OFFICE FRANÇAIS
DE L'INTÉGRITÉ SCIENTIFIQUE

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND RESEARCH SECURITY: TOWARDS A COORDINATED APPROACH IN RESPONSE TO FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

Prospective Note – February 2026

INTRODUCTION

Foreign interference targeting the research sector is receiving increasing attention. With several countries openly engaging in interference strategies,[1] which are facilitated today by artificial intelligence,[2] a number of national and international actors have been warning about this issue in recent years. In France, in September 2021, an initial report on non-European influences in French academia, known as the "Gattolin report" named after the senator leading this work, highlighted the need to better protect our research community from this type of interference.[3] At the international level, in May 2023, the ministers of science and technology of the G7 countries expressed concern about the risks posed by foreign interference to research integrity and security in a joint statement.[4] The Council of the European Union, as another example, adopted a recommendation in May 2024 calling for greater research security while preserving academic freedom. [5]

Recent examples that fuel the news are not lacking: from the entryism of Confucius Institutes[6] to the Trump administration's attempts at ideological influence[7] as well as various cases of scientific espionage.[8] In France, the French General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI) is raising awareness of this issue. For instance, in June 2024, DGSI published a note to draw the attention of researchers who have won scientific awards to the risks of capture and influence to which their notoriety exposes them.[9]

Stakeholders responsible for research integrity are increasingly being called upon to address these types of risks, without the risks being precisely characterised. However, the operational handling of foreign interference cases largely falls under the responsibility of security and defence stakeholders, an area often referred to as "research security" and not intended to address issues of research integrity.

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[1] Houlié S. on behalf of the French Parliamentary Delegation for Intelligence. "Rapport public relatif à l'activité de la délégation parlementaire au renseignement pour l'année 2022-2023". June 2023.
[2] David A and Saint-Paul L. on behalf of the French Foreign Affairs Commission. "Rapport d'information sur l'irruption de l'intelligence artificielle dans les ingérences étrangères". January 2025.
[3] Gattolin A. "Rapport d'information fait au nom de la mission d'information sur les influences étatiques extra-européennes dans le monde universitaire et académique français et leurs incidences". September 2021.
[4] Available from: French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Space. "Déclaration finale du G7 des ministres de la science et de la technologie". May 2023.
[5] Council of the European Union. "COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on enhancing research security". May 2024.
[6] Guibert N. "Les Instituts Confucius en France, de si discrets relais chinois". *Le Monde*. July 2021.
[7] Mallapaty, S. "Trump team 'survey' sent to overseas researchers prompts foreign-interference fears". *Nature*. March 2025.
[8] For example, André J. "Mise en examen d'un mathématicien bordelais pour intelligence avec la Chine". *Intelligence Online*. January 2026 ; Seurin T. "'Il se passe des choses bizarres' : un laboratoire bordelais au cœur d'une enquête pour suspicion d'espionnage chinois". *Sud-Ouest*. November 2025; Fisayo-Bambi J & Liabot J-P. "Les universités danoises rejettent certains chercheurs étrangers par crainte d'espionnage". *EuroNews*. July 2025.
[9] French General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI). "Intérêts étrangers pour les chercheurs français lauréats de distinctions scientifiques". Flash ingérence n° 104. June 2024.

In this context, the French office for research integrity (Ofis) has therefore undertaken an ongoing prospective effort. The aim is twofold:

1) Identify the extent to which different forms of foreign interference are likely to pose a risk to research integrity–i.e. to undermine the reliability of research results and the proper functioning of research communities;

2) Explore how research integrity issues are addressed by existing security mechanisms – in particular the framework for the Protection of the Nation's Scientific and Technical Potential (PPST), in order to better assess the scope of action of the various actors responsible for research integrity, including Ofis.

This note, intended for institutional and political stakeholders responsible for research integrity as well as those responsible for research security (at both the national and local levels), provides a cursory overview of the current situation. In line with several international actors,[10] the Ofis recognises the need for coordination between these two communities. It calls for the development of a shared culture of vigilance, where scientific rigour and the protection of strategic knowledge contribute to preserving the autonomy and trustworthiness of research.

1. RESEARCH FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

As defined by the "Houlié" law, an act of foreign interference is "an act committed directly or indirectly at the request or on behalf of a foreign power and having the purpose or effect, by any means, including the communication of false or inaccurate information, of undermining the fundamental interests of the Nation, the functioning or integrity of its essential infrastructure, or the regular functioning of its democratic institutions".[11]

In a geopolitical context marked by growing tensions,[12] the research sector can become a strategic area of confrontation. By weakening a state's scientific and technological capabilities, a foreign actor may, for example, attempt to limit its lead in critical areas. Similarly, by undermining a state's scientific influence, a hostile actor may seek to isolate this state or reduce its influence in multilateral bodies.

According to the Gattolin report,[13] when foreign interference attempts target the research sector, they primarily aim to achieve two objectives:

- the instrumentalisation of research to promote the narrative of a state – understood as the strategic use of discourses to support a political position, whether factual or not;
- the capture of data, knowledge, and expertise in order to gain a strategic advantage (whether economic or military).

More broadly, these acts of interference are likely to contribute to the destabilisation of democracies, in which research plays a fundamental role in informing decisions, particularly through targeted disinformation campaigns. By instilling doubt about the trustworthiness of experts or research findings, a foreign actor can fuel widespread mistrust of legitimate sources of knowledge and, ultimately, weaken institutions.

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[10] Some examples:
OECD. "Integrity and security in the global research ecosystem". June 2022.
Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (European Commission). "Tackling R&I foreign interference: staff working document". January 2022.
G7 Working Group on the Security and Integrity of the Global Research Ecosystem (SIGRE), "G7 Common Values and Principles on Research Security and Research Integrity". June 2022.
Mollaki, V., Ziouvelou, X., Giouvanopoulou, K., & Karkaletsis, V. "Challenges and Recommendations for Research Security: Learning from Research Ethics and Integrity". *Research Ethics*. January 2026.
[11] See the Article 7 from the Law No. 2024-850 of 25 July 2024 on preventing foreign interference in France.
[12] French General Secretariat for Defence and National Security (SGDSN). "National Strategic Review 2025". July 2025.
[13] Gattolin A. "Rapport d'information fait au nom de la mission d'information sur les influences étatiques extra-européennes dans le monde universitaire et académique français et leurs incidences". September 2021.

To note

Foreign interference is only one form of interference in research. Cases of domestic interference – documented elsewhere in some national contexts such as the United States[14] – are not addressed here. While all types of interference warrant consideration on the protection of academic freedom and scientific independence against external pressures, not all of them require a coordinated approach with the security and defence sector.

The culture of openness makes the research sector particularly vulnerable to foreign interference strategies: international collaboration, resource sharing and open science are among the conditions necessary for the advancement of knowledge. This sector is also dependent on competition to access funding, which makes research both a driver of innovation and a prime target for external influence strategies – some of which involve offering or withdrawing funds. Foundations or companies, for example, can act as intermediaries to fund chairs or projects that are more or less directly linked to interference objectives.

Some areas of research are particularly exposed, such as technological research with potential military applications ('dual-use research'), but also research on politically controversial topics, research in sensitive fields, scientific work generating or requiring large amounts of data, and research dependent on non-sovereign infrastructure. However, outside of some sensitive disciplines, communities are generally not aware of or trained in the risks of interference and manipulation – sometimes leading to a kind of 'naivety' towards the actions of potential malicious actors, according to several parliamentary reports.[15]

2. Foreign interference represents a risk to research integrity

Foreign interference in research can take various forms: political, administrative, or financial pressure (e.g. through the withdrawal of research funding or denial of access to research fields);[16] exploitation of individuals through intimidation or blackmail (e.g. online harassment or even SLAPPs – Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation);[17] digital intrusion or entryism.[18] These different forms of interference pose different risks to research integrity; namely, situations in which the actions of foreign states or third parties compromise or attempt to undermine the proper functioning of research communities or the reliability of results.

The Ofis suggests distinguishing between three types of risks[19] for research communities. Each risk leads to different potential effects on research integrity. These risks were identified on the basis of documentary searches – national and international reports, press articles, publicly available cases – e.g. *Flashs ingérence* published by DGSI, or those published by the US funding agency, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) – as well as interviews with some of the key actors in the French research security system and in the academic

[14] The instrumentalisation of research to promote a state's narrative is the aim of several forms of political interference in research, which are not necessarily external: these mechanisms can be observed within a given state, when the political system in place interferes within its own research community – something that has been widely documented, for instance, in the United States during Donald Trump's first and second terms. See for example: Tollefson, J. "The plan to" Trump-proof" US science against meddling". *Nature*. 2023.

[15] See for instance Gattolin A. "Rapport d'information fait au nom de la mission d'information sur les influences étatiques extra-européennes dans le monde universitaire et académique français et leurs incidences". September 2021; Témal R. "Lutte contre les influences étrangères malveillantes. Pour une mobilisation de toute la Nation face à la néo-guerre froide". July 2024.

[16] See, in particular, the Inalco survey: Allès D. & Perrodin L. "Recherche, formation et expertise sur des terrains 'empêchés' ou 'entravés' – Pratiques, méthodes et nouvelles ressources". Data paper #1. December 2024.

[17] « They can be defined as legal proceedings brought by companies, institutions or public personalities, which are not aimed at winning on legal grounds but at silencing the targets by subjecting them to costly proceedings fought on unequal terms » [free translation] – Delmas P. "Directive contre les procédures-bâillons : face aux limites du cadre européen, plaidoyer en faveur d'une transposition ambitieuse". May 2024.

[18] In terms of entryism, one example is the 'Confucius Institutes', created by the Chinese government as a tool of soft power for Chinese culture. As reported in the Gattolin report, they have been present in France since 2005 and are mainly located in medium-sized cities with universities. Pressure from these institutes led, for example, to the cancellation of conferences by the Dalai Lama at the University of Sydney in 2013 and at Sciences Po Paris in 2016. See for example : Sabado E. "L'enseignement supérieur français sous la menace de l'ingérence de la Chine". *L'étudiant*. December 2021.

[19] An initial version of these types of risk was published in this article: Chapin C & Voarino N. "L'intégrité scientifique, garante de la fiabilité des sciences et de la recherche". *Techniques de l'ingénieur*. January 2025.

field. Several examples are provided to illustrate these three types of risk. It should be noted that, for security reasons, the handling of identified cases prioritised discretion over publicity.

Risk 1: deception of research communities

In general, deception refers to all practices that deliberately mislead an individual or a group by concealing the true identity of the actors, their intentions, affiliations, or objectives in order to gain a strategic, informational or operational advantage.[20] In the context of foreign interference in research, communities can be deceived when one or more individuals acting on behalf of a foreign state hide political or strategic objectives under the guise of contributing to or participating in research activities. Deception can be used to capture, alter or delete research data, materials or results.

Examples of cases:

Case presented by the US Department of Justice in a press release: A researcher was sentenced to prison for lying on funding applications in order to develop scientific expertise for China using more than $4 million in US grants. He did not disclose his conflicts of interest to either his employers or the NIH. The researcher was participating in the Chinese Talent Plan, a programme established by the Chinese government to recruit individuals with access to foreign technology intellectual property.[21]

Case presented by the DGSI in the context of incidents observed in sensitive research facilities involving foreign researchers: A foreign scientist who had been working in a French research laboratory for several months plagiarised the sensitive work of the research team director. A few years after his departure, when it came time to publish the results of his research, the director realised that they had already been published by the foreign scientist, who copied the laboratory's results without citing them. As the DGSI commented after presenting this case: "Some states rely on their nationals working in foreign research facilities in strategic fields to gather information and expertise that could strengthen their scientific, industrial or military capabilities" [free translation].[22]

Examples of potential effects on research integrity:

- False results or bias in research results – arising, for example, from conflicts of interest that are not managed or not declared, or from "imposter participants".[23] Predatory journals and paper mills represent potential vectors for manipulation or deterioration of scientific literature on a larger scale.[24]
- Breach of peer review integrity – through misrepresentation in the review of articles or funding applications, or through breaches of confidentiality.
- Plagiarism or any other failure to acknowledge contributions – resulting from the theft or capture of data, knowledge and research results.
- Obstructing reproducibility and peer review – for example, by destroying data, results or research materials, such as the 'withholding research data or results'.[25]

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[20] Based on the definitions provided by the Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales.
[21] US Department of Justice. "University Researcher Sentenced to Prison for Lying on Grant Applications to Develop Scientific Expertise for China". *Press release*. May 2021.
[22] French General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI). "Exemples d'incidents constatés dans des structures de recherche sensibles en lien avec des chercheurs étrangers". Flash ingérence n°85. June 2022.
[23] Research is vulnerable to attacks by bots or human imposters seeking to falsify the results of online studies, particularly when recruitment of research participants is carried out on social media. If researchers are unaware of this, they risk unwittingly perpetuating the deception they have fallen victim to (i.e. incorporating this false data into their results). These participants are not necessarily aiming to falsify results, but rather to obtain the compensation offered. While we have not identified any cases of imposters distorting a study as part of foreign interference, we believe it is possible that such cases could occur. See for examples: Salmons J. "Avoid Scams, Imposters, and Fraud in Online Research Participation". *Sage Research Methods Community*. May 2024.
[24] Papermills are predatory industries that write and sell fake scientific articles or authorship positions. Advances in generative AI have amplified the impact of these industries. In 2022, it was estimated that 1.5% to 2% of scientific literature was flooded with articles from papermills. See Van Noorden, R. "How big is science's fake-paper problem". *Nature*. November 2023.
[25] Withholding research data or results without justification is an unacceptable research practice according to All European Academies (ALLEA). "The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity". June 2023.

Risk 2: discrediting of research communities

In general, discrediting consists of intentionally undermining the credibility, legitimacy or authority of a person, group, institution or body of knowledge by raising doubts about its reliability, integrity, competence, or motivations, whether through well-founded criticism, partial questioning, or through distortion, conflation or disinformation.[26] In the context of foreign interference in research, discrediting refers to all actions carried out on behalf of a foreign state with the aim of undermining the credibility, legitimacy or authority of researchers, teams, scientific institutions or research results by raising doubts about their integrity, independence, competence or methods. These attempts at interference can undermine the credibility of honest researchers or the reliability of rigorous research. Conversely, they can also aim to legitimise an official narrative or public discourse with fallacious scientific support.

Examples of cases:

Example presented by the DGSI in the context of environments conducive to attempts at foreign economic interference: "A French research laboratory specialising in a technological field exposed to strong international competition was the victim of a campaign of disinformation that could have prevented it from participating in a funding programme [...] Although the origin of this information campaign could not be formally identified, it could be the result of malicious actions initiated by foreign competitors in order to disqualify its application for the funding programme" [free translation].[27] As the DGSI comments, "these French actors may thus be the targets of attacks on their reputation, actions that consist of disseminating, in various forms [...] false information that could damage their image and call into question their integrity or the reliability of their research products" [free translation].[28]

Example from a report by the French Service for Vigilance and Protection against Foreign Digital Interference (*Viginum*) on information manipulation in the age of artificial intelligence: "On 13 December 2024, the independent Russian-language investigative media The Insider published an article presenting a new Matryoshka campaign [...] aimed at convincing Internet users that professors from prestigious universities were calling on the West to lift sanctions against Russia, while criticising Ukrainian President Volodymyr ZELENSKY. Investigations showed the use of AI tools in these videos, in particular to clone the voices of academics, some of whom had confirmed that the statements were not made by them".[29]

Examples of potential effects on research integrity:

- Undue questioning of the reliability of results or the integrity of research communities – undermining efforts by research integrity policies to promote trust in science.
- Instrumentalisation of academic legitimacy that may lead to the fabrication or falsification of research results, or to members of the research community making public statements outside their field of expertise – all of which may constitute research misconduct or unacceptable practices.

Risk 3: coercion of (or strong influence on) research communities

In general, coercion consists of compelling someone to act against their will or placing someone in a position where they have no choice but to act.[30] Influence, on the other hand, refers to generally imperceptible actions that are exercised on individuals' psychological dispositions and moral, political, or intellectual opinions. In the field of international relations, it refers to the actions that one country exercises on the politics, the economy, the culture, the way of life or the organisation of public affairs of another country.[31] In the context of foreign interference in research, a person acting on behalf of a foreign state may attempt to discourage various actors from funding, conducting, or disseminating specific research or results

[26] Based on the definitions provided by the Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales.
[27] French General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI). "Les risques d'atteinte à la réputation d'entreprises ou de laboratoires français évoluant à l'international". Flash ingérence n° 109. January 2025. p. 4
[28] *Ibid*. p. 3
[29] French Service for Vigilance and Protection against Foreign Digital Interference (Viginum) (French General Secretariat for Defence and National Security). "Challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence in the fight against information manipulation". February 2025. p. 9
[30] Based on the definitions provided by the Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales.
[31] Based on the definitions provided by the Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales.

through intimidation and coercion. The first two risks create a general climate of insecurity and can also contribute to negatively influencing the behaviour of research communities.

Examples of cases:

Case presented in the reports on the fact-finding mission on the influence of extra-European states: "Recently, the Cairn portal, which publishes articles from French journals in the humanities and social sciences, received a request from a Chinese university to remove the December 2020 issue of the journal Esprit, entirely devoted to China, from its catalogue on the grounds that the subject was 'sensitive'. Cairn refused".[32]

Case highlighted in the Gattolin report and detailed in an opinion piece by Maxime Audinet: Researcher Maxime Audinet's work on Russia Today, seen as a Russian propaganda tool, led to him being sued for defamation, but he was acquitted in February 2025. The lawsuit focused in particular on comments made in a report on the impact of information manipulation on democracies. Maxime Audinet denounced the proceedings as a 'SLAPP', aimed at stopping research on certain sensitive subjects and potentially leading researchers to practice self-censorship.[33]

Examples of potential effects on research integrity:

- Lack of rigour or reliability due to the reframing of research questions, methods, or results for reasons other than scientific ones (similar to situations of unmanaged conflicts of interest).
- Undermining objectivity, when interference leads research communities to disseminate only data or results that support a particular viewpoint, and to censor data and results that contradict it – such as the misconduct described as *cherry-picking.*[34]
- Limits available knowledge, and may lead to certain topics being under-studied or even not studied at all in the longer term – as a result of censorship or self-censorship.
- Embellishment, fabrication, or falsification of data and research results could result from the pressures exerted.

Each of the identified risks—deception, discredit, coercion—requires different measures. These include training research communities, strengthening protection against different forms of coercion, and, for discrediting strategies, developing critical thinking skills with regard to new media and contemporary information channels, beyond research communities alone.

Foreign interference is therefore likely to affect all the actors involved in the research process—researchers, research support staff, research funding organisations, scientific publishers and editors, research performing organisations etc. It is also likely to affect all stages of the research cycle (see the Figure on the next page).

Foreign interference can ultimately affect other components of society that benefit from such research, and undermine public trust in science. It should therefore be a matter of concern for all institutional stakeholders involved in ensuring compliance with the rules that guarantee honest, rigorous, reliable, and credible research.

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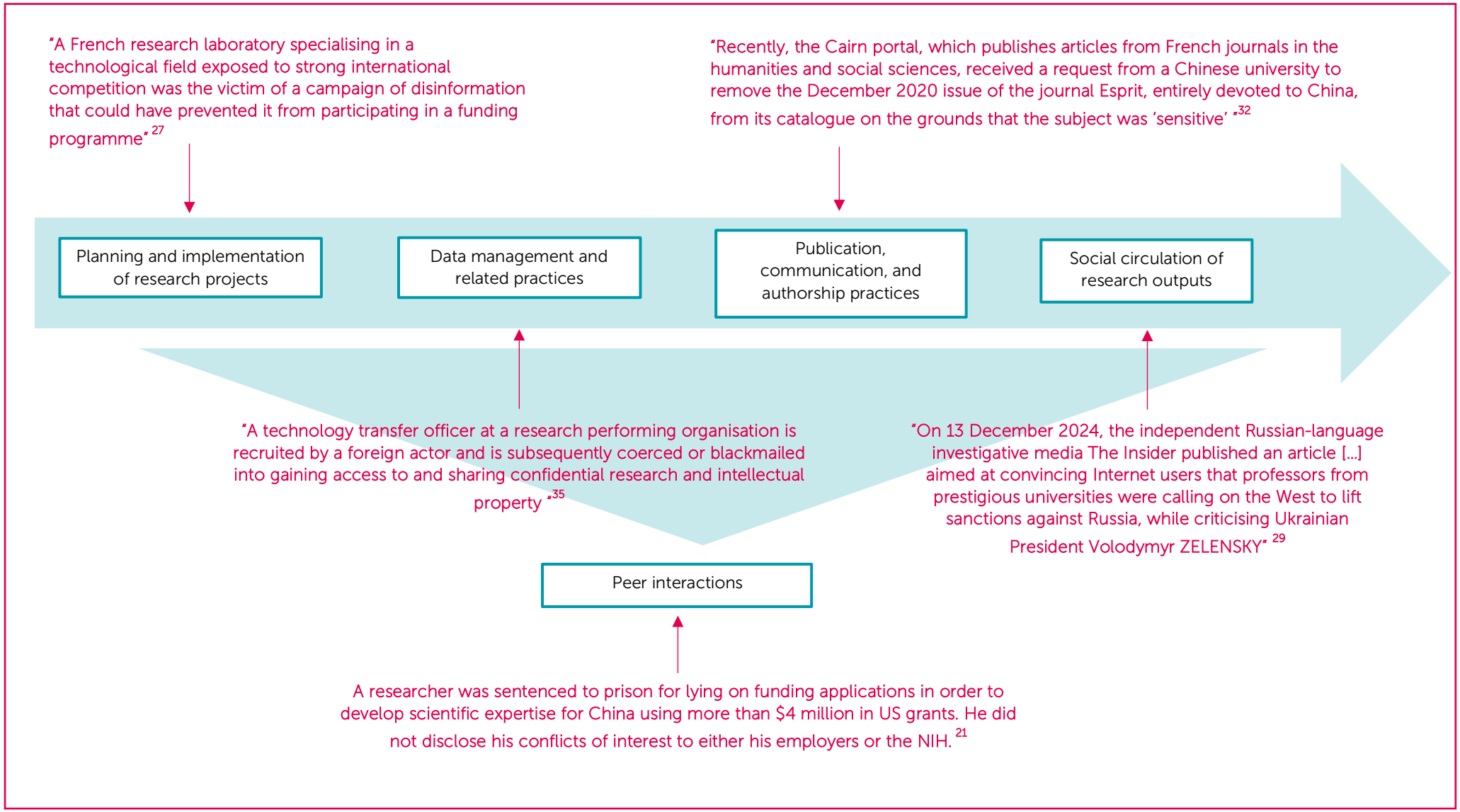
[32] See the reports on the fact-finding mission on the influence of extra-European states published in July 2021, on the French Senate website.

[33] See: Audinet M. "Travailler sur la Russie, comme sur d'autres Etats autoritaires ou aux tendances illibérales, expose nombre de chercheurs à "des procédures-bâillons". *Le Monde*. March 2025.

[34] Cherry picking is a form of research misconduct that involves ignoring evidence that contradicts an opinion in order to only consider evidence that supports it. This practice undermines the reliability of research activities, which require all available knowledge to be taken into account in order to draw objective conclusions. A mediatised case of cherry picking, reported in autumn 2022, involved Florida's Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo, who is also a researcher at the University of Florida. He allegedly publicly advised young men against receiving the messenger RNA vaccine through official government channels, based on a single study demonstrating a cardiac risk (neither published nor peer reviewed). For more details on the case, see in particular: Dyer O. "Covid-19: Florida's surgeon general used "careless" research practice in recommending against vaccination, his university finds". *BMJ*. January 2023.

[35] (Figure) Example taken from Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (European Commission). "Tackling R&I foreign interference: staff working document". January 2022. p. 12

***Figure**. Examples of foreign interference cases based on their impact on the research process*



3. RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND RESEARCH SECURITY IN FRANCE

In France, as in several European countries, research integrity and research security fall under two distinct institutional systems, involving different actors and control or prevention mechanisms at both the national and local levels.

While the main objective of France's national research integrity policy is to promote a shared culture of good research practices across all disciplines, the research security policy is primarily aimed at protecting the sovereign interests of the Nation, focusing mainly on research with potential military applications.

Research Integrity refers to the set of rules and values that must govern research activities in order to ensure that they are honest and scientifically rigorous. Any practice that undermines the reliability of results and the proper functioning of research communities is likely to constitute research misconduct[36] – which may be the case for behaviour resulting from foreign interference or influenced by foreign interference activities.

Research performing organisations and research funding organisations have an obligation to foster conditions that ensure compliance with research integrity requirements. These requirements stem mainly from the research communities themselves, since peers in each discipline can define the conditions for reliable and credible research. Beyond disciplinary differences, however, good practices are based on common principles, such as reliability, honesty, respect, and accountability.[37]

The aforementioned organisations must appoint a research integrity officer (RIO), whose role is to investigate cases of research misconduct in accordance with a procedure established in line with the Ofis recommendations.[38] If a case of foreign interference impacts research integrity, whether as an initial objective or as a side effect, the RIO may need to intervene to alleviate its impact. In the event of proven misconduct, various measures may be implemented: correction of the scientific record,[39] reporting to relevant stakeholders,[40] support and training, or even disciplinary action in the most serious cases. Rehabilitative measures or other corrective actions may be implemented, such as restoration of reputation for those who were found not to have committed research misconduct.

However, cases of foreign interference may differ from typical cases of research misconduct, particularly in terms of the intent, motivations, and capacity to cause harm of the individuals involved — or those influencing the individuals responsible for the misconduct. Breaches of integrity appear to be a side effect of actions taken for strategic or political purposes. Academic actors who find themselves deceived, influenced, or coerced in this context do not necessarily commit intentional scientific fraud. The committed misconduct may not be a deliberate attempt to transgress scientific norms, nor honest error. Therefore, the responses traditionally used to address research misconduct — namely, disciplinary procedures, awareness-raising measures focused on individual good practice, or academic sanctions—may prove inadequate or insufficient to address these situations effectively. Furthermore, RIOs are not necessarily equipped or trained to detect or manage this type of risk and may find themselves challenged or even overwhelmed by geostrategic or political issues.

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[36] French Office for Research Integrity. "Qu'est-ce qu'un manquement à l'intégrité scientifique ?". October 2024.
[37] ALLEA (All European Academies). "The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity". June 2023.
[38] For a list of the obligations of research organisations with regard to research integrity, see the Article D. 211-2 from the Research Code. For the Ofis recommendations, see the French Office for Research Integrity."Recommandations relatives à la procédure de traitement des manquements à l'intégrité scientifique". July 2025.
[39] For example, by notifying a journal to correct or retract a scientific article affected by a research misconduct.
[40] For the reliability of research and the proper functioning of research communities, when a misconduct is proven following an investigation and affects research data or publications, all stakeholders concerned should be informed. They may need to take action, each according to their prerogatives. These may include research funding organisations, ethics committees, publishers or scientific journals, etc. See French Office for Research Integrity. "Quels sont les acteurs à informer en cas de manquements à l'intégrité scientifique avérés ?". December 2023.

Research Security "involves the actions that protect our research communities from actors and behaviours that pose economic, strategic, and/or national and international security risks".[41] In France, this is mainly ensured by the framework for the Protection of the Nation's Scientific and Technical Potential (PPST). This framework aims to "protect the most sensitive knowledge, expertise and technologies of public and private institutions (research laboratories, companies, etc.) located on national territory, whose misappropriation or capture could:

- undermine the economic interests of the nation;
- strengthen foreign military arsenals or weakening French defence capabilities;
- contribute to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their vectors;
- be used for terrorist purposes on national territory or abroad" [free translation].[42]

The PPST framework offers legal and administrative protection resulting from the creation of a zone covering activities identified as sensitive or strategic, in which the circulation of people is restricted: called 'zones à régime restrictif' (ZRR) for 'controlled areas'. The framework is led by the French General Secretariat for Defence and National Security (SGDSN) and implemented by Senior Defence & Security Officials for 'Haut fonctionnaire défense et sécurité' (HFDS) within six ministries, as well as by Defence & Security Officials — called for the purpose of this note Research Security Officers (RSO) — at the local level (one within each research organisation). This mechanism also enables the HFDS to issue opinions on international cooperation projects, whether scientific or technical.[43]

The DGSI and its regional divisions also contribute to implementing the PPST by raising awareness among relevant stakeholders (particularly researchers), conducting building audits, and investigating reports relayed by RSOs. With the monthly publication of *Flash ingérence,*[44] the DGSI presents cleared cases and makes recommendations to prevent or respond to threats posed by foreign interference, whether they relate to digital security, conditions for effective collaboration, assessment of the sensitivity of work, discretion, etc.

The objectives of the PPST necessarily focus the framework on protecting disciplines with technological applications, in particular dual-use research, which has military applications. However, other disciplines may also be affected, even if the threat to national security may appear to be less significant. The PPST's threshold for vigilance is high: its implementation only applies to significant risks of knowledge and know-how being captured.[45] Some cases may therefore escape the framework and remain unaddressed. There is also a form of reluctance among some research communities to comply with the vigilance measures of the PPST framework, fearing excessive control by non-academic stakeholders[46] or excessive administrative burden.

The protection of research integrity, which is mainly absent from the discourse and training offered by security and defence stakeholders, is not guaranteed by these mechanisms, as they were not designed for this purpose. They focus on other types of issues, assessed from a counter-espionage perspective, aimed primarily at protecting the interests of the Nation.

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[41] G7 Working Group on the Security and Integrity of the Global Research Ecosystem (SIGRE). "G7 Common Values and Principles on Research Security and Research Integrity". June 2022. p. 2

[42] See the French General Secretariat for Defence and National Security (SGDSN) web page: "Protéger le potentiel scientifique et technique de la nation" (accessed January 31, 2026).

[43] See the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Space web page: "Protection du potentiel scientifique et technique et intelligence économique (P.P.S.T.)" (accessed January 31, 2026).

[44] See the French General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI) web page: "Conseils aux entreprises : Flash ingérence" (accessed January 31, 2026).

[45] As highlighted in Gattolin A. "Rapport d'information fait au nom de la mission d'information sur les influences étatiques extra-européennes dans le monde universitaire et académique français et leurs incidences". September 2021.

[46] This is evidenced by the recent complaint of abuse of power submitted to the French Council of State by an association of laboratory directors, which seeks to have the decree on the PPST and restricted areas revoked. See in particular the conclusions of Mr Florian Roussel, Public Rapporteur, before the Conseil d'État, "Conclusions No. 495971 – Association des directeurs de laboratoire", March 2025.

4. SOME DIRECTIONS FOR A COORDINATED APPROACH

Coordinating research security and research integrity policies at both the national and local levels aims to ensure that research integrity considerations are better addressed in the prevention and management of foreign interference in research. The complementarity of the two institutional systems must strike a balance between excessive measures that could hinder the advancement of knowledge or academic freedom, and overly lenient measures that would be ineffective against sophisticated interference mechanisms and the scale of their consequences.

To this end, Ofis identified several relevant directions to guide the further development of this work and recommendations which will be addressed to research performing organisations and RIOs:

- ✓ Raise awareness on research integrity issues among the research security community and highlight the risks posed by foreign interference to the various stakeholders responsible for research integrity;
- ✓ Adapt training and awareness-raising activities on research integrity for research communities in all disciplines (including those aimed at RIOs), including aspects relating to research security and the impacts of foreign interference. At the same time, encourage the integration of aspects relating to research integrity into training and awareness-raising activities on research security (including those aimed at RSOs);
- ✓ Consider the conditions for sharing information between actors from these two institutional systems, at both the national and local levels (e.g. between RIOs and RSOs within research performing organisations);
- ✓ Promote the development of knowledge on foreign interference in research in order to assess the scale of the phenomenon, better understand threats to scientific security and integrity, and share findings between and among these respective communities;
- ✓ Assess the consideration for research integrity issues in the current support provided to research communities regarding foreign interference and in the handling of cases within French institutions and transnationally when the French research communities are involved.
- ✓ Identify new mechanisms to adapt protection to disciplines other than dual-use (including the social sciences and humanities) and to different levels of risk and severity. These mechanisms should allow those responsible for research integrity to act within their respective areas of competence, such as correction of the scientific record or reporting to relevant stakeholders.

Some of the challenges identified:

- **Confidentiality**: information sharing could be limited by the different confidentiality obligations of actors in both fields (e.g. information sharing between RIOs and RSOs).

- **Discrimination**: there is a risk of excessive suspicion regarding research collaborations with actors from specific countries. Not all cases of scientific misconduct committed by foreign actors necessarily constitute foreign interference: they must be motivated by a strategic (national) objective. The measures developed should not be based on a specific list of countries, but rather on the level of risk, the fundamentals to be protected, or the types of threats.

- **Acceptability**: the involvement of non-academic actors in research governance may generate resistance from research communities whose standards are mainly based on self-regulation, even if the objective is to protect and support academic freedom. There is a need to promote a culture of integrity, security, and openness while respecting the expertise, skills, and practices specific to each of the two fields.

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