

EIN Seminar on:

“Fake news and Electoral Campaigns” - 06.03.2019

Main ideas of the Speech delivered by the Secretary General of the European People’s Party (EPP)

Digital fake news has become pervasive in challenging our fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of speech and freedom of information, and ultimately our very own democratic systems.

The incitement to anger and fear; using the EU as a scapegoat to your own failures; and spreading lies or, even worse, half truths, shouldn’t be part of a politician toolkit.

We need to bring back trust and truth, first in the short-term and secondly in the long-term.

In the short-term, we will need to considerably improve our readiness for the EU elections of May.

- 1. Measures to support the integrity of elections, and to protect the democratic systems and public debates.** Initiatives such as the creation of a Rapid Alert System and close monitoring of the implementation of the Code of Practice against disinformation signed by the online platforms, are very welcome.

2. The **support to national multidisciplinary teams of independent fact-checkers and researchers** to detect and expose disinformation campaigns across social networks is also very welcome.
3. **Cybersecurity.** Disinformation campaigns, in particular by third countries, are often part of hybrid warfare, involving cyber-attacks and hacking of networks, with the single purpose of creating chaos, discredit our systems and institutions or mislead people with false or leaked information. We have to step-up our resilience and protect our democratic systems. Both monitoring what is happening on online platforms, especially on social media, but as well as taking measures to shield ourselves from cyberattacks that are being made against the EPP.

Secondly, **in the long run** I think we could do much more and start right now. **Our position as EPP is that we have to tackle fake news but always without hampering the freedom of expression and without giving too much power to institutions or companies to decide what is true or is not (the so-called Ministry of truth).** In sum:

- **We need to focus on reconstructing and empowering the role of traditional media. Good journalists and editors, like**

politicians, are all custodians of freedom of speech and democracy.

- **We need social media companies to boost their efforts on countering fake news.** But efforts should most of all be put on transparency, accountability and identification. **And here I wouldn't exclude regulatory measures.**
- We need continuous promotion of scientific advice and evidence as a bastion against post-truth or post-trust by means of the free exchange of ideas and arguments.
- We need to keep building trust and confidence in democratic institutions by means of innovative practices for citizen engagement and awareness, transparency and ethical behaviour. **In fact, the EPP, has recently launched an Ethical commission to address exactly these issues.**
- We need also to address fake news on the demand side, and for this, education and digital literacy is the best way. Education and media literacy must be a compass to spot fake news and unreliable sources. At school, kids need to learn to unmask fake news, to do fact-checking and increase their critical thinking and they will influence their parents in the same direction.

Fake news is a global problem. Awareness-raising campaigns should be developed in order to change behaviours.