

Press release – Fact-checking Day: Fighting the virus of disinformation on Covid-19



Today 2 April, on International Fact-checking Day, Parliament is contributing to raising awareness of the dangers of disinformation, not only for citizens' health, but also for democracy.

Whereas many battle day and night to save lives from the coronavirus, health organisations and fact-checkers have uncovered another dark side of the pandemic – organisations and individuals exploiting the crisis for political or commercial manipulation, instead of supporting those saving lives.

EU institutions have repeatedly warned of the risks linked to disinformation attempts and scams. To support factual and reliable information, a joint [EU page](#) has been set up about Europe's response to the virus. It also busts the most common myths related to the Covid-19 outbreak.

According to a [report](#) by the EEAS anti-disinformation taskforce [EUvsDisinfo](#), some false claims come from actors close to the US "alt" right, to China and to Russia. In these cases, the aim is political, to undermine the European Union or to create political shifts.

Parliament's Vice-President Othmar Karas (EPP, AT) insisted that "False

claims are easy to check. Proof of EU solidarity is easy to find. The EU has very limited formal powers in health matters, but EU countries and the EU as a whole are looking at ways to help the victims of the crisis. At this very moment for example, German nurses and doctors are taking care of COVID-19 patients flown in from Italy or France. Czechia sent 10.000 protective suits to both Italy and Spain. Austria and France sent millions of masks to Italy.”

“Last week, Members of the European Parliament almost unanimously adopted urgency measures to free up money to help EU countries finance healthcare, medical assistance or prevent further spread of the disease. In the other EU institutions, people are also working tirelessly to find effective and quick ways to support the victims of this crisis, be it those who are ill, healthcare workers or people who have lost their jobs or income due to the crisis”, he concluded.

Vice-President Katarina Barley (S&D, DE) highlighted that “In times like these, lives depend on all of us listening to health authorities, and spreading lies or questioning the truth becomes even more dangerous. It is important that the institutions continue to closely cooperate with online platforms, encouraging them to promote authoritative sources, demote content that is found to be false or misleading, and take down illegal content or content that could cause physical harm.

Parliament is launching a campaign to support the EU response to the crisis and to show our citizens that this continent is filled with Europeans fighting side by side against Covid-19.”

She also called on everyone to pay specific attention to online disinformation attempts: “Today, on International Fact-checking Day, we would like to remind people of the importance of fact-checking and we are sharing fact-checking tips in all languages. Just as we respect social distancing and wash our hands, we have the duty to stop the spread of fake advice and manipulative stories”.

Vice-President Karas added: “In a crisis like this, fact-checking is not about being the wise guy finding pleasure in correcting people who make mistakes; rather, it is our civic duty to protect European citizens and the democratic society we have created.