



His Excellency Mr Margaritis Schinas
Vice-President of the European Commission
for Protecting our European Way of Life

His Excellency Mr Josep Borrell Fontelles
High Representative of the Union for
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and
Vice-President of the European Commission
for a Stronger Europe in the World

Date 16 November 2020
Re Request for exchange of views on undesirable influence through foreign
financing

Your Excellencies,

The recent terrorist attacks in Austria and France have deeply shocked us all. Their effects are being felt across Europe, including in Dutch society. We feel that these attacks are an attack on our values and on the democratic legal order. We must do everything we can to prevent such attacks from happening again. As President Macron said in his speech on the fight against *séparatismes*, we have to work hard to make sure that individuals do not turn their back on society, and to eliminate separate societies that run parallel to our own and where democratic values are undermined.

In the Netherlands, we have seen that our core values are being challenged due to the growing influence of a small group of individuals who exhibit or encourage problematic, anti-democratic behaviour based on extreme religious teachings. These extremists have a disproportionately wide reach within our country's Muslim communities. They spread their ideology through active and professional use of social media and informal religious education.

Our government fears that financial flows from outside the EU are one factor that is enabling these worrying developments. We want to address foreign financing that buys undesirable influence. This is not an easy thing to do. Possible measures against this kind of foreign financing often conflict with our own fundamental rights, such as freedom of association, freedom of religion and the free movement of capital. Moreover, although the anti-democratic behaviour stimulated by foreign financing is problematic, it is often not illegal. Nevertheless, we in the Netherlands have adopted a government-wide approach and taken modest steps towards enhancing the transparency of foreign funding of civil and religious organisations. This has enabled us to take action in some cases where we were concerned that undesirable influence was being exerted.

At the informal European Council in October, Prime Minister Rutte called for joint EU action to limit non-transparent foreign financing that fosters undesirable foreign influence on civil and religious organisations in European countries. His message was echoed by a joint statement following the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden on 5

November. On 9 November, when the President of the European Council paid tribute to the victims of the attack in Vienna, he too referred to the need for effective measures to limit foreign funding of the dissemination of hate. The topic was also discussed in the video conference on the fight against terrorism, held on 10 November, in which President Macron, Chancellor Kurz, Chancellor Merkel, Council President Michel, Commission President von der Leyen and Prime Minister Rutte participated.

Many member states have expressed their concern about undesirable influence through foreign financing, and are struggling to find a suitable response. The Netherlands would be keen to start an exchange of views with member states and EU institutions on this cross-border issue, lessons learned and possible solutions.

Topics that could be discussed are:

- exchanging information on the appropriate scale for tackling this problem;
- best practices in national legislation;
- how to engage with countries that are a source of foreign funding;
- ways of enhancing the transparency of financial flows from outside the EU that are channelled through another EU country;
- legal ways of limiting non-transparent foreign financing which exerts undesirable influence on civil and religious organisations in European countries.

We also call on the Commission to help jointly tackle this issue by translating the outcome of these exchanges into practical proposals. In this way we can make foreign financing of civil and religious organisations more transparent and reduce its negative effects on our societies.

We look forward receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely,



Stef Blok
Minister of Foreign Affairs



Ferdinand Grapperhaus
Minister of Justice and Security