



European  
Commission

#DSM

# Digital Single Market

## TACKLING THE SPREADING OF DISINFORMATION ONLINE

In a Communication released on 26 April 2018, the European Commission put forward an action plan and self-regulatory tools to tackle the spread and impact of online disinformation in Europe and ensure the protection of European values and democratic systems. The Commission proposes an EU-wide Code of Practice on Disinformation, support of an independent network of fact-checkers, and tools to stimulate quality journalism.



The internet has grown enormously – nearly 1.3 billion websites allow 3.7 billion users daily to exchange information, trade and interact with unparalleled intensity.



Online manipulation and disinformation have been used in at least 18 countries during elections in recent years. Source: Freedom on the net report 2017, Freedom House.



Disinformation is a long existing phenomenon. While online platforms have brought many benefits, they also allow false information to be produced, widely disseminated and promoted.



According to Eurobarometer opinion poll 83 % of Europeans think fake news is a threat to democracy.



Since September 2015, EU's East StratCom Task Force, set up by the European External Action Service, has gathered more than 3,900 examples of pro-Kremlin disinformation contradicting publicly available facts, multiplied in many languages and repeated on a daily basis.

“Fake news” is a simplification of the complex problem of disinformation. Disinformation can be understood as false information deliberately created and spread to influence public opinion or obscure the truth. Disinformation does not include journalistic errors, satire, or parody. Fake news and online disinformation are not per se illegal and thus are not covered by existing legislation or self-regulation although some members states are looking into legislative actions.

### ANALYSING THE PHENOMENON AND ACTING AT EU LEVEL

Some Member States are already acting against disinformation online. These announcements reinforce the Commission in its work to find a European approach. The goal is to avoid fragmentation since the problem spans across borders. The challenge faced by the EU is how to arrive at effective and proportionate measures to counter fake news and online disinformation without damaging freedom of expression, a fundamental right and a cherished value for all Europeans.

## FOUR KEY PRINCIPLES GUIDE OUR WORK

**Transparency** so that citizens have clear information about news sources and funding

**Diversity** of information in the online and offline world because this fuels critical debate and judgement

The **credibility** of information must be obvious to citizens

**Inclusivity:** there can be no long term, sustainable solution without commitment from all the parties involved

## THE EUROPEAN UNION HAS ALREADY BEEN ACTIVE:

- The East StratCom Task Force, under High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini's responsibility, has been set up following the European Council in March 2015, for countering disinformation in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.
- Operational since September 2015, the East StratCom Task Force is a team of 14 Russian-language and communications specialists.
- Their Disinformation Review focuses on key messages carried in the international information space, which have been identified as providing a partial, distorted or false view or interpretation and/or spreading key pro-Kremlin messaging.
- Defending quality journalism as well as the freedom and pluralism of the media sector has a positive impact to counter-balance the spread of fake news with reliable and trustworthy information. In that sense, Commission's recent proposals to **modernise EU copyright** rules include a provision to protect high-quality journalism by granting new publishers online rights so they can adapt to the changing digital environment.
- At the EU level, the EU Expert Group on Media Literacy also provides a platform for exchanging best practices on media literacy, including a citizens' tool for debunking misinformation.

## STEPS TAKEN TO COUNTER DISINFORMATION IN THE PAST:



## NEXT STEPS:

By summer 2018, the Commission will convene a multi-stakeholder forum for an efficient cooperation among relevant stakeholders, including online platforms, the advertising industry and major advertisers. The forum's first output should be an EU-wide Code of Practice on Disinformation to be published by July 2018.

By December 2018, the Commission will report on the progress made. The report will also examine the need for further action to ensure the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the outlined actions.

On a different file related to illegal content available online, the Commission has asked online platforms to be more proactive and swift in removing illegal content, including online terrorist propaganda and xenophobic, racist or hate speech as well as child pornography. As a follow-up, the Commission recommended in March 2018 a set of operational measures – accompanied by the necessary safeguards – to be taken by companies and Member States to further step up this work before it determines whether it will be necessary to propose legislation.