



Tackling disinformation online: Expert Group advocates for more transparency among online platforms

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In a report handed over today to Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society Mariya Gabriel, the High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Disinformation spread online suggests a definition of the phenomenon and makes a series of recommendations.

The independent experts advocate for a Code of Principles that online platforms and social networks should commit to. The report complements the first insights from a public consultation and Eurobarometer survey also published today. These contributions will feed into the preparation of a Communication on tackling disinformation online, that the Commission will publish in spring.

Commissioner **Gabriel** said: *"Thanks to the High-Level Expert Group and to Professor Madeleine de Cock Buning for the great work in steering the group to meet the tight deadlines. With all the opinions gathered and the extensive collective expertise, we now have at our disposal a wide array of material that will help us put forward a number of tangible options to better address the risks posed by disinformation spread online."*

Chair of the High-Level Expert Group, Professor Madeleine de Cock Buning, said: *"I am very pleased with our results, especially the commitment of all stakeholders, including online platforms, on the steps we advise the Commission to take. It is a great leap forward on the issue of the spread of disinformation: we have created a robust starting point for a Code of Practices, supported by a multi-stakeholder Coalition."*

High-Level Expert Group defines the problem

The [report from the High-Level Expert Group](#) focusses specifically on problems associated with disinformation online rather than fake news. The experts deliberately avoided the term 'fake news', saying it is inadequate to capture the complex problems of disinformation that also involves content which blends fabricated information with facts.

The report defines disinformation as false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted for profit or to intentionally cause public harm. This can threaten democratic processes, values and can specifically target a variety of sectors, such as health, science, education and finance. The report underlines the need to involve all relevant parties in any possible action, recommending first and foremost a self-regulatory approach.

The group recommends to promote media literacy to counter disinformation; develop tools for empowering users and journalists to tackle disinformation; safeguard the diversity and sustainability of the European news media; continuing research on the impact of disinformation in Europe.

It also advocates for a Code of Principles that online platforms and social networks should commit to. Among the 10 key principles outlined in the report, online platforms should, for instance, ensure transparency by explaining how algorithms select the news put forward. In cooperation with European news outlets, they are also encouraged to take effective measures to improve the visibility of reliable, trustworthy news and facilitate users' access to it.

These measures are particularly important ahead of electoral periods. Finally, the Group recommends to establish a multi-stakeholder coalition to ensure that the agreed measures are implemented, monitored and regularly reviewed.

Surveys emphasise the role of quality media

The Commission has received nearly 3000 replies to the [public consultation](#) launched in November 2017. Intentional disinformation aimed at influencing elections and migration policies were the top two categories where most respondents thought fake news were likely to cause harm to society.

According to the latest [Eurobarometer survey](#) (around 26,000 citizens interviewed), people perceive that there is a lot of fake news across the EU with 83% of respondents saying that this phenomenon represents a danger to democracy. It emphasises also the importance of quality media: respondents perceive traditional media as the most trusted source of news (radio 70%, TV 66%, print 63%). Online sources of news and video hosting websites are the least trusted source of news with a trust rate of

26% and 27%, respectively.

These results are confirmed in the public consultation, where the least trust is put in social media, online news aggregators and online blogs and websites, and higher trust in traditional newspapers and magazines, specialised websites and online publications, news agencies and public agencies (overall with more than 70%).

According to the public consultation, the overall perception is that the spread of disinformation via social media is made easy because fake news appeal to readers' emotions (88%), are disseminated to orient the public debate (84%) and are conceived to generate revenues (65%). Half of the respondents believe that fact-checking after the disinformation has been published is not a solution as it will not reach the people that saw the initial information.

Background

In his [mission letter](#) to Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society Mariya Gabriel, President **Juncker** requested that the Commissioner looks into the challenges the online platforms create for our democracies with regard to the spread of false information and initiates a reflection on what would be needed at EU level to protect our citizens.

The [High-Level Expert Group](#) was set up to advise the Commission on the scope of the phenomenon of fake news. The appointed 39 experts brought together representatives of the civil society, social media platforms, news media organisations, journalists and academia.

The European Union is already active in the fight against fake news: in 2015, the East Stratcom Task Force, under High Representative Vice President Mogherini's responsibility, was set up following the European Council in March 2015, for countering disinformation in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. In addition, the 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.

For More Information

[Report of the High-Level Expert Group on Fake news and Disinformation](#)

[First results of the public consultation](#)

[Eurobarometer survey presentation](#)

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