

Brussels, 11 December 2018

To: *President of the European Parliament* Antonio Tajani

Members of the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members Danuta Hübner, Mady Delvaux, Sajjad Karim, Jean-Marie Cavada, Jiri Mastalka, Heidi Hautala, Laura Ferrara, Gerolf Annemans

Chairs of the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group David McAllister, Linda McAvan

Copies have been sent to: *Member of Committee on Foreign Affairs*, Petras Auštrevičius, *Rapporteur of Resolution "Corruption and human rights in third countries"*.

Subject: Protecting the European Parliament from undue foreign influence

Dear Mr President, dear Members,

As the leading organisation in the fight against corruption, Transparency International has long been working on curbing undue influence on institutions around the world and to shield them from corruption.

Over one year ago, a group of investigative journalists published [the Azerbaijani Laundromat revelations](#). The journalists uncovered a secret €2.5 billion slush fund run out of Azerbaijan government to buy influence and launder the country's image in a number of European countries.

The story contained a number of allegations about the behaviour of members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), which led to an independent investigation that corroborated many of the allegations, and a PACE resolution with recommendations to prevent similar cases of corruption and undue influence in the future.

PACE was however not the only target of the Azerbaijani campaign and Members of the European Parliament have in the past been invited by organisations close to the Azeri government. As you know, this has led to investigations by the Advisory Committee in 2013/2014, which found seven members in breach of the Code of Conduct for not having declared their trips to Azerbaijan paid for by those organisations.

The [PACE resolution](#) of April 2018 calls upon the European Parliament to follow their example to conduct an independent investigation and to draw on the recommendations of their own investigation.

In fact, the European Parliament had already adopted in September 2017 [a resolution](#) on "Corruption and human rights in third countries" [calling for](#) an investigation into the behaviour of the Azerbaijani state. Parliament had pledged to conduct a "comprehensive" investigation into "attempts by Azerbaijan and other autocratic regimes ... to influence European decision-makers through illicit means".

It appears that, to date, the European Parliament has not started any investigation into possible

attempts by Azerbaijan or other autocratic regimes to influence its members. Given the widespread and systematic nature of the attempts to influence international bodies described in the independent PACE report, we would urge the European Parliament to conduct a similar investigation. Such an investigation could also review the safeguards the Parliament in place to protect itself from the undue influence of foreign governments. Given the widespread public concern about the documented attempts of authoritarian governments round the world to undermine democratic elections and institutions, and the upcoming European elections, such a review would be apposite and timely. We also note that conducting such a review is one of the European Parliament's commitments under the UN Convention Against Corruption, which the European Union ratified in 2008.

The people of Azerbaijan are paying a heavy price for the grand corruption in their country. The authoritarian government has cracked down on activists, critical journalists, and the opposition through arbitrary [arrests](#) and [unjust convictions](#) according to NGOs and the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers.

We are more than happy to present our position in person or to answer any questions you might have.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Carl Dolan
Director
Transparency International EU