
Fake news and threats to democracy: the European Parliament takes remedial action

Europe, Europe, Europe. Every single day, whenever any global or national problem emerges, there is a call "to Europe", generically understood, suggesting a reminder of the responsibilities as well as the capacity/willingness of the European Union to intervene, be it in the economy, security, public health, migration, agriculture, social cohesion, the fight against climate change, and so on. On the one hand, it would appear to substantiate the idea that the EU is important, that it "counts", that it is part of the life of European citizens, and that it can be a response to the challenges that the continent is facing. *On the other hand, it cannot be denied that so many references to Europe reveal a lack of knowledge of the EU's actual competences and prerogatives, enshrined in the Treaties.* This reflects the ill-concealed desire to transfer competences and prerogatives that rest with the Member States and their leaders. In short, the EU as a "scapegoat" is useful to many... This can be seen when EU institutions are called upon to "take action", while – in other circumstances – the same Member States deny the EU a budget that exceeds the current 1% of European GDP: namely, "we demand that you must work hard, possibly taking care of everything, but we are not giving you the powers (Treaties) and the resources (budget) to do so." *In these tragic hours another concern emerges, or rather is confirmed, on the EU, under the strain of nationalism and populism fuelled by the web.* It is corroborated by a document – detected by SIR – published by the European Parliament (Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Directorate for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs).



Immagine non disponibile

[In essence, the Eurochamber's Constitutional Affairs Committee \(Afco\) intends to commission a research on the subject of "Foreign Institutions and Interferences" to a specialised agency. This research will then have to feed into the preparation of an Afco report addressing various thorny issues including: "institutions and foreign interference", "defence of liberal democracy - EU democratic project", "integrity of European elections." It is evident that the problem, known at a global level and already experienced in the old continent, involves the threat posed by a distorted use of the internet to democratic, national and EU institutions, and in particular the impact of disinformation on citizens during elections. Against this backdrop, Afco is seeking an institute or agency specialized in this field, in order to commission "a 40 to 50-page survey in English on institutions and external interference". The deadline for the presentation of the final report is 29 June 2020, with the definition of the final project scheduled for 1 June. A short amount of time to eventually submit the results of the](#)

research during a meeting of the Constitutional Affairs Committee. The proposed budget is EUR 15 thousand (net of VAT). The report “shall be based on available data, reports, studies and analyses from various sources and documents coming from the EU, national and international institutions”. Concrete “quantitative and qualitative evidence” is also requested. Finally, the report “*shall include policy recommendations addressed to the leading stakeholders, including the European Parliament.*” “Aspects” to be considered include a review of the initiatives taken so far by the EU in combating dissemination of false information and threats to democracy, along with measures to ensure free elections (also addressing the risk of “external influence on the integrity of the 2019 European Parliament elections”). A review of the “legislative initiatives announced by the EU Commission, such as the Action Plan for European Democracy, aimed at countering risks of external interference in the European elections, including proposals to ensure greater transparency on paid political publicity and clearer regulations concerning the funding of European political parties”, is equally requested.

Gianni Borsa