



YOUTHQUAKE 4 EU - FIGHTING DISINFORMATION

POLICY PROPOSALS



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INTRODUCTION



Welcome to the culmination of the Erasmus+ Youth Participation Activity, "Youthquake 4 EU: Fighting Disinformation." Over the course of two enriching years, we embarked on a journey to empower and engage young minds, aged 16-21, from across the European Union. Together, we delved into the critical issues of disinformation trends and their profound impact on the EU and its member countries. Through a series of offline activities and online seminars, these young individuals not only explored the multifaceted world of EU policy-making but also honed their skills to become future leaders who actively participate in the decision-making process at the European level.

The centerpiece of our endeavor was the second offline activity—an immersive simulation of the European Parliament. Here, our participants assumed the roles of EU deputies, representing the diverse interests and perspectives of each member state. Working collaboratively, they sought to identify policy solutions to combat disinformation across several crucial domains, including youth policy, democratic development, and European elections. The result? Six comprehensive policy proposals that offer innovative and informed strategies to diminish the influence of disinformation on European democracy. In this booklet, you will find these six policy proposals, the result of the dedication, creativity, and vision of our young leaders.



YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Fighting disinformation is important because it influences the opinion of young people and their perception about their values. In this kind of environment, they can feel under pressure because they have to make decisions which are based on misleading information through social media and communications platforms often causing real harm. Disinformation can discourage people from achieving the things they desire and can also lead them to challenging paths. This problem does not only have short period effects but also in the long term which means that people are more likely to become radically thinking and there is possibility that their number of pursuable opportunities could decrease.

The EU and the EP have taken several actions to tackle disinformation and protect democratic processes and human rights in the EU and the world. Some of these actions include:

1. The Communication on „tackling online disinformation”: a European approach, which sets out a collection of tools to address the spread of disinformation among young people and ensure the protection of EU values.
2. The European Democracy Action Plan, which proposes measures to promote free and fair elections, strengthen media freedom and pluralism, and support education and civic engagement.
3. Another great example is the Erasmus+ projects with topics based on disinformation, fake news, politics because it is more approaching for teens and it gives them an opportunity to work in non-formal environment.

To further enhance the fight against disinformation, several actions could be taken:

1. Implementing obligatory subject: the subject would be called “media literacy” and the purpose of it is to teach youths how to process and work with true and false information, how to critically analyze articles, so they can decide on their own what is true and what is not.
2. Adolescent Education and Skills Development: providing guidance, tools, activities, and supplies to support adolescents with ages between 10 and 18 with skills development and psychosocial support. This initiative aims to bring positive change in adolescents’ lives through art and innovation. These initiatives can help young people develop important life skills, express their ideas, participate in decision-making processes, and take action on issues that matter to them.
3. Funding the creation of software: it will fact check information by comparing it with reputable sources. Those will be chosen by long term analyzation done by study professionals. Young people will be taught how to use this technology in order to verify the reliability of information.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIVERSITY

Disinformation is deliberately misleading or biased information, manipulated narrative or propaganda. Disinformation refers to types of wrong or false information, though it is mainly on purpose. The human rights are one of the most important things that must be protected from disinformation. Diversity is the condition of having or being composed of different elements. Diversity drives creativity and novation. Every culture, every nationality, every single person sees the world in a different way. It's important for every person to know their human rights, so they don't become a victim of any abuse or mistreating.

EU policy includes:

- promoting the rights of women, children, minorities and displaced persons;
- opposing the death penalty, torture, human trafficking and discrimination;
- defending civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights;
- defending human rights through active partnership with partner countries, international and regional organizations, and groups and associations at all levels of society;
- inclusion of human rights clauses in all agreements on trade or cooperation with non-EU countries;
- a strategy for the persons with disabilities;
- a gender equality strategy;
- an antiracism action plan;

Recommendations

We can disclose business paths with companies exploiting their workers and not paying them a fair salary. When the company is making more profit than 5% of profit, they should split it with all of the co-workers who were responsible for that profit. Also, if they have overtime, they should get either the money they deserve or free time. Every employee needs to get a bonus by the end of the year. Also those profit from the companies must be shared with schools or charities.

Every person needs to be accepted, included and feel listened to. No one should be judged of any kind, such as race, color, sex, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin. When the human resources are hiring someone, they need to explain why they are hiring these persons so it will be fair.

Every country which is in the EU must provide free higher education for everyone. Also, they must provide financial support for education systems that further their critical thinking about media and information digital literacy, including though collaborative efforts with civil society and academia.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGIES

Nowadays, disinformation is an urgent issue, and it can be perceived as an information which contains inaccurate or misleading facts, which is spread on purpose. Currently, this can be extremely influential and interfere into huge differences of areas spread through the internet. This misinformation reaches the mass of people and transforms their view of society and its course in the scaremonger's opinion. The disinformation has various impacts and currently it can be seen in the context of the war in Ukraine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also in national politics. Misinformation is increasingly created with AI, making it harder to discern whether it is true or false. However, there are certain tools and experts trying to recognize these problematic articles or medias. During the last couple of months, the committee have learnt many useful ways to recognize and fight against disinformation, but also how it appears and how it is spread. Based on new knowledge and risen awareness in digital transformation and technology, the committee have decided, as the representants of young generation, to propose our suggestions.

The European Union (EU) is actively combating disinformation in the digital space through a series of initiatives. The EU has recognized the threat of disinformation and has taken steps to address it through initiatives like the Code of Practice on Disinformation. The EU Commission is increasing oversight of social platforms, demanding swift removal of harmful content. In 2020, the European Cybersecurity Agency (ENISA) was established to enhance cybersecurity and combat disinformation. Moreover, digital transformation can support media literacy efforts, empowering individuals to discern between credible and false information in the digital area. In terms of statistics, in 2020, the EU published a report on countering disinformation, revealing that over 90% of disinformation was related to COVID-19. Over 80% of EU citizens say they see fake news both as an issue for their country and for democracy in general. Therefore, not only older generation face the problems with disinformation. In addition, half of EU citizens aged 15-30 say they need critical thinking and information skills to help them combat fake news and extremism in society and in general two thirds of EU citizens report coming across fake news at least once a week. The EU is also collaborating with social media platforms to reduce the spread of disinformation, so it can be possible to provide a more trustworthy digital space for EU citizens, so this can be improved, the committee came up with two solutions.

To fight disinformation, the committee proposes the creation of a program, "Mastermind", which is going to operate online (in social media, sites, news articles...) as fact-checking. This will work as "firewalls" which will monitor and control incoming and outgoing network traffic, allowing or blocking data based on certain rules. The main goal is to evaluate the information that is on the internet and show the readers if it is true or false, so they can know what to trust and have reliable sources. If there is an article with disinformation, this program will show a feature near the fake information and if this is a constant problem, the site or social media will be shut down.

Another solution that the committee proposes is the application of an option online, "Checkie", where readers can report information that they believe is incorrect. However, there will be an online mechanism, which will calculate, based on how many people reported and the width of the audience if it is necessary to use fact-checking. To make sure that readers do not report for the wrong reasons, this program will only operate if there is a 20% (forty percentage) of the audience reporting the article or social media post in question. This program will be provided with an authorization's personality.

EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

- Relevance

It's essential to fight against disinformation in the EU, because disinformation can easily divide, cause some members to shift away from values that the EU promotes, such as democracy, rule of law, freedom, equality, human rights, etc. Disinformation may cause conflicts inside the union and make member states follow different interests, for instance, Hungary when it comes to relations with Russia, and Poland when it comes to immigration policies. Cross-border cooperation is significant, as it helps to strengthen relations between countries, on the other hand, if disinformation is spread, it can also weaken the relations between member states, reducing opportunities for citizens of European countries. Disinformation can easily influence people and affect their decision making, influencing policy making on the scale of the whole European union.

- Current State of Affairs

The European Union has made many changes and actions to prevent and fight disinformation, particularly creating initiatives such as the "European Digital Media Observatory," a project that supports the independent community working to combat disinformation. Another example of the European Unions and Parliaments actions is the code of practice on disinformation, which is the first of its kind tool on self-regulatory standards to fight disinformation. The European Democracy Action plan is another plan to counter disinformation, they monitored and took accountability of online platforms to further prevent disinformation from spreading. The European Union has also made efforts to limit the influence of IT companies by imposing regulations if the product of these companies is used on European soil.

- Proposals

- The creation of several sources of official and reliable information, accessible to every citizen of the European Union.
- Making almost all the countries in Europe unite, so that it becomes a single power, increasing its effectiveness.
- Restricting citizens from purposefully spreading false and misleading information through online posts.
- Restricting untrue information that opposes leading coalition and weakens the government party.
- Strengthening the relation of already participating states in the European Union, to add another layer of safety, additionally making their affairs and connections stronger.
- The coalition is fully responsible for any disinformation that manages to pass through regulations, by handling it.
- Regulate incoming information and website traffic to establish safety for the citizens of Europe and reduce the spread of disinformation, from unchecked sources.
- Employing experts in various fields for the purpose of fact checking information.
- Marking non-official resources and websites with a label that states that it has been checked by the authorities.

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

In context of our Committee, we regard media as a particularly sensitive topic, as most disinformation is to be found among the media content we have in the EU. We define disinformation as faulty or not enough verified information deliberately distributed within our information field. In our opinion, it can lead to both internal and external conflicts, which can be easily avoided if disinformation is limited effectively. Education is known to be a space for political, religious and other propaganda, which often contains disinformation and which we consider highly undesirable. Moreover, the cultural pluralism we currently have in the EU is threatened by the disinformation, since it hinders mutual trust and causes misunderstandings in a Union we hope should function peacefully.

We strive to unite the cultures of the Union, with the citizens coexisting in harmony. We view future citizens as open-minded, motivated and familiar with both their heritage and current events - and all these aims are impossible with disinformation still widely present in Europe. We want to secure everyone's right to be protected from fraudulent or misinterpreted information and its influence. Disinformation, if out of control, can cause chaos in culture, media and education easily - so we present our policy proposals, aiming to eliminate such risk and achieve the goals described above. Some of them, especially the ones related to education and culture, we believe will become a long-term investment into our common future.

We will promote prioritizing practical courses (financial literacy, everyday life skills) into education, as well as history- and culture related ones, at the expense of subjects like natural sciences

We will promote the political neutrality of the church, and consequently religious influence on public education should be minimized.

We plan to create a reputable public media outlet run by the EU using the funding we have, which is to include news articles, educational materials, childrens' content and other media content. This way disinformation can be verified more easily, while reliable information can be accessed more easily.

We plan on using the EU funding to incentivize promotion of local values rather than foreign influences, as we believe that foreign values, when becoming dominant in our local communities, provide wrong image of the society and hence are disinformation.

We encourage the implementation of cultural exchange elements into both national and international non-formal education.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Disinformation is an actual and serious matter that threatens the very foundations of democratic societies, like ours from EU. The spread of false and misleading information has the power to distort the public opinion, influence elections, and, the most dangerous one, undermine trust in democratic institutions. This instability is detrimental to the democratic principles upon which European societies are built.

Young people are the future of the European Union and often active participants in the digital space, making them particularly susceptible to disinformation. They need accurate information to make informed choices and participate effectively in our democracies. Disinformation can mislead them, eroding trust in the political process and discouraging civic engagement.

Disinformation often exploits societal fault lines, deepening divisions and polarizing communities. Furthermore, this can lead to increased social tensions and a lack of cohesion, which is harmful to the stability of European societies.

Another problem correlated to our proposal is the lack of trust in traditional media, which is a fundamental pillar of democratic societies. It can be particularly harmful to young people, who might lose confidence in credible sources of information.

Fighting disinformation is essential for preserving the democratic, social, economic, and informational well-being of European societies. Its impact on us, young people, is particularly significant, as they are not only vulnerable to its influence but also essential for the future development and stability of our societies. Later, we will address this issue by proposing an approach that includes fact-checking initiatives, regulation, and technological solutions to curtail the spread of false information.

Since the conflict between Israel and Hamas started, many disinformation and biased news spread around in the EU. DSA was launched in 2022, both the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act have been adopted by the Council of the European Union and their main goals are to create a safer digital space in which the fundamental rights of all users of digital services are protected; to establish a level playing field to foster innovation, growth, and competitiveness, both in the European Single Market and globally.

The EU suspended all the payments toward Palestinians because of this conflict. -> "No EU funding indirectly enables any terrorist organization to carry out attacks against Israel." But also, they did send 27.9 million euros humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. In this case, they did a big review about the situation before they chose what to do.

After an analysis, our group reached an agreement on certain measures and actions to prevent and uncover disinformation:

- a. Implementation of a fact checker on the EU. The reference for this fact checker comes from the Community Notes of "X", that has been a crucial part of fighting disinformation on a platform that is mostly occupied by the youth. This fact checker would be available on the next point (EU magazine) and beside every website. Moreover, this would be connected to the DSA who expects foreign countries to sign a treaty whereby they agree that their product (ex.: Social Media, Magazines) would be checked by the DSA, and if they find any misinformation or biased news or inappropriate content, it will be banned from the EU.
- b. The legal implementation on the EU and, consequently, their nations of fines and penalties for the spread of false information (regardless of the motive (ideological or profitable). These penalties should have as their main point the loss of the credibility of the author (therefore, they should lose credentials or receive a suspension).
- c. Creation of an official EU magazine. It is really important to create a trustworthy and reliable "way" of information that provides news that are based on facts and unbiased.
- d. Creation of a committee responsible for this action. This Committee would be in charge of the correction of information and would be occupied by members from different political parties that need to come to an agreement in order to achieve the most unbiased work.



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Thank you for joining us in celebrating the achievements of these remarkable individuals, as we embarked on a journey to strengthen European democracy and tackle the challenge of disinformation. Together, we strive for a brighter, more informed, and united future for the European Union.

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