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| **Lord Sharpe of Epsom****Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State** |
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To: All Peers

 28 February 2023

My Lords,

**National Security Bill: Foreign Influence Registration Scheme**

I write to confirm that I will today be placing this letter in the House Library, alongside some documents relating to the Government’s proposed Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS). The scheme forms Part three of the National Security Bill.

The scheme strengthens the resilience of the UK political system against covert foreign influence and provides greater assurance around the activities of specified foreign powers or entities, delivering a key recommendation of the Intelligence and Security Committee’s 2020 *Russia Report* and bringing us in line with key allies[[1]](#footnote-2).

The Government is clear for the need for the scheme, including the political influence tier. Transparency on which foreign powers are influencing our politics is vital to defending our democracy. Those who comply with their obligations by declaring relevant arrangements and activities will contribute to the strengthening of the resilience of the UK political system against covert foreign influence.

However, the Government recognises the significant concerns that have been raised about the breadth of the scheme and the burdens it may impose on businesses, charities, universities and other sectors. We have responded to these concerns by tabling a series of amendments to the political influence tier. These include narrowing the tier to only cover arrangements with foreign powers (rather than any foreign entity) and providing that an individual may demonstrate that it was not reasonably practicable to register activities before carrying them out as part of their defence in proceedings. We have also accepted the recommendation of the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee to amend regulations governing publication of the register to the affirmative procedure.

The Government believes the revised scheme is proportionate and necessary. If a foreign power is seeking to influence British political life – such as elections, referendums or government decisions - then we consider they should have to be transparent about this.

In its revised form, the scheme requires registration of arrangements to carry out political influence activities where they are to be carried out at the direction of a foreign power. This is an important tool to improve transparency and make the UK a harder target for those foreign powers who wish to covertly influence our political system. I can assure my Lords that the Government is working hard to ensure that the transparency benefit does not create a disproportionate burden to those who will register.

The scheme also contains an enhanced tier, which requires registration of arrangements to carry out any activities at the direction of specified foreign powers, and specified entities subject to foreign power control. A foreign power/entity can only be specified under the enhanced tier when this is considered reasonably necessary by the Secretary of State to protect the safety or interests of the UK. This decision will be implemented through Regulations subject to the affirmative Parliamentary procedure.

The Bill provides for regulation-making powers, to provide the practical detail of how the scheme will operate. In order to provide Parliament with further information to assist with scrutiny of the scheme, I will be placing the following documents, alongside this letter, in the House library:

* Draft regulations in relation to the powers conferred by clauses 74(1) and (5) and 79 of the Bill;
* A policy statement relating to the remaining regulations under the scheme**;**
* Examples of completed registration forms; and
* An example of the information that will appear on the public register.

The policy statement outlines the way in which the Government intends to use the delegated powers conferred under the scheme. These include powers related to the information to be required at registration, information which is required when there is a material change to arrangements, the issue of information notices, information to be published on the public register and information which may be disclosed to public authorities. The statement also sets out how we expect the scheme to work in practice, including matters which will be set out in guidance to assist compliance.

The annexes to the policy statement provide an indication as to the types of information and level of detail that will be required on the registration form and, where applicable, that will be published on the public register. The number and types of questions that a registrant will need to answer will depend on factors such as what the activities are, who is carrying out the activities and whether they are registering for themselves or on behalf of another person.

I wish to extend again an invitation for any Peer to discuss the Bill with us as scrutiny continues. If this is of interest, please email LordsMinister@homeoffice.gov.uk and my office will provide further details.

I am grateful for the experience and expertise of your Lordships to date in engagement and through the scrutiny of this Bill in Committee.



**Lord Sharpe of Epsom**

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Home Office**

1. Both the U.S. and Australia have similar schemes in place through the Foreign Agent Registration Act 1938 and the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018 respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)