Tackling Online Disinformation: a European Approach

21 March 2019

Alberto Rabbachin
DG CONNECT
European Commission

Why take action?

- Open democratic societies depend on public debate that enables citizens to develop informed opinions

- Social media can be used to disseminate disinformation on a scale and with speed and precision of targeting that is unprecedented

- Disinformation erodes trust in institutions and in digital and traditional media

- Disinformation harms our democracies by hampering the ability of citizens to take informed decisions

European Commission

Bird's eye view: What has the EU done so far?

Interlinked initiatives, with multiple actions:

1. Disinformation Communication (April 2018)
2. Elections Package (September 2018)
3. Action Plan (December 2018)

Communication on Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach COM(2018)236 final

➢ Adopted 26 April 2018

1. **Code of practice** for online platforms & advertising industry
2. Support for **independent fact checking and academic research** on disinformation

3. Harnessing **new technologies**
4. Ensuring **secure election processes**
5. Fostering **media literacy**
6. Supporting **quality journalism**
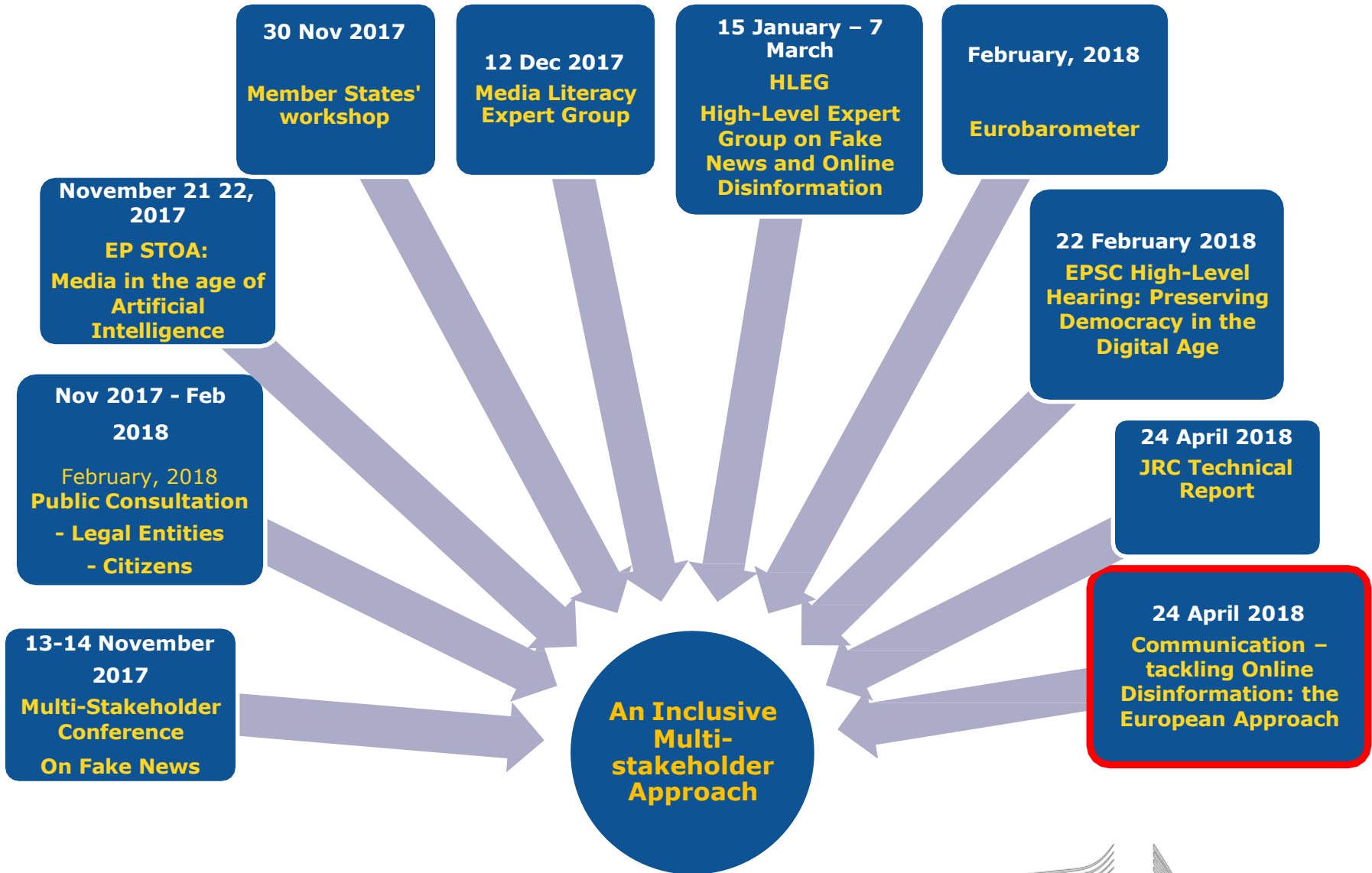7. Bolstering **strategic communications**

European Commission

Elections Package

➢ Pres. Juncker SOTU Address, 12 September 2018

1. **Communication** on **securing free and fair European elections** COM (2018) 637 final

2. **Recommendation** on election **cooperation networks**, **online transparency**, protection against **cybersecurity** incidents and fighting disinformation campaigns C(2018) 5949 final

3. **Guidance** on application of EU **data protection** law COM (2018) 638 final

4. **Amendment** to **Regulation** on European Political Parties and Foundations

Action Plan against Disinformation JOIN (2018) 36 final

➢ Adopted 5 December 2018 by Commission and High Representative (EEAS)

➢ Endorsed by European Council

➢ 4 "Pillars," outlining 10 Actions

1. Improving **EU Capabilities** to **Detect, Analyse, Expose** Disinformation

2. Strengthening **Coordinated and Joint Responses to** Disinformation

3. **Mobilising Private Sector** to Tackle Disinformation

4. Raising **Awareness** and Improving **Societal Resilience**

European Commission

Disinformation Communication – The Process

30 Nov 2017

Member States' workshop

12 Dec 2017
Media Literacy Expert Group

15 January – 7 March
HLEG
High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation

February, 2018

Eurobarometer

November 21 22, 2017
EP STOA:
Media in the age of Artificial Intelligence

22 February 2018
EPSC High-Level Hearing: Preserving Democracy in the Digital Age

Nov 2017 - Feb 2018
February, 2018
Public Consultation
- Legal Entities
- Citizens

24 April 2018
JRC Technical Report

13-14 November 2017
Multi-Stakeholder Conference
On Fake News

An Inclusive Multi-stakeholder Approach

24 April 2018
Communication – tackling Online Disinformation: the European Approach

November December January February March April

European Commission

Online Public Consultation: 2,986 entries

Which channels do you use for news?

Which channels do you trust?

Age: +50

- Social Media = 59%
- TV = 59%
- Radio = 52%
- Traditional press = 47%

- **Age: -50**

- Social Media = 72 %
- TV = 30%
- Radio =30%
- Traditional press = 30%

- Radio = 70%
- TV = 66%
- Printed newspapers and news magazines = 63%
- Online newspapers and news magazines = 47%
- Video hosting websites and podcasts = 27%
- Online social networks and messaging apps= 26%

Eurobarometer:
28 Member States – 26,576 interviews

Some key findings:

- 80 % of EU citizens come across "fake news" regularly – from every day to monthly
- At least half in all EU 28 encounter "fake news" at least once a week
- 85 % perceive "fake news" to be a problem in their country
- 83% perceive "fake news" to be a problem for democracy in general

European Commission

High-Level Expert Group

➢ HLEG Report: "The threat is disinformation, not 'fake news.'"

➢ "Disinformation," as defined in the Communication:

   Verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm.

➢ Excluded:
   • Reporting error
   • Satire and parody
   • Partisan news and commentary

General Approach

1. Overarching objectives – to improve the transparency, diversity and credibility of information, and to fashion inclusive solutions
2. Disinformation a multi-dimensional phenomenon
3. Responses require multi-stakeholder engagement – public authorities, platforms, media, fact-checkers, academics, teachers, civil society
4. Responses should be based on evidence and adapt as the phenomenon evolves
5. Responses must respect freedom of expression and other European/international human rights standards
6. Focus on positive measures to enable freedom of expression and empower citizens

European Commission

Closer look: Code of Practice

➤ A <u>self-regulatory</u> Code for **online platforms** and the **advertising sector**

➤ 5 Chapters, 15 Commitments

1. **Scrutiny of ad placements - disrupting revenues** to websites that spread disinformation

2. **Transparency of political advertising -** and issue-based advertising

3. **Integrity of services –** addressing **fake accounts** and online **bots**

4. **Empowering consumers - ** to **report disinformation, access different news** sources, while improving the visibility and findability of **authoritative content**

5. **Empowering the research community –** through, e.g., privacy-compliant access to data; platforms to support/not hinder research efforts

European Commission

Closer look: Code of Practice

Subscribers

➤ The major online platforms - **Facebook**, **Google**, **Twitter** – and the trade association for online platforms (**EDIMA**), plus **Mozilla**

➤ Trade associations representing the advertising industry: **IAB Europe** and **EACA** (plus some **national EACA associations**)

➤ Trade associations representing the advertisers: **WFA** (plus the **Belgian national association**)

Implementation

➤ Code signatories have submitted first on implementation

➤ Results were published at the end of January

➤ A closer monitoring on a monthly basis is ongoing until the EP elections

➤ Assessment in Fall 2019 at the Code's one year anniversary

Closer look: Support for independent fact-checking and research

➢ **1st phase:** Facilitate the creation of an independent European network of fact-checkers

  ➢ Launch of the H2020 action **SOMA** - provide a fact-checking platform for European fact-checkers to establish common working methods, exchange best practices, achieve broad coverage across the EU, and participate in joint fact-checking and related activities.

  ➢ IFCN and the EJTA have started dedicated fact-checking projects around the EP elections https://factcheckeu.info/it/ and https://eufactcheck.eu/

➢ **2nd phase:** strengthen capacities to identify and expose disinformation threats targeting national audiences and facilitate cross-border cooperation

  ➢ **European online platform** for additional data gathering and analysis by fact-checkers and academic researchers with access to fact-checking tools, EU public data and online platform data. (CEF Work Programme 2019 – European Platform on Disinformaiton)

European Commission

Thank you!