

20 May 2022

Professor Lorraine E. Ferris
Associate Vice President, Research Oversight and Compliance,
University of Toronto

Dear Prof. Ferris,

Re: Observations on the “CatalanGate” exchange and petition for an independent investigation

We are a group of academic researchers that have been following the Pegasus espionage scandal since the publication of the Citizen Lab report “CatalanGate; Extensive Mercenary Spyware Operation against Catalans Using Pegasus and Candiru” on 18 April 2022. The topic of cyber-surveillance and civil rights is of the utmost importance. Social scientists and policymakers should take very seriously the risks of illegal surveillance by states and non-governmental organisations. We greatly appreciate the work that activist organisations are playing in revealing abuses and requesting accountability from different states and private organisations involved in non-regulated espionage of citizens and civil society organisations.

The Pegasus spyware investigation has made many people aware of the potential threats to their privacy and caveats in governments’ transparency. It has had an impact on political dynamics in Spain and its security policies. The Spanish and European Parliaments have initiated investigations to understand the magnitude of the problem. Therefore, it is very important to guarantee that the sources of information feeding into this public assessment of the Pegasus espionage are as rigorous and reliable as possible.

We appreciate the questions made by Renew Europe MEPs to the University of Toronto on 11 May 2022, and the responses swiftly provided by Prof. Deibert on 13 May 2023 (that he shared publicly on Twitter and [uploaded](#) to the internet). We want to thank him for his disposition to assist with shedding light into this complex issue. However, after a close examination of this exchange, of the report, and of other publicly available relevant resources, we would like to pose further questions and observations and share them with the key stakeholders involved at the University of Toronto, the European Parliament, and beyond.

We firmly believe that Prof. Deibert’s responses do not properly address many of the issues raised over the last few weeks, in the press and in social media, concerning the rigour of the Citizen Lab investigation on Catalonia. On the contrary, they raise additional research ethics issues that may affect the validity and reliability of the report and its findings.

Based on the observations and unresolved questions compiled in the document “Methodological and ethical issues in Citizen Lab’s spyware investigation in Catalonia” (attached to this letter), we would like to formally request the University of Toronto an independent investigation, as soon as possible. Such assessment would help increase the confidence on certain findings and/or rule out some

conclusions that may result from potential research design flaws and fieldwork problems. This is particularly relevant given the authors of this report have been recommended as experts to provide testimony in different commissions and trials.

We assume that Citizen Lab, an institution notoriously committed to defending transparency and public accountability, frequently demanding governments, and other organisations to be independently investigated, would not oppose our equivalent request.

Our observations are organised following the same order of the original questions and responses (we attach the PDF with Prof. Deibert's responses and the letter of the Renew EMPs as reference). Most of the questions expressed are similar to those that Citizen Lab would have faced had they submitted the report to a normal peer-review process.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require additional clarification on the observations and questions expressed in the attached document.

We hope that the University of Toronto and the other stakeholders affected find our observations and questions useful.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Sincerely,

Dr José Javier Olivas Osuna, Department of Political Science and Administration, National Distance Education University & LSE IDEAS, The London School of Economics and Political Science.

Prof. Natividad Fernández Sola, Department of Public Law, University of Zaragoza.

Prof. Charles Powell, Director of Elcano Royal Institute.

Prof. David Ruiz Aguilar, Department of Mathematical Analysis, University of Granada.

Dr. Mira Milosevic, Senior Analyst for Russia and Eurasia, Elcano Royal Institute

Dr. Anar Ahmadov, Governance and Global Affairs, Leiden University.

Dr. Kenneth Dubin, IE Business School, Madrid.

Prof. Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio, Department of English and German Philology, University of Granada.

Prof. Manuel Arias Maldonado, Department of Political Science, University of Málaga.

Dr. Ashikur Rahman, Senior Economist, Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

Prof. Rafael Martínez, Department of Political Science and Constitutional Law, University of Barcelona.

Dr. Clara-Alexandra Volintiru, Department of International Business and Economics, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

Prof. Ricardo García Manrique Department of Political Science and Constitutional Law, University of Barcelona.

Dr. Corina Lacatus, School of Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary University of London.

Dr. Ninfa M. Fuentes Sosa, Division of International Studies, Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (CIDE).

Prof. César Nombela, Former President of the Spanish Council for Scientific Research, CSIC.

CC:

Dr. Rachel Zand, Director of Human Research Ethics Research Oversight & Compliance Office
Mr. Moritz Körner, Third Vice-Chair of the EP inquiry committee for Pegasus
Mr. Adrián Vázquez Lázara, MEP
Mr. Alex Matos, Director of Internal Audit
Mr. Jeroen Lenaers, MEP, Chair of the EP inquiry committee for Pegasus
Mr. Sándor Rónai, MEP, First Vice-Chair of the EP inquiry committee for Pegasus
Ms. Diana Riba i Giner, MEP, Second Vice-Chair of the EP inquiry committee for Pegasus
Ms. Maite Pagazaurtundúa, MEP
Ms. María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, MEP
Ms. Susana Solís Pérez, MEP
Prof. Luis Garicano, MEP
Prof. Meric Gertler, President of the University of Toronto
Prof. Peter Loewen, Director of the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy
Prof. Ronald Deibert, Director of Citizen Lab
Prof. Ted Hewitt, President of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

(This version has been amended on 23 May 2022 as one of the authors of the letter was left out in the previous version)