Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the EU, including Disinformation (INGE)

European Parliament

May 2021

Parliament's research capacities within the Directorates-General for Parliamentary Research Services (EPRS), Internal Policies (IPOL) and External Policies (EXPO) support the work of the new Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation (INGE) and its Members.

Foreign interference in democracies: Understanding the threat, and evolving responses

Briefing by Naja Bentzen, September 2020

The Covid-19 crisis has further exacerbated the systemic struggle between democracy and authoritarianism, prompting authoritarian actors – often under pressure to deflect blame for their own (mis-)handling of the outbreak – to deploy a broad range of overt and covert tools. This briefing gives an overview of key concepts and responses by like-minded democracies, as well as the role of the European Union, including Parliament.

The evolving consequences of the coronavirus 'infodemic'

Briefing by Naja Bentzen with Thomas Smith, September 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic has been accompanied by massive waves of information, including mis- and disinformation. This Briefing shed light on the still evolving repercussions of this 'infodemic', that have already cost lives and impacted the ability of authorities to effectively deal with the pandemic, with some arguing that the infodemic is aggravating the spread of the virus itself.

Peace and Security in 2020: Overview of EU action and outlook for the future

Study coordinated by Eleni Lazarou, September 2020

This study looks at the concept of peace and the changing nature of the geopolitical environment, in light of global shifts in power and of the impact of the coronavirus crisis. Each chapter of the study analyses a specific threat to peace and presents an overview of EU action to counter the related risks. One of the chapters focuses specifically on countering disinformation and foreign interference. Other areas discussed include violent conflict, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, cyber-attacks and terrorism.

Institutions and foreign interferences

Study coordinated by Alessandro Davoli, June 2020

This study assesses the EU responses to counter foreign interferences. It examines in particular the effectiveness of the EU's action against foreign interference in the 2019 European Parliament elections, the Covid-19 crisis, and the issue of foreign donations to European political parties. The study concludes with specific policy recommendations to enhance the EU's responses in these matters.

The EU's response to the coronavirus 'infodemic'

'At a glance' note by Naja Bentzen, June 2020

In parallel to the coronavirus pandemic, governments across the world are having to tackle a viral 'infodemic'; a wave of coronavirus-related information including hoaxes, conspiracy theories and disinformation by third parties. In many countries, the situation is hampering freedom of expression.

The use of artificial intelligence in the audiovisual sector

In-depth analysis by Katarzyna Anna Iskra, May 2020

This paper presents the current issues and potential challenges in particular as regards the automated detection of illegal content and deep fakes, and AI-based production of high quality content, as well as the misuse of AI for false news, misinformation and manipulation. It also proposes concrete recommendations on how the EU could shape appropriate policies in the sector.

Covid-19 foreign influence campaigns: Europe and the global battle of narratives

Briefing by Naja Bentzen, April 2020

The global health crisis sparked by the Covid-19 pandemic raises concern that a combination of disinformation and heavily promoted health diplomacy, echoed by local proxies in Europe, could potentially pave the way for wider influence in other sectors in the wake of the crisis. Both Russia and China seem to be driving parallel information campaigns, conveying the overall message that democratic state actors are failing and that European citizens cannot trust their health systems, whereas their authoritarian systems can save the world.

Countering the health 'infodemic'

'At a glance' note by Naja Bentzen, April 2020

The dissemination of mis- and disinformation in traditional media and on social media has surged in recent years, with wide-ranging consequences in various policy areas – from elections to geopolitics to healthcare. The prevalence of false information regarding health issues threatens to undermine trust in official health advice and institutions responsible for countering threats to public health.

The sharp power of knowledge: Foreign authoritarian meddling in academia

'At a glance' note by Naja Bentzen, December 2019

The visibility of, and focus on, authoritarian hybrid threats – a mix of conventional and non-conventional hostile activities to undermine democracies – is increasing. In this context, 'soft power' exerted through academic institutions and universities can become a 'sharp' hybrid tool, undermining academic independence and further eroding trust in facts and science.

Science and scientific literacy as an educational challenge

Study coordinated by Pierre Heriard, March 2019

European societies are faced with emerging threats relating to the spread of disinformation and pseudo-science. In this context, fostering scientific literacy can provide people with tools to navigate and critically address the vast amounts of information exchanged in public debate, and support democratic processes. This study gives an overview of scientific literacy in the EU, and of potential education policy responses to better prepare scientifically literate citizens.

Polarisation and the use of technology in political campaigns and communication

Study coordinated by Philip Boucher, March 2019

Algorithms, automation, big data analytics and artificial intelligence are becoming increasingly embedded in everyday life in democratic societies. This report includes a chapter on 'bots, fake news, and foreign influence campaigns' and provides detailed analysis of the technological affordances that enhance and undermine political decision-making, both now and in the future.

Regulating disinformation with artificial intelligence

Study coordinated by Mihalis Kritikos, March 2019

This study examines the consequences of the increasingly prevalent use of artificial intelligence (AI) disinformation initiatives upon freedom of expression, pluralism and the functioning of a democratic polity. In this context, the study maps the regulatory options (from self-regulation to legislation) against four types of disinformation (public, private, electoral and foreign).

[Disinformation and propaganda – Impact on the functioning of the rule of law in the EU and its Member States](#)
Study coordinated by Marion Schmid-Drüner, February 2019
This study assesses the impact of disinformation and strategic political propaganda disseminated through online social media sites. It examines effects on the functioning of the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights in the EU and its Member States. The study formulates recommendations on how to tackle this threat to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It specifically addresses the role of social media platform providers in this regard.

[Support for democracy through EU external policy: New tools for growing challenges](#)
Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, February 2021
This briefing touches upon disinformation in the context of taking a more strategic and autonomous approach to supporting democracy worldwide to combat the crisis of democracy and the rise of authoritarianism across the globe. Since the start of the current parliamentary term, the EU has reviewed its political guidance on democracy and human rights. Digital challenges and the narrowing space for civil societies are among the priorities to be addressed. Accordingly, disinformation is mentioned because it intends to undermine democratic systems and the idea of democracy itself.

[Trump's disinformation 'magaphone': Consequences, first lessons and outlook](#)
Briefing by Naja Bentzen, February 2021
The deadly insurrection at the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 was a significant cautionary example of the offline effects of online disinformation and conspiracy theories. The briefing offers an overview of interference and disinformation in the 2020 election, the consequences of Trump's disinformation campaigns and finally, it describes the currently evolving challenged to democracy.

[Digital services act](#)
Briefing by Tambiama André Madiega, March 2021
The rules governing the provision of digital services in the EU have remained largely unchanged since the adoption of the e-Commerce Directive in 2000, while digital technologies and business models continue to evolve rapidly and new societal challenges are emerging, such as the spread of counterfeit goods, hate speech and disinformation online. Against this backdrop, in December 2020, the European Commission tabled a new legislative proposal on a digital services act to amend the e-Commerce Directive and set higher standards of transparency and accountability to govern the way platform service providers moderate content, on advertising and on algorithmic processes.

[Mapping fake news and disinformation in the Western Balkans and identifying ways to effectively counter them](#)
Study coordinated by the Policy Department for External Affairs, February 2021
Disinformation is an endemic and ubiquitous part of politics throughout the Western Balkans, without exception. A mapping of the disinformation and counter-disinformation landscapes in the region in the period from 2018 through 2020 reveals three key disinformation challenges: external challenges to EU credibility; disinformation related to the COVID-19 pandemic; and the impact of disinformation on elections and referenda. While foreign actors feature prominently – chiefly Russia, but also China, Turkey, and other countries in and near the region – the bulk of disinformation in the Western Balkans is produced and disseminated by domestic actors for domestic purposes. Further, disinformation is a symptom of social and political disorder, rather than the cause. As a result, the European Union should focus on the role that it can play in bolstering the quality of democracy and governance in the Western Balkans, as the most powerful potential bulwark against disinformation.

Further reading
[Towards a more resilient Europe post-coronavirus: Options to enhance the EU's resilience to structural risks](#), *Study, April 2021*

[Democratic scrutiny of social media platforms and protection of fundamental rights](#), *At-a-glance Note by Tambiama Madiega, February 2021*
[Online platforms: Economic and societal effects](#), *Study coordinated by Mihalis Kritikos, March 2021*
[The geopolitical implications of the Covid-19 pandemic](#), *Study coordinated by the Policy Department for External Affairs, September 2020*
[Disruption by technology: Impacts on politics, economics and society](#), *In-depth analysis by Philip Boucher, Naja Bentzen, Tania Laţici, Tambiama Madiega, Leopold Schmertzing and Marcin Szczepański, September 2020*
[Foreign influence operations in the EU](#), *Briefing by Naja Bentzen, July 2018*
[Countering terrorist narratives](#), *Study coordinated by Kristiina Milt, November 2017*
[Russia's information war: Propaganda or counter-propaganda?](#), *Briefing by Martin Russell, October 2016*
[US strategic communication to counter foreign propaganda](#), *Briefing by Naja Bentzen, October 2016*
[Canada's strategic communication to counter foreign propaganda](#), *Briefing by Naja Bentzen, October 2016*
[NATO strategic communications – An evolving battle of narratives](#), *Briefing by Naja Bentzen, July 2016*
[Russia's information war: Propaganda or counter-propaganda?](#), *Briefing by Martin Russell, October 2016*
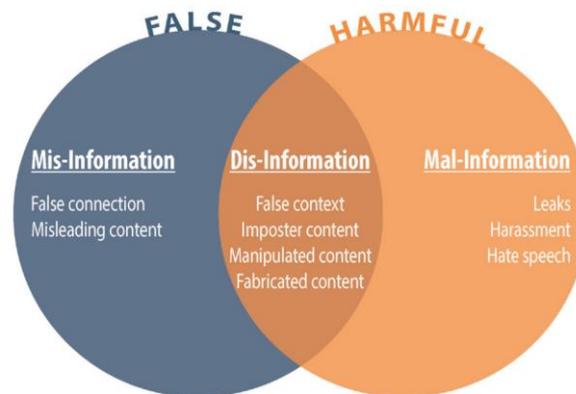
Further online resources
'How to spot when news is fake'-package with [1-pager in 24 languages](#), [animated infographic](#) ([downloadable in all EU languages](#)), video '[Disinformation and democracy](#)' with subtitles in 24 languages

What Europe does for me: [People worried about false coronavirus news](#), [People who worry about fake news](#), [Fact-checkers](#), [Amateur fact-checkers](#), [EU response to coronavirus crisis](#)

European Science-Media Hub (ESMH): [Tackling Covid-19 Infodemic: fact-checking and debunking initiatives](#), [disinformation-related articles](#)

Graphic
Information disorder (sharing or developing of false information with or without the intent of harming)

Source: EPRS based on Council of Europe.

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