

(English version)

Question for written answer E-001958/24
to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Dolors Montserrat (PPE)
(4 October 2024)

Subject: Russian Government disinformation interference with national governments

By hiring a company investigated by the FBI and sanctioned for its pro-Russia propaganda activities, Vladimir Putin's government has taken another step in its disinformation campaign. According to internal documents accessed by a number of German, Estonian and Spanish media outlets, the company in question, Social Design Agency, intends to systematically publish thousands of pieces of false information about the governments of Germany, France, Italy and Spain, political parties like the Partido Popular and institutions such as the Spanish Royal Household.

The company's strategy, leaked by the newspaper *ABC*, also indicates that the Russian Government intends to nurture its relationship with far-right European parties in an effort to attract them to the Kremlin and use their influence to achieve its top priorities, such as winning against Ukraine. In total, the agency is estimated to have published a total of 38 899 pieces of content between January and April 2024, including 30 000 posts and 4 600 videos.

In view of the above:

1. Are the Vice-President/High Representative of the Union and the External Action Service aware of this Russian interference?
2. What steps will they take to limit the impact of Russian disinformation on plurality and institutions in the Member States?

Submitted: 4.10.2024

Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Kallas on behalf of the European Commission
(10 February 2025)

The High Representative/Vice-President is aware of the intentions of the Russian government, its *modus operandi* and have detected and exposed several foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) operations coming from Russian state or pro-Kremlin actors.

The European External Action Service coordinates closely with Member States and EU institutions on such FIMI activity in the context of the Rapid Alert System, including regarding Social Design Agency and other entities with links to such operations.

The exposure and response to Russia's FIMI operations and restrictive measures are part of the FIMI toolbox ⁽¹⁾, endorsed by the European Council in December 2023 ⁽²⁾, and developed to reinforce EU situational awareness, resilience and response, as well as international partnerships to tackle this threat to security and democracy.

The EU's response to FIMI evolves in close cooperation with the EU Member States and international partners to take account of new operations and malign activity patterns.

Furthermore, Regulation 2022/2065 (Digital Services Act 'DSA') ⁽³⁾ along with the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation ⁽⁴⁾ provide a number of tools to address the spread of disinformation, while fully upholding fundamental rights including the freedom of expression.

Political advertising can be a vector of disinformation and foreign interference. Once it fully enters into application in October 2025, Regulation 900/2024 on transparency and targeting of political advertising will ensure that political advertisements are labelled and subject to strict targeting requirements.

Sponsoring political advertisements by third country actors will be prohibited in the three months before elections or referenda.

⁽¹⁾ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/tackling-disinformation-foreign-information-manipulation-interference_en

⁽²⁾ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/68967/european_council_conclusions-14-15-12-2023-en.pdf

⁽³⁾ 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) (OJ L 277, 27.10.2022).

⁽⁴⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/code-practice-disinformation>