Countering disinformation

Since 2015, the European Union has set out and is actively implementing concrete measures to address disinformation, protect its democratic systems and public debates.

Disinformation - i.e. verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public - distorts public debate, undermines citizens' trust in institutions and media, and even destabilises democratic processes such as elections. To address coordinated disinformation campaigns, often deployed with political objectives, coming from inside and outside the European Union, the EU institutions and Member States have stepped up their efforts and continue to take concrete action.

73% of internet users in the EU are concerned about disinformation in pre-election periods. Given its cross-border dimension, the adverse effects of disinformation in the European Union require a coordinated and long-term approach to respond to the challenge at both EU and national level.

In 2015, after the European Council's call to address the ongoing disinformation campaigns by Russia, the East Stratcom Task Force was created in the European External Action Service (EEAS). To date, the Task Force has catalogued, analysed and raised awareness of over 4,500 examples of pro-Kremlin disinformation, and significantly improved understanding of the tools, techniques and intentions of disinformation by Russian sources. In close cooperation with European Commission services, it has also substantially improved the effectiveness of EU communications in the Eastern Neighbourhood.

In 2016, the Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats was adopted, followed by the Joint Communication on increasing resilience and bolstering capabilities to address hybrid threats in 2018. As part of the measures foreseen in this context, the Hybrid Fusion Cell was created in the EEAS in 2016 to act as a single focus for the analysis of hybrid threats for EU institutions, and in 2017 the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats was established in Helsinki.

The Commission put forward a European approach for tackling online disinformation in its Communication of April 2018, seeking to promote a more transparent, trustworthy and accountable online environment. The Communication proposed measures to tackle disinformation online, including a self-regulatory EU-wide Code of Practice on Disinformation, signed by large online platforms and the advertising industry, as well as support for an independent network of fact-checkers. The Communication also stressed the need to ensure secure and resilient election processes, to foster education and media literacy, and to support quality journalism. The Commission also called for a strengthening of strategic communications.
On 12 September 2018, the Commission set out measures to secure free and fair European elections, including greater transparency in online political advertisements and the possibility to impose sanctions for the illegal use of personal data in order to deliberately influence the outcome of the European elections.

Building on these efforts, in December 2018 the EU presented an Action Plan against Disinformation with additional measures to counter disinformation, including the creation of a Rapid Alert System and close monitoring of the implementation of the Code of Practice signed by the online platforms.

See also

EUvsDisinfo
Fake news and online disinformation
Securing free and fair European elections
Communication "Tackling online disinformation: a European approach"
Code of Practice on Disinformation
www.eeas.europa.eu

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