

Dear President Ackson,

Dear Colleagues,

In times of unprecedented crumbling of the rules-based international order, foreign interference has emerged as one of the most rapidly evolving and concerning challenges facing societies worldwide. **As the European Union's** recent Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats confirms, "Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference reached a new level of operational complexity and global reach, with attacks increasing in frequency, intensity and coordination." **The Report** also states that foreign interference is "not merely a communication challenge but part of a broader strategy with tangible political and security consequences."

Indeed, what the European Union says in its Report is true. **Foreign interference** is a substantial and persistent threat to democratic security. **It also is** a structural and worsening challenge. **What makes it** even worse is that foreign interference is being quietly normalized as it is being reframed as "engagement", "partnership", or "support". **But let us call it** what it is: **When outside actors** seek to shape a nation's internal political choices, bypass its institutions, this is not cooperation any more. It becomes a violation of the very basic principle of international law – sovereignty of states.

It is, at its core, a question of governance and accountability. **A government** should answer to its own people and act on the basis of national interests, not the interests of foreign patrons or external interests. **A government** subject to outside pressure cannot be fully accountable to its own citizens. **This is where** governance and accountability break down.

It is telling that a growing number of states adopt legislation and regulations that counter foreign interference. **Many countries** that once criticized this type of legislation elsewhere, are now legislating against foreign interference at home. **Australia**, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and many others, are enacting or tightening their own transparency and foreign-funding legislation and registration measures. **What once was** dismissed as an unconventional outlier is increasingly understood as a legitimate and necessary tool of democratic self-defense.

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness reminds all of us that genuine partnership requires that assistance must strengthen, not substitute for, national institutions and national consent. **This important principle** deserves renewed attention today, far beyond the field of development aid, as foreign interference is quietly replacing foreign assistance.

I would like to bring the example of Georgia. **Considering** serious security and political challenges that arise from foreign funding, Georgia's Law on Grants now requires that foreign grants receive the consent of the government before disbursement. **Complementing this**, the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence requires organizations that receive a significant share of their funding from abroad to register and disclose that funding publicly. **The principle** behind both Laws is simple: when foreign resources flow into a country's political or public life, the citizens must have visibility over how those resources are used. **This is an exercise** of sovereignty and accountability crucial for democratic resilience and good governance.

Certainly, it is highly concerning that the trend of foreign interference is deepening. **However**, there is a hypocritical aspect as well: **Some states**, while interfering in others' affairs, simultaneously lament the erosion of the international order. **They seem** to forget that non-interference is one of the pillars of international order. **Besides**, practices of interference, however well-intentioned, breed new potential for conflict, distrust, and instability.

The path forward is clear: interference must give way to genuine partnership, rooted in the consent of governments and the sovereignty of nations. **It is high time** for the international community to agree upon a common international standard on transparency of foreign interference and foreign funding, one that gives every member state the legitimate tools to protect democratic processes, grounded in shared principles of sovereignty, accountability, and consent. **Only then** can accountability, and with it, legitimate democratic governance, truly flourish.

Thank you.