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Foreign interference in electoral processes as a factor of international politics: Mechanisms and counteraction

Abstract. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the need to better understand the mechanisms and ways of foreign interference in electoral processes in North America and Europe. This is necessary to develop effective measures to counter attempts to undermine democratic processes and improve them in accordance with the challenges of the digital media era. The purpose of the study is to analyse the current policy of China and the Russian Federation in the sphere of influence on electoral processes in democratic countries, to analyse possible measures to counteract this interference. The following methods were used in the study: heuristic, induction, synthesis, abstract and logical. According to the results of the study, electoral processes in North America and European countries are subject to constant interference from China and Russia, since each of these countries has its own motives for dismantling democracy in these countries. There is an increase in these manipulations due to digitalisation processes. Based on the results of the analysis of manipulation mechanisms, a classification of the types of interference of these states in electoral processes is developed, in particular, three main scenarios of such influence and five types of interference are indicated. It is determined that Russia mostly resorts to manipulating information, implementing the concepts of “post-truth”, and China – to subversive activities in society. There are many measures in both the EU and the US to counter such interference, but most of these measures consist of exposing the interference, spreading such information to the public, and taking technological action. It is concluded that the defence of democracy should be based solely on open and democratic ways of countering foreign interference, and the violation of citizens’ rights will only further undermine faith in democratic values. It is concluded that countering interference in electoral processes, first of all, should be based on informing citizens about the risks of manipulation, media literacy, critical thinking, and readiness for constant political activity. The practical significance of this study is that it will help in developing a strategy for countering foreign interference in democratic processes

Keywords: diplomacy; civil participation; manipulation; vectors of influence; methods of counteraction

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Introduction

The relevance of this study lies in the fact that foreign interference in electoral processes remains a threat to the political stability of countries and democracy around the world. Interference in electoral processes not only poses a threat to national security, but also discredits democratic values. Understanding intervention mechanisms and measures to prevent or counteract them will help ensure the sustainability of electoral systems and protect the democratic values of the states under study.

Elections are an important process for every democratic country. The entire system of representative democracy is based on the idea of delegating power to the people to representatives who should be independently responsible for foreign and domestic policy. Such a system can function successfully only if there is freedom of choice and fair voting (Boryslavska, 2018). However, current trends indicate that the principles of freedom of choice are increasingly being used to deliberately manipulate the political preferences of the electorate. This is especially evident in cases of foreign interference in national elections in states with a high level of democracy development: the United States of America (USA) and the states of the European Union (EU) (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.).

The problem of protecting the information system and countering foreign interference in the electoral process of countries is considered in many studies by Ukrainian researchers. Exploring digital technologies in the electoral process, I.M. Zharovska, & V.B. Kovalchuk (2020) determined that despite the significant superiority of digital technologies in the election process, digitalisation of life increases the risks and opportunities for external interference in electoral processes. Other Ukrainian researchers M.A. Buchyn & M.V. Kitsiak (2020) noted that the mechanisms and forms of foreign interference in the national elections of other states are not just a means of strengthening the influence of manipulators in democratic regions, but are an element of the hybrid war waged by authoritarian states. Investigating the protection of the electoral model of political participation, N. Rotar (2021) determined that a powerful element of such a hybrid war is disinformation of the population, which affects the future of political institutions. Analysing the information security of the 2020 US election, I.O. Chernovol & I.Y. Charskykh (2021) concluded that the main consequence of foreign interference in the US election is not the victory of a particular candidate, but the long-term impact on democratic processes and state institutions. As a result, there is a distrust of citizens towards politicians, the government, and democracy in general. Foreign interference in electoral processes is an element of hybrid manipulative attacks, the so-called “sharp power”, which was investigated by Y. Vaida (2022) on the example of EU states. As a result of the study, the researcher concluded that as of 2022, the problem is so acute that the EU has begun an institutional fight against external interference in electoral processes.

The study of foreign interference in electoral processes consists of at least three aspects: violation of democratic principles, threat to national security, and the role of digital technologies. That is, foreign interference affects

the process of democracy, since the influence of foreign states on the electoral process of the state violates the right of citizens to free choice. Attention should be paid to the problem of threats to the national security of the state that is being interfered with. In addition, this problem is not new, but with the development of digital technologies, such intervention is becoming more accessible and effective. Analysing most of the conducted research, some gaps in the area can be identified. In particular, the mechanisms of foreign interference in the electoral process of another state are considered mainly as an integral part of other forms of interference, such as “sharp power” or hybrid warfare, which does not always allow describing the process of interference in democratic institutions. In addition, studies usually consider the problem and consequences, but do not provide specific recommendations for preventing and countering foreign interference at the cognitive level for citizens. This creates the need for a detailed investigation of intervention mechanisms and prevention measures, and counteraction recommendations for both the USA and EU states.

The purpose of the study is to analyse foreign interference in the USA and EU electoral processes to further identify possible consequences for the democratic system and develop principles on which to base counteraction to such interference.

Materials and Methods

In the course of the study, general scientific and special research methods were used. The genetic method was used to identify the origin of certain patterns and mechanisms of interference in electoral processes and other democratic institutions in Europe and North America. Using the method of synchronous and asynchronous comparison, the difference in the tactics and mechanisms of intervention used by different political agents was revealed, along with this, the use of these methods identified regional features of intervention and tracked how the methods and intensity of influence changed during the 21st century. Using the heuristic method, current views on the nature of interventions were analysed and information was collected about political parties that express support or have a loyal attitude towards countries that interfere in democratic processes. An abstract and logical method was used, which allowed forming conclusions based on the results obtained.

The analysis of the problem was based on analytical reports, statistics and indices that show the level of public confidence in democratic institutions and the executive branch. The analysis of quantitative data identified states that interfere and states that most often interfere in democratic processes, in particular, in electoral processes. The main resource was the “Authoritarian Interference Tracker” developed by the Alliance Securing Democracy (ASD) (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.). This tracker is represented by five interrelated asymmetric tools – information manipulation, cyber operations, malicious financing, subversive activities against civil society, and economic coercion. Many of the data records

are cross-tagged with multiple tools, highlighting how the Russian and Chinese governments simultaneously use different tactics to undermine and destabilise democracy. The data provided by ASD is taken from open sources, and therefore, they are usually incomplete and indicate mainly key trends than exact characteristics. Due to the hidden nature of authoritarian interventions, it is quite difficult to determine clear and direct authorship, so the data in the Tracker includes only those incidents for which the initiator country is more or less clearly established. In addition, to determine the specifics and consequences of interference in electoral processes, the indicators of the Democracy Index for the period 2006-2022 and indicators of the level of support for democracy calculated and presented by the Economist Intelligence Unit were used (2023). Quantitative data on citizens' trust in public institutions in Europe and America were used, presented in a number of specialised studies and calculated using various methods (Big Think, 2021; Brennan, 2021). Using an IPU Pirline (n.d.) resource and a heuristic search for information about European political parties, the share of pro-Russian or Russian-loyal parties in the parliaments of European countries was estimated. The database on the Russian presence in Europe was used to assess the sources of influence on EU policy (Texty.org.ua, 2022), created by a number of analysts based on an analysis of 1,300 individuals and 900 organisations.

Results

First of all, foreign interference in elections is motivated interference in which a foreign state interferes with the elections of another state to pursue its interests and improve its own status (Chernovol & Charskykh, 2021). Interference is a component of illegal influence characterised by the use of material, information, and economic resources for cognitive effect to influence the target audience (Berzina & Soula, 2020). Cases of foreign interference in the electoral process of other states are not a new phenomenon in the international political arena. However, the use of influence or interference by one state to change the course of elections by another state is increasingly observed. For the most part, such interference is caused by technological progress, which has positive consequences for the overall development of society in certain areas, but creates negative consequences for democracy in the 21st century (Boryslavska, 2018).

Illegal actions to interfere in the democratic and electoral processes of other states in the international arena are most often carried out by the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.). Other states also try to influence democratic and electoral processes, but with much less resources and less success at the international level than Russia and China (Jiangène Vilmer *et al.*, 2018). The total number of attacks identified by ASD reaches 643 cases. Of these, 68% (438 attacks) were carried out by Russia, and 32% (208 attacks) were carried out by China (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.). It should be emphasised that interference in the electoral process of the Democratic states of the EU and the United States is observed by

states that are characterised by an authoritarian regime. So, as of 2022, Russia has a Democracy Index of 2.28, and China – 1.94 (EIU, 2023), while the average level of the EU Democracy Index is between 9.39 in Sweden and 6.45 in Romania with an average of 7.9, and the US Democracy Index – 7.85 (EIU, 2023). That is, Russia and China have not only failed to form a perfect democratic system in the country, but also worsen it in individual states, interfering in their democratic processes, in particular elections. Due to various reasons, including foreign interference, the level of democracy in the EU has fallen by 0.2 points in recent years (Hungary shows the most negative trend, where the Democracy Index decreased by 0.89) (EIU, 2023). In the USA, the level of democracy fell by 0.37 points. To establish a correlation between foreign interference in electoral processes, there is currently little data, and the methodology and specifics of such calculations have not yet been investigated, but it can be assumed that China and Russia also contribute to the destruction of democracy and trust in Europe, as evidenced by the decline in confidence in national parliaments in Europe (Big Think, 2021).

For the period 2008-2022, the EU and the United States became the targets of the largest number of interventions in democratic processes, of which more than 20% accounted for the United States – 138 attacks according to the Authoritarian Interference Tracker (n.d.), and 505 for Europe (Fig. 1). For comparison, during the period 1946-2000, Russia interfered in every ninth US election (Levin, 2016). Now, with the development of digital technologies, such interference occurs during every US election, as well as in the periods between elections. Analysing the period 2008-2022, it can be argued that the greatest activity on the part of Russia and China was manifested in the period 2013-2022 (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.). Long before the election process – in 2014 – Russian disinformation spread among Americans (Berzina & Soula, 2020). In the same year, Chinese hackers engaged in unprecedented cyber espionage. In 2017, American experts determined that the Russian intelligence group APT28 was involved in interference in the 2016 US election (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). Russian intelligence hackers stole the email of the Democratic National Committee, distributing it on social networks (Ross *et al.*, 2022). About USD 100 million was also spent on spreading disinformation on social media, reaching 120 million Americans. The goal was to sabotage the electoral process, undermine the candidates' campaigns, and form a negative public opinion about each candidate (Henschke *et al.*, 2020; Schmitt, 2021). Thus, the consequence of foreign interference was not only the deterioration of international relations (Rato, 2018), but also the undermining of the electoral process and the attitude of citizens to democracy. Thus, according to data calculated on the basis of the Christopher Klassen methodology, the level of support for democracy in the United States, after exposing information about election interference, experienced a rapid decline (EIU, 2023). Never before have so many citizens of the United States viewed democratic institutions so negatively. Thus, this example proves that exposing information about foreign interference in democratic processes leads to a rapid decline in the authority of democracy.

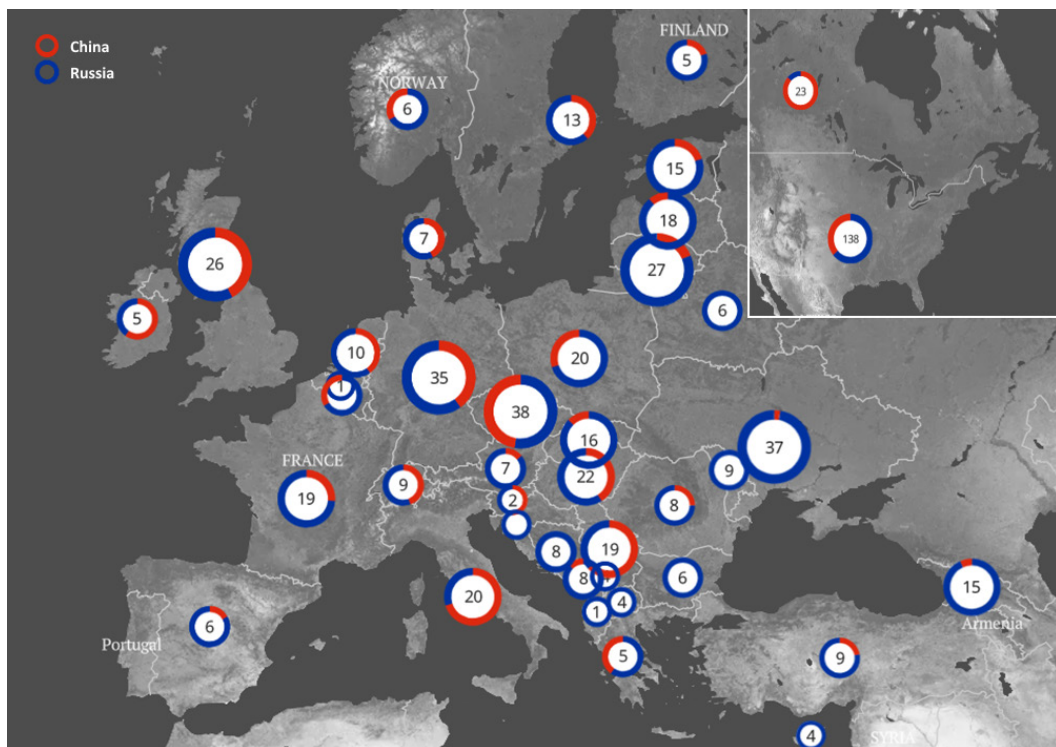


Figure 1. The number of foreign interference in democratic processes at the international level for the period 2008-2022

Source: Authoritarian Interference Tracker (n.d.)

After the election of D. Trump as president, the spread of Russian disinformation continued for a long time. For example, for the period 2015-2017, Russians posing as Americans organised about 130 events aimed at clashes between groups of US citizens (Berzina & Soula, 2020). After the 2016 presidential election, the United States government took a more active stance on countering foreign interference in the electoral process: public warnings were issued, sanctions were imposed, and social media accounts were removed. However, such actions did not cause foreign interference on the part of Russia to discredit the figure of D. Biden, and China – D. Trump (Luther *et al.*, 2021). In addition, in order to undermine US democratic institutions, Iran became more active in 2020, whose influence in the 2016 elections was not noticeable (Eichensehr, 2021; Pylypiuk, 2022).

In 2018, on the eve of the US presidential election in 2020, China's manipulation and subversive actions in American society were again recorded. The mechanisms of Chinese intervention were somewhat different from those of Russia. China did not act directly by falsifying election data, as Russia did. But it showed mechanisms of influence through trade: using tariff policies for political gain and specifically targeting industries and states that played an important role in the elections and were less supportive of D. Trump. For example, goods produced in the districts of P. Ryan and Senate leader M. McConnell were most affected (Brutger *et al.*, 2023). This period represents a sharp decline in American confidence in the federal government, as demonstrated by M. Brennan (2021).

For the period 2016-2022, experts estimate that China spent about USD 280 billion on actions to influence US policy. Unlike Russia, which mainly focused its influence on undermining democracy in general, China has made attempts to change the views of the United States in a broader sense (Che *et al.*, 2021). "Russian intelligence services are creating bad weather, and China is changing the climate" – this is how the Director General of the British Intelligence Agency, C. McCallum, described China's foreign interference in the UK (Kurlantzick, 2022).

In 2022, China introduced mechanisms of influence through print and online media (hereinafter – mass media) and propaganda through radio, thus trying to influence the course of the upcoming US elections in 2024. Thus, China is trying to harm possible candidates who do not cooperate with the PRC. This happens through bots and fake social media profiles (Kurlantzick, 2022). Researchers note that China controls 4.5 thousand television channels, more than 2 thousand radio stations, about 2 thousand newspapers, 10 thousand magazines, and 3 million websites where it criticises the countries of Western Europe and the United States (Jiangène Vilmer *et al.*, 2018). In other words, China is increasingly copying Russian mechanisms of influence (Kurlantzick, 2022). The interference of Russia and China in the democratic processes in the EU countries is observed in a smaller volume compared to the United States.

Analysing the data in Figure 1, it can be concluded that Germany, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Lithuania, Great Britain, Italy, Hungary, Serbia, Ukraine, France, and the Baltic states experienced the greatest interference in

democratic processes by the Russian Federation (Fig. 1). However, the interventions shown in Figure 2, in addition to interference in electoral processes, also characterise other types of interventions to undermine democracy in states (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.).

The largest number of interventions by China and Russia was experienced by five countries: Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands. There is a tendency to increase the number of pro-Russian lobbyists in Western European countries (Table 1).

Table 1. Russian influence in Europe

Country	Number of Russian organisations in Europe	Number of pro-Russian politicians and lobbyists
Germany	196	216
France	62	200
Italy	86	162
United Kingdom	70	81
Serbia	67	79
Bulgaria	43	61
Czech Republic	43	60
Spain	43	43
Greece	22	59
Austria	22	54
Poland	21	51
Hungary	41	28
Belgium	35	27
Sweden	27	27
Netherlands	20	16
Romania	18	31
Slovakia	16	28
Ireland	15	16
Denmark	13	11

Source: compiled by the authors based on Texty.org.ua (2022)

China has been less influential in the EU than in the USA. In particular, back in 2013-2014, the Chinese strategy “One Belt, One Road” was announced with the aim of developing infrastructure in 70 countries, including the EU, improving political trust and joint development. In its foreign policy strategy towards Europe, China relies primarily on strengthening its global influence in the economic, political, and cultural spheres (Akdemir, 2020). In 2013-2014, in anticipation of political overtones in such a strategy, EU countries only resorted to preventive actions in 2015 and strengthened the protection of the market and their own political interests. Researchers note that this strategy of China contributes not only to the development of interests, but also acts as a counteraction to the influence of external media (Jiangène Vilmer *et al.*, 2018).

Both in terms of the number of interventions in democratic processes and the number of lobbyists in Russia, Germany is the “leader” among EU countries. Russia’s interference in Germany’s democratic processes was noticeable in 2014, right after the sanctions were imposed on Russia, because of its military invasion of Ukraine, as the sanctions were supported by German Chancellor Merkel at the time (Shekhovtsov, 2018). Since the EU imposed sanctions on Russia in 2014, German concerns have suffered significant economic losses. According to experts, such losses amounted to about EUR 13 billion. Therefore, the mechanism of Russian interference in the German electoral process

was as follows: strengthening Russia’s interaction with the heads of leading German corporations (Martynov, 2017). In addition, hacker attacks were carried out on the Bundestag, the Christian Democratic Union party. Merkel, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs blamed the Russian intelligence unit APT28 for this (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018; Baezner & Robin, 2017). China in 2017 acted mainly indirectly through some political parties in the election campaign. For example, the “Solidarity Civil Movement” Party argued that “The future of Germany is the Silk Road” (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.).

In 2017, national elections were held in France. According to experts, Russia’s attempts to interfere in the electoral process in France were the most brazen that year. The main target was the party of E. Macron. Therefore, all mechanisms of intervention were carried out through cyber-attacks on this party. First, this included attempts to hack the headquarters website. Second, it was confirmed that Russian agents created twelve accounts on the social network Facebook (now Meta Platforms) under the guise of close acquaintances of E. Macron in order to get secret information about him. In addition, targeted fraudulent emails disguised as a fake Microsoft repository website attempted to obtain passwords and login details from employees (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). In addition, stolen files and emails of election candidates were distributed (Berzina & Soula, 2020). A large number of fraudulent

attacks were carried out, in which the APT28 division was accused (Baezner & Robin, 2017). Two months before the start of voting for Russia's assistance, propaganda news and false reports were distributed. False information about candidates was spread in "Twitter" (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). In addition, the second candidate in the election is M. Le Pen – received direct financial assistance

to participate in the electoral process from a banking institution associated with Russia (Shekhovtsov, 2018). The high volume of capital investment in right- and left-wing populist movements in France is evidenced by the fact that as of 2023, the country is one of the leaders in the number of pro-Russian or relatively loyal forces in the national parliament (Table 2).

Table 2. Share of pro-Russian and loyal forces in the parliaments of European countries

Country	%
Serbia	49
France	34
Hungary	29
Slovakia	24
Italy	23.5
Germany	22
Romania	20
Lithuania	19.9
Austria	16.2
Bulgaria	14.4
Czech Republic	11
Poland	7.7
Greece	7
Latvia	5
Portugal	4.3

Source: developed by the authors using the IPU Pirline (n.d.)

In 2017, elections were held in the Netherlands. The main mechanism of interference in the conduct of these elections by Russia was the dissemination of false information during public debates. Researchers suggest that this "weak" influence compared to other EU countries can be caused by two aspects: the Netherlands is a major trading partner of Russia, fears of further inflaming public opinion in a country where almost 200 Dutch citizens were killed by Russian-backed militants, as a result of the downing of Flight MH17 in Ukraine (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018).

Russian interference in the electoral process in 2017 was also observed in the UK. The mechanisms of intervention were mainly in the form of cyber-attacks. 188 cyber-attacks were carried out, but not with the aim of harming the vote of a certain candidate, but to cause distrust of democracy in the state. In addition, disinformation was actively carried out on social networks (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). China also conducted propaganda through Confucius Institutes, which hide political interference and the imposition of an authoritarian regime under cultural ideas. The UK has the largest number of them – 29 in higher education institutions and 148 classes in schools (Vaida, 2022).

In 2018, Sweden held national elections. As of 2018, Sweden was a member of the EU, but was not a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), but co-operated with the alliance in many programmes. This was the reason for Russia's active interference in the state's electoral processes (Shekhovtsov, 2018). The mechanisms of Russia's interference in Sweden's electoral processes

included: hacking operations, spreading information, undermining stability, spreading false news, daily cyber-attacks, and creation of fake political accounts on social networks. All these actions were carried out with the aim of polarising Swedish society. Simultaneously with the national elections in the country, Sweden, along with other NATO countries and the United States, conducted military exercises. Russia took advantage of the moment to spread a false picture of the purpose of the exercises and presented them as provocative and aggressive in nature with an emphasis on nuclear weapons in order to incite fear and distrust among the Swedish public (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). While law enforcement agencies informed the public about Russian interference, the response was the growing intra-European distrust. That is, counteractions indicate insufficient protection against interference (Silvestre, 2022).

In 2022, China actively pursued actions to steal and share information about European officials and political aspects (Kurlantzick, 2022). China continues to use the following mechanisms: penetration into EU organisations, such as the Council of Europe, manipulation of Chinese diasporas in the EU, manipulation of European statesmen who push China's interests, payment of funds to the EU population for distributing the news app in the largest EU newspapers. Democratic governments have used a wide range of approaches to counter and deter information operations, ranging from the exchange of information between states to the fight against disinformation (Jeangène Vilmer *et al.*, 2018).

Summarising the analysed data, it can be understood that Russia and China operate on the principle of three main scenarios: interference in the electoral process itself, direct or indirect interference in election campaigns, and measures even before the start of the electoral process (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). Mechanisms of influence can be divided into five types (Table 3): economic coercion, subversive activities aimed at the public, cyber operations, information manipulation, and illegal financing. Economic coercion should be understood as the use of

financial resources to create the dependence of individuals. Subversive activities aimed at the public should be understood as influencing individual target groups of the population in order to separate their opinions and views. Cyber operations should be understood as illegal actions aimed at information in the online space. Information manipulation should be understood as the coordinated use of the media to intentionally spread false information. Illegal financing refers to the financing of parties and individual candidates in order to influence public opinion.

Table 3. Regional features of mechanisms of interference in democratic processes

Region	Subversive activities	Economic coercion	Cyber operations	Information manipulation	Illegal financing
North America	19%	7%	33%	31%	10%
Western Europe	28%	12%	18%	32%	9%
Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans	23%	21%	14%	29%	12%

Source: developed by authors based on the Authoritarian Interference Tracker (n.d.)

Analysing the recorded cases of interference, it can be determined that China most resorts to subversive activities aimed at the public, and least of all – to illegal financing. Russia uses information manipulation the most, and economic coercion the least. At the same time, subversive activities were more successful in Western Europe. Cyber operations were directed mainly against the United States and Canada, and to a lesser extent against the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, which may be due to their relatively lower digitalisation. These countries are least protected from illegal, harmful financing and economic coercion by Russia and China.

Countering foreign interference in electoral processes is extremely important for ensuring the integrity and independence of electoral processes in any country. The analysis of the mechanisms of such influence allows forming a number of principles on which the policy of countering such a phenomenon should be built.

Awareness of information security: citizens should be aware of the possibility of disinformation and electoral interference. Ensuring information security and teaching citizens critical thinking are key aspects of this principle. Information protection: Improving the level of cybersecurity and protecting citizens' personal data from unauthorised access by third-party forces is critical. Inter-country cooperation: International cooperation and information exchange between countries can help identify and prevent interference. Legislative measures: Adoption and strengthening of laws related to electoral processes and cybersecurity can provide legal protection against foreign interference. Checking information sources: Governments, political parties, and citizens should check information sources before using or distributing it, especially during election campaigns. Training and professional development: Political leaders, election commission officials, and citizens should be trained to recognise possible threats of foreign interference and effectively protect electoral processes. First of all, attention should be paid to the introduction of a mandatory media education course

in educational institutions that teach recognition of disinformation and the importance of checking information sources. Campaigns should be carried out to raise public awareness of foreign interference and its impact on democracy. Transparency and openness: Openness in electoral processes, including the financing of political campaigns, can reduce opportunities for external influence. Support for journalists and researchers: Support for journalists and independent researchers studying foreign interference can lead to the detection and disclosure of misconduct. International support: Attracting support from international organisations that specialise in democracy and electoral processes can strengthen a country's ability to resist foreign interference.

Discussion

After investigating the scale and mechanisms of influence of Russia and China on the electoral processes of the United States and EU countries, researchers are increasingly discussing various measures to prevent and counteract such influences. Analysing the impact of Russia and China on EU countries, Y. Vaida (2022) points out that as of 2022, the EU member states have only begun to combat interference, as prevention has not been introduced in all EU states, and at the institutional level, there is only a formalisation of countermeasures without punishment. The researcher notes that the most important measure is the development of a strategy to protect the population from information manipulation.

Analysing opposition to foreign interference for liberal democracies, A. Henschke *et al.* (2020) noted that in modern conditions, both in the EU and in the US, there are five vulnerabilities that, without protection, can lead to the degradation of the democratic system in the state: democratic institutions, electoral infrastructure, individuals, industry, and ideas. The researchers point to weak opposition from the United States against Russia and China regarding data from five key elements of the 2018 election results, which was a striking example of the feasibility of

developing measures to prevent such interference from happening again in the next election. The authors of this study fully agree with this statement, since according to the results of this study, it became clear that Russia's influence on political processes in the United States is not limited only to the direct results of the election race. The disclosure of information about election interference, which leads to a decrease in the level of confidence in democracy in the United States, has much deeper consequences.

Investigating the interference of some states in the national elections of others, D.H. Levin (2016) noted that the activation of intervention recently is caused by two factors: motive and opportunity. The motives of China and Russia are mostly different, while the opportunities are equal both from the side of funding and from the side of technological development, which is fully consistent with the results of this study, because China is gradually increasing the number of subversive activities.

Investigating measures against foreign interference, M. Rahman *et al.* (2020), note that legislation is one of the important parts of counteraction, but should be applied strategically in an integrated approach. That is, it should consider not only intelligence activities to expose interference, the development of new technologies for the possibility of exposing interference, the use of mass media and the dissemination of information, but also public support, public education in the field of media literacy, and critical thinking. If only the aspect of already exposed acts of foreign interference is communicated to the public, such actions can be perceived as an attack and accusation against opponents in the electoral process.

Describing the threat of information warfare using cybersecurity, H. Lin (2019) noted that the impact on electoral processes and the undermining of democracy is increasingly caused by the criminal use of digital technologies, which is confirmed, in particular, by data provided by the ASD (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.). The researcher draws attention to the problem of limited cognitive resources of people, which can be "spent" in conditions of mental stress. Emotions and motivations affect cognition. It is these aspects that are mostly the basis for foreign interference in the electoral processes of other states. Disinformation has always been an effective mechanism for influencing a large number of people. But today, people are more vulnerable to information warfare than at any time in human history. Countering such a mechanism of influence in the United States is poorly developed and ineffective, given the course of the 2018 elections.

The impact of digital technologies was also noticed by A. Bendiek & M. Schulze (2019) in a study of disinformation in EU elections. The advantage of digital disinformation is that it has low costs and at the same time has a great impact: with a small amount of resources, it is possible to reach a global audience through individual disinformation. Digital disinformation uses legitimate advertising industry tools to target users based on their individual behaviour profiles. Therefore, it is difficult to counteract such mechanisms of influence at the legal level. L. Lonardo (2021) came to a similar conclusion while investigating EU legislation against hybrid threats. The

researcher noted that all actions that characterise foreign interference in the democratic processes of EU countries cover such a wide range of issues that the adoption of a single law is impractical and probably undesirable. It is worth noting that the existing legal and regulatory instruments allow the EU to resist only some mechanisms of influence. For example, the EU has the EU Cyber Security Act, the EU Data Protection and Online Services Act, etc., but it is necessary to develop comprehensive legislation that will incorporate and harmonise the regulation of certain areas related to the protection of democracy from foreign influence.

N. Rotar (2021), investigating the protection of the electoral model of political participation in the EU, notes that the European approach to countering disinformation consists of five main comparable parts: a transparent online system (creating open and transparent mechanisms for the dissemination of information and communication); safe electoral processes (ensuring the security of elections to avoid the impact of disinformation on election results); the development of media literacy (teaching citizens to critically evaluate the information they consume and recognise disinformation); the maintenance of high-quality journalism (ensuring the independence and professionalism of journalists to ensure reliable information); strategic communications (developing effective communication strategies for the authorities and other institutions to prevent the influence of disinformation). But these measures have long been known to the interfering states, so in modern conditions, the gap for the EU is to expose non-transparent financing of political activities by foreign states. Addressing this approach requires Europe-wide action. Exploring the European approach to online disinformation, A. Casero-Ripollés *et al.* (2023) concluded that the EU's disinformation policy is based on two opposing logics. On the one hand, disinformation through the online space is perceived as a threat to democracy. Digital platforms, on the other hand, are self-regulating with clear rights and minimal interference in their policies. Despite the adoption of a new law on digital services, internal disputes in the EU regarding countering disinformation in the online space are unresolved.

However, analysing the studies that have already been conducted, it becomes clear that EU states are deeply concerned about Russia's influence on elections as the election process approaches, although their actions are not always effective (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). This is due to the fact that states can only counteract on the basis of international law, and the mechanisms of the foreign interference in question are in the so-called "grey zone" (Berzina & Soula, 2020). Therefore, relying on international law as guiding principles for regulating these activities would not be sufficient, and national governments should pursue targeted policies to protect the democratic values on which the existing political system in Europe and the USA is based.

Conclusions

Consequently, states with a low Democracy Index interfere most actively in the electoral processes of states in the modern world. By doing so, they plan to undermine the

trust not only of individual political leaders or parties, but also of the general trust of the people of Europe and North America in the institutions of democracy. The main modern political actors who use such mechanisms of influence in the political arena are Russia and China, whose official representatives often show an open disregard for democratic values. In turn, the countries where the most active interference in electoral processes takes place are mainly countries with a high level of the Democracy Development Index, which may indicate that Russia and China are waging a global hybrid war against the leaders of the liberal world. The motives of this war among its initiators are different. In the case of Russia, this is mainly an attempt to weaken the impact of sanctions, which is manifested in the high number of pro-Russian forces in the legislative power in Europe, manipulating the population with Eurosceptic views. The results of the study show that the number of recorded Russian interference in electoral processes in key Western European countries has a strong connection with the share of these forces in parliament, the number of Russian lobbyists in society. In the case of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the high level of support for Russia can be explained by historical factors and long-term propaganda. In the case of China, the main motives for intervention are to protect its economic and geopolitical interests. The opportunities of these countries are relatively equal and only increase in the era of digital transformation.

The method of identifying and classifying interference mechanisms requires further improvement, but it can be

argued beforehand that the division into subversive activities, cyber-attacks, information manipulation, economic manipulation and coercion, and harmful financing allows investigating and identifying the specifics of the policy of interference in the democratic processes of various political actors. At the same time, it allows analysing specific features of intervention in different countries and regions. In particular, it was found that Russia most often resorts to manipulating information, while China to subversive activities and cyber operations. Certain regional features of intervention have been identified, in particular, North America is more vulnerable to cyber operations, Western Europe is more likely than other regions to be subjected to subversion, and Central-Eastern Europe and the Balkans – to economic coercion and illegal financing.

The relevance of this topic and problem encourages further analysis. Therefore, the prospect for further study is the issue of more detailed research and development of strategies and measures to protect democracy and electoral processes. Further research should be based on more data to establish a correlation between electoral interference, economic cooperation between countries, declining democracy indices, and public confidence in governments and democratic institutions.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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**Іноземне втручання в виборчі процеси як фактор
міжнародної політики: механізми та протидія**

Анотація. Актуальність дослідження обумовлена потребою більш чітко розуміти механізми та напрямки іноземного втручання в виборчі процеси в країнах Північної Америки та Європи. Це необхідно для розробки ефективних заходів протидії спробам підриву демократичних процесів та водночас їх вдосконалення відповідно до викликів епохи цифрових медіа. Метою проведення дослідження є аналіз сучасної політики Китаю та РФ в сфері впливу на виборчі процеси в демократичних країнах, аналіз можливих заходів протидії цьому втручання. У дослідженні використовувалися такі методи: евристичний, індукції, синтезу, абстрактно-логічний. За результатами дослідження виявлено, що виборчі процеси в Північній Америці та державах Європи піддаються постійному втручання з боку Китаю та Росії, оскільки кожна з цих країн має власні мотиви для демонтажу демократії в цих країнах регіонах. При цьому, простежено збільшення цих маніпуляцій внаслідок процесів цифровізації. За результатами аналізу механізмів маніпуляції розроблено класифікацію типів втручання цих держав в виборчі процеси, зокрема вказано про три головних сценарії такого впливу та п'ять видів втручання. Визначено, що Росія найбільше вдається до маніпулювання інформацією, втілюючи в життя концепції «постправди», а Китай – до підривної діяльності в суспільстві. Як в ЄС, так і в США є багато заходів щодо протидії такому втручання, але більшість із таких заходів складаються із викриття втручання, розповсюдження такої інформації серед громадськості та технологічних дій. Зроблено висновок, що захист демократії має спиратись виключно на відкриті та демократичні способи протидії іноземному втручання, а порушення прав громадян задля буде лише ще більше підривати віру в демократичні цінності. Зроблено висновок, що протидія втручання в виборчі процеси, перш за все, має спиратись бути на інформування громадян про ризики маніпуляції, медіаграмотність, критичне мислення та готовність до постійної політичної активності. Практичне значення цього дослідження полягає в тому, що воно допоможе в формуванні стратегії протидії іноземним втручанням в демократичні процеси

Ключові слова: дипломатія; громадянська участь; маніпуляція; вектори впливу; методи боротьби
