



Brussels and Prague, 16 April 2024

Dear Colleagues,

In recent weeks, the intelligence services in several Member States have identified attempts to disrupt democracy in Europe by an external actor, notably by interfering with decision-making processes within the European Parliament.

The Belgian intelligence service confirms this Russian interference: *“Our service discovered the existence of a pro-Russian interference network with activities in Belgium. The network’s activities are aimed, among other things, at promoting cooperation between pro-Russian politicians within the European Parliament, helping to elect more pro-Russian candidates to Parliament, and appointing people active within this network as employees of (newly elected) MEPs.”* This attempted interference involved the handover of cash, mainly in Czechia.

It is clear that the Russian regime is trying to influence the upcoming European elections and to strengthen the pro-Russian narrative in the new European Parliament.

Belgium finds itself in a particular position in this regard, as one of the seats of the institutions of the European Union, co-seat of the European Parliament, and seat of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Although the transfer of cash did not take place on Belgian territory, the intended interference does.

It is now up to us all, EU institutions and Member States, both at national and European level, to decide how to further deal with this matter.

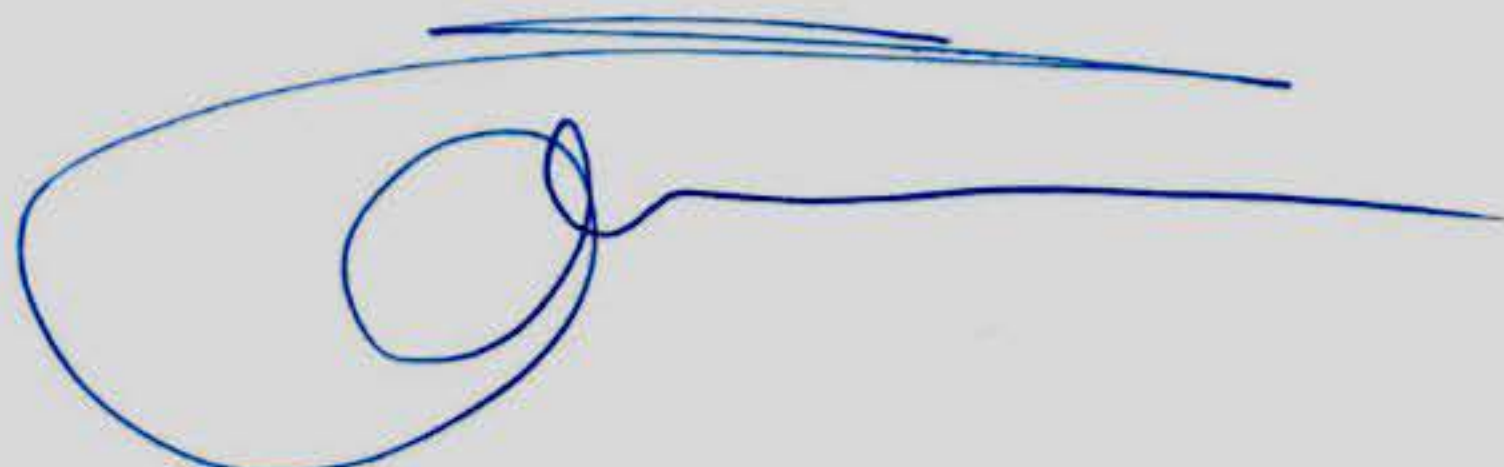
The Czech Government decided to place several individuals and one entity on the Czech national sanctions list for actions that aimed at undermining territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence of Ukraine. Czechia is now proposing to impose restrictive measures on these individuals and this entity under the respective EU restrictive measures regime as a matter of the greatest urgency.

Belgian judicial authorities have decided to open a criminal investigation into this attempted interference, as have several other Member States. Furthermore, Belgian judicial authorities have requested that a Eurojust meeting be convened at short notice.

In view of article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, which states that *"The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail"*, we intend to raise this issue at the European Council on 17 and 18 April. We simply cannot allow Russia to get away with such a blatant attack on our democratic institutions and principles. We must arm ourselves against this, both at national and European level.

In this regard, it is the right time to establish a new EU restrictive measure regime aimed to counter Russian malign activities. Equally, we should examine whether the mandates of the European Public Prosecutor's Office and the European Anti-Fraud Office allow for this interference to be prosecuted. If this were not the case, we should not rule out an expansion of these mandates to allow such prosecution in the future.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alexander De Croo
Prime Minister of Belgium

A handwritten signature in blue ink, featuring a large initial 'P' and 'F' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Peter Fiala
Prime Minister of the Czech Republic

To:

Mr. Charles Michel, President of the European Council
Mrs. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission
Mrs. Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament
Members of the European Council