

A Europe that Protects: The EU steps up action against disinformation

Taking stock of the progress made so far and following up on the call made by European leaders in [June 2018](#) to protect the Union's democratic systems, the European Commission and the High Representative are setting out concrete measures to tackle 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. [The Action Plan](#) also foresees an increase of resources devoted to the issue.

High Representative/Vice President Federica **Mogherini** said: *"Healthy democracy relies on open, free and fair public debate. It's our duty to protect this space and not allow anybody to spread disinformation that fuels hatred, division, and mistrust in democracy. As the European Union, we've decided to act together and reinforce our response, to promote our principles, to support the resilience of our societies, within our borders and in the neighbourhood. It's the European way to respond to one of the main challenges of our times."*

Andrus **Ansip**, Vice-President responsible for the Digital Single Market, said: *"We need to be united and join our forces to protect our democracies against disinformation. We have seen attempts to interfere in elections and referenda, with evidence pointing to Russia as a primary source of these campaigns. To address these threats, we propose to improve coordination with Member States through a Rapid Alert System, reinforce our teams exposing disinformation, increase support for media and researchers, and ask online platforms to deliver on their commitments. Fighting disinformation requires a collective effort."*

Stepping up detection, response and awareness

The Action Plan – prepared in close cooperation also with Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra **Jourová**; Commissioner for Security Union Julian **King** and Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** – focuses on four areas key to effectively build up the EU's capabilities and strengthen cooperation between Member States and the EU:

- **Improved detection:** Strategic Communication Task Forces and the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell in the European External Action Service (EEAS), as well as the EU delegations in the neighbourhood countries will be reinforced with significant additional specialised staff and data analysis tools. The EEAS' strategic communication budget to address disinformation and raise awareness about its adverse impact is expected to more than double, from €1.9 million in 2018 to €5 million in 2019. EU Member States should complement these measures by reinforcing their own means to deal with disinformation.
- **Coordinated response:** A dedicated Rapid Alert System will be set up among the EU institutions and Member States to facilitate the sharing of

data and assessments of disinformation campaigns and to provide alerts on disinformation threats in real time. The EU institutions and Member States will also focus on proactive and objective communication on Union values and policies.

- **Online platforms and industry:** The signatories of the Code of Practice should swiftly and effectively implement the commitments made under the Code of Practice, focusing on actions that are urgent for the European elections in 2019. This includes in particular ensuring transparency of political advertising, stepping up efforts to close active fake accounts, labelling non-human interactions (messages spread automatically by 'bots') and cooperating with fact-checkers and academic researchers to detect disinformation campaigns and make fact-checked content more visible and widespread. The Commission, with the help of the European group of regulators in charge of audio-visual media services, will ensure a close and continuous monitoring of the implementation of the commitments.
- **Raising awareness and empowering citizens:** In addition to targeted awareness campaigns, the EU institutions and Member States will promote media literacy through dedicated programmes. Support will be provided to national multidisciplinary teams of independent fact-checkers and researchers to detect and expose disinformation campaigns across social networks.

Finally, the Commission is today also reporting on the progress made in tackling online disinformation since the presentation of its Communication in [April 2018](#).

Next steps

The European Commission and the High Representative will develop and implement the measures set out in the Action Plan, in close cooperation with Member States and the European Parliament.

With a view to the European elections, the Rapid Alert System will be set up by March 2019. This will be complemented by further strengthening relevant resources.

The signatories of the Code of Practice will have to provide the first implementation update to the Commission by the end of 2018, which the Commission will then publish in January 2019. Between January and May, the online platforms will have to report to the Commission on a monthly basis. The Commission will also carry out a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Code of Practice in its first 12 months. Should the implementation and the impact of the Code of Practice prove unsatisfactory, the Commission may propose further measures, including of a regulatory nature.

Background

The European Union has been actively tackling disinformation since 2015. Following a decision of the [European Council in March 2015](#), in order to "challenge Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns", the [East StratCom Task](#)

[Force](#) in the European External Action Service (EEAS) was set up. The Task Force, together with the relevant Commission services, focuses on effectively communicating the EU's policies towards its eastern neighbourhood; strengthening the overall media environment in the eastern neighbourhood, including providing support for media freedom and strengthening independent media; and improving the EU's capacity to forecast, address and raise awareness of pro-Kremlin disinformation activities.

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.

In [April 2018](#), the Commission outlined a European approach and self-regulatory tools to tackle disinformation online, including an EU-wide Code of Practice against Disinformation, support for an independent network of fact-checkers, and tools to stimulate quality journalism. On 16 October, the [Code of Practice](#) was signed by Facebook, Google, Twitter and Mozilla as well as the trade association representing online platforms and trade associations representing the advertising industry and advertisers.

In his [2018 State of the Union Address](#), President Juncker also put forward a set of concrete measures to make sure that next year's European Parliament elections are organised in a free, fair and secure manner. The measures include 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.

For More Information