how safeguards preserve open debate.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01 Adopt a common operational definition and evidence standard for foreign interference.
- 02 Create national-European protocols for rapid, qualified and reviewable attribution.
- 03 Exercise election, crisis and deepfake scenarios with public institutions and independent actors.
- 04 Protect independent media, journalists and transparent political-finance oversight.
- 05 Audit whether counter-interference measures preserve rights and improve public understanding.

DECISION AND MONITORING MATRIX

Priority	Decision horizon	Evidence of progress
Adopt a common operational definition and evidence standard for foreign interference.	0-90 days	Coordinated inauthentic behaviour
Create national-European protocols for rapid, qualified and reviewable attribution.	3-12 months	Foreign financing and covert networks
Exercise election, crisis and deepfake scenarios with public institutions and independent actors.	12-36 months	Time to qualified attribution
Protect independent media, journalists and transparent political-finance oversight.	Continuous	Public confidence in institutions
Audit whether counter-interference measures preserve rights and improve public understanding.	Annual review	Coordinated inauthentic behaviour

INDICATORS TO WATCH

- Coordinated inauthentic behaviour
- Foreign financing and covert networks
- Time to qualified attribution
- Public confidence in institutions

SOURCES AND METHOD

This publication distinguishes verified institutional evidence from CERAX interpretation and forward-looking judgement. Principal public sources are listed below; all recommendations are the institutional judgement of CERAX.

- European Commission, European Democracy Shield
- European Commission, Countering information manipulation



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