EUA WEBINAR SERIES: A NEW WORLD? UNIVERSITIES IN CHANGING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Risk assessment for international partnerships

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1. WHAT is foreign interference?

Definition

Activities that are carried out by, or on behalf of a **foreign actor**, which are **coercive**, **covert**, **deceptive** or **corrupting** and are **contrary** to the **EU's sovereignty, values and interests**.

Examples

A research leader which is collaborating with a foreign actor is pressured into restricting or cancelling lectures, workshops, conferences, or projects on specific topics.

A foreign state-sponsored hacker group runs a phishing campaign on students and staff of a HEI to harvest their accounts and gain unauthorised access to publications, data, and code. A technology transfer officer is recruited by a foreign actor and is subsequently coerced or blackmailed into gaining access to and sharing confidential research and IPR.



1. WHAT is foreign interference?

Possible tactics

- Political pressure by influential representatives on strategic decision makers.
- Financial support in the form of investments, donations, funding, and loans.
- Exploiting people in strategic positions who are coerced, recruited, or placed.
- **Digital intrusions** breaching cybersecurity remotely or physically on location.
- Spreading disinformation against local interests or promoting foreign interests.

Multi-dimensional threats

Often multidimensional, combining coercive and **subversive measures**, using both **conventional** and **unconventional** tools and tactics. They are designed to be **difficult to detect or attribute**. These threats **target critical vulnerabilities** and extend across all **research activities**, **scientific domains**, **research outputs**, **and individuals at the organisations**.



2. WHY HEIs?

Objectives of foreign interference

The objectives of foreign interference serve to further the **political**, **socio-cultural**, **economic**, and **technological interests** of the foreign actor:

- to retrieve information of interest to the foreign actor,
- to influence decisions in favor of the foreign actor,
- to **undermine values** contrary to the foreign actor.

Higher Education Institutions

- Europe's HEIs have a strong record of internationalisation.
- This openness and collaboration has greatly contributed to their success but has simultaneously facilitated foreign interference.
- HEIs are often insufficiently aware of potential threats and have not taken preventive measures.
- Provided the complexity of the threats, it is **difficult to tackle these issues in isolation**.

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3. HOW to protect against foreign interference?

1. Make use of support provided by **local** and **national authorities**, **associations**, etc.

2. Guidelines on tackling R&I Foreign interference

Available soon

Aim

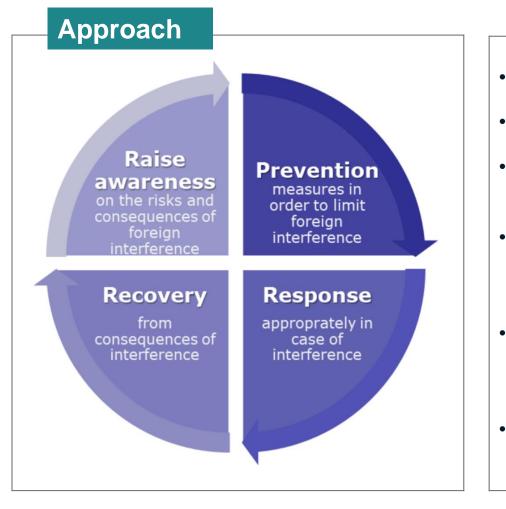
- 1. Protect fundamental values by safeguarding academic freedom, integrity and institutional autonomy.
- 2. Protect our key research findings and intellectual assets.

Areas of attention

Four areas of attention, which are especially vulnerable to foreign intervention

- Values
- Governance
- Partnerships
- Cyber-security

3. HOW to protect against foreign interference?



Characteristics

- State-agnostic.
- On voluntary basis.
- Based on a **positive agenda** of partnership coupled with the constructive management of differences.
- Not designed to burden the organisations with additional administration but to encourage integration of recommendations in existing structures.
- Aim to be as **concrete as possible**, but each organisations should tailor their own set of actions as there is no one-size-fits-all approach.
- **Not exhaustive** and do not prevent HEIs from adopting other guidance on the same subject.



3. HOW to protect against foreign interference?

Possible actions

- Continue to cooperate with partners in repressive settings
- Conduct a vulnerability assessment to understand external pressures on your institution.
- Raise broad awareness of potential risks involved in engaging in a partnership and of the ways the institution seeks to mitigate them.
- Ensure that knowledge security and academic integrity is safeguarded in all partnerships by reviewing procedures and expanding and strengthening them where needed.
- Define the minimum levels of due diligence for different types of partnerships.

Possible procedure for partnership agreements

- 1. Develop a positive agenda
- 2. Prepare for partnership
- Develop a sound knowledge of the partner organisation, of its place in the national research system of its country.
- 4. Perform due diligence.
- 5. Carefully negotiate partnership agreement.
- 6. Monitor the implementation of the agreement.
- Assess the outcomes of the collaboration and draw lessons for future engagement.

THANK YOU!

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