Fake news and online disinformation: The EU Response

The majority of Europeans are concerned by disinformation, namely 83% think fake news is a threat to democracy, 73% of internet users are concerned about disinformation online in the pre-election period. Therefore, the European Commission has engaged with all stakeholders to define a clear, comprehensive and broad-based action plan to tackle the spread and impact of online disinformation in Europe and ensure the protection of European values and democratic systems.

The European Commission's role

The Commission supports a multi-stakeholders process, involving platforms, news media, research and civil society organisations in order to find the right solutions applicable coherently across the EU. An action plan to step up efforts to counter disinformation in Europe and beyond focusing on four key areas has been outlined by the EU. This plan serves to build EU's capabilities and strengthen cooperation between member states by improving detection, having a coordinated response to threats, collaboration with online platforms and industry as well as raising awareness and empowering citizens.

The coordinated response to disinformation presented in the Action Plan is based on four pillars:
   (i)   improving the capabilities of EU institutions to detect, analyse and expose disinformation;
   (ii)   strengthening coordinated and joint responses to disinformation;
   (iii)   mobilising private sector to tackle disinformation;
   (iv)   raising awareness and improving societal resilience.

An overview of the Action Plan is available in the factsheet on the action plan to counter disinformation.

A first Report assessing the progress made in the implementation of the actionsis is available too.
The Action Plan complements the Communication "Tackling online disinformation: a European approach", that puts forward self-regulatory tools.

The action is guided by four principles:
   1. Improve transparency regarding the way information is produced or sponsored;
   2. Diversity of information;
   3. Credibility of information;
   4. Inclusive solutions with broad stakeholder involvement.

The Communication on online disinformation has been developed taking into account the extensive consultations with citizens and stakeholders, including:

- a public consultation
- The synopsis report was released which helps assess the effectiveness of current actions by market players and other stakeholders, the need for scaling them up and introducing new actions to address different types of fake news. The consultation process was complemented with a Eurobarometer public opinion survey which measured the perceptions and concerns of the European citizens around fake news.
- a multi-stakeholder conference and a colloquium on fake news took place to define the boundaries of the problem, assess the effectiveness of the solutions already put in place by social media platforms and to agree on key principles for further action.
- The Commission set up a High Level Group (HLG), to advise on policy initiatives to counter fake news and the spread of disinformation online. The HLG submitted its final report in March 2018.
- A self-regulatory Code of Practice to address the spread of online disinformation and fake news is now in place.
- Individual roadmaps by online platforms and the advertising industry to implement the Code of Practice. The detailed individual roadmaps contain concrete actions showing that platforms plan to extend their tools against disinformation to all EU M.S. ahead of the European Parliament elections.

Vice-President of the Commission, Andrus Ansip, mentioned media literacy and quality journalism as vital tools to address the spread of fake news online.