ACTION PLAN AGAINST DISINFORMATION
Report on progress

#EUvsDisinfo

The Commission together with the European External Action Service, the other EU institutions and the Member States has made it a key priority to address potential threats to the elections and to strengthen the resilience of the Union's democratic systems.

THE ACTION PLAN AGAINST DISINFORMATION

A set of actions presented in December 2018 to build up capabilities and strengthen cooperation between Member States and EU institutions to proactively address disinformation.

Improve detection, analysis and exposure of disinformation

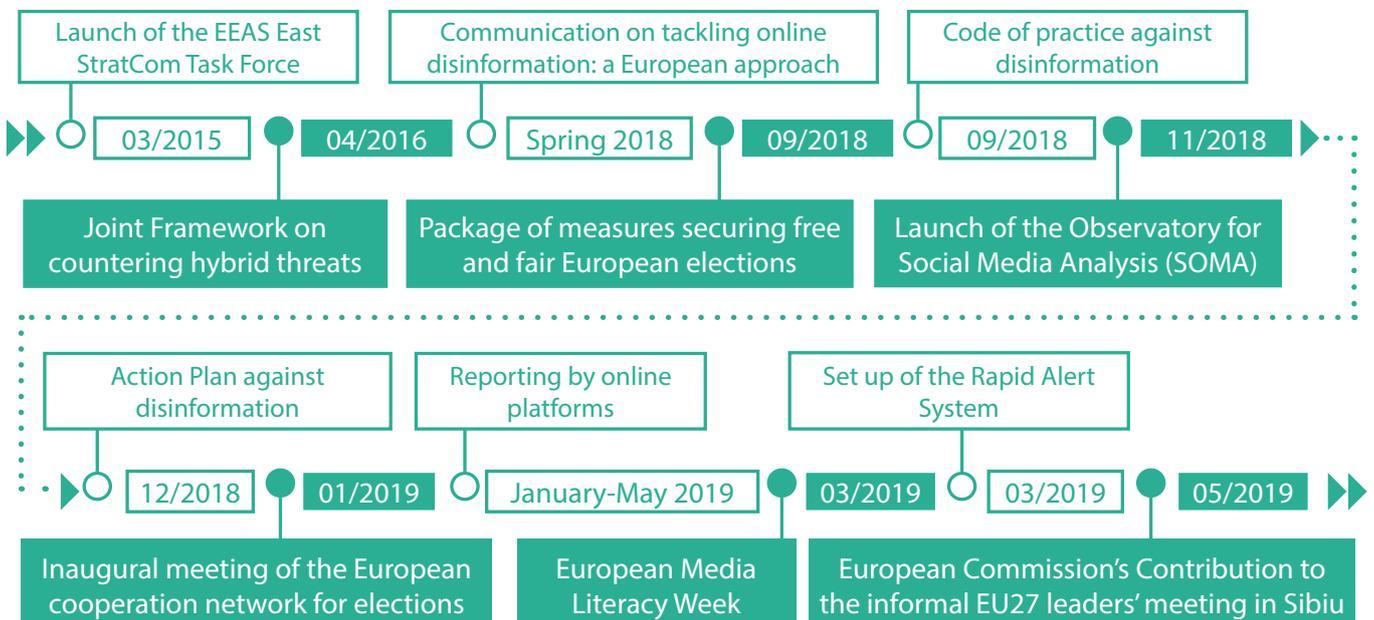Stronger cooperation and joint responses to disinformation

Mobilise private sector to tackle disinformation

Raise awareness and improve societal resilience

The measures taken under the Action Plan against disinformation and the elections package of September 2018 have helped to deter attacks and expose disinformation attempts. EU action mobilised a strong alliance of journalists, fact-checkers, platforms, governments, national authorities, researchers and civil society to counter the threat. But disinformation is an evolving challenge. More remains to be done to protect the EU's democratic processes and institutions from disinformation and manipulation.

OVERVIEW OF EU JOINT AND COORDINATED ACTION AGAINST DISINFORMATION

Launch of the EEAS East StratCom Task Force

Communication on tackling online disinformation: a European approach

Code of practice against disinformation

03/2015 • **04/2016** ○ **Spring 2018** • **09/2018** ○ **09/2018** • **11/2018**

Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats

Package of measures securing free and fair European elections

Launch of the Observatory for Social Media Analysis (SOMA)

Action Plan against disinformation

Reporting by online platforms

Set up of the Rapid Alert System

12/2018 • **01/2019** ○ **January-May 2019** • **03/2019** ○ **03/2019** • **05/2019**

Inaugural meeting of the European cooperation network for elections

European Media Literacy Week

European Commission's Contribution to the informal EU27 leaders' meeting in Sibiu

Improving capabilities and strengthening coordinated responses

▶ **EEAS East Stratcom Task Force**

- **1000 cases** detected and exposed since January compared to 434 in the same period in 2018.
- EEAS strategic communication budget more than doubled to **€5 million** in 2019.
- Around **50 additional strategic communication staff** expected to be hired during the next two years in EEAS headquarters and Delegations.

At this point in time, available evidence has not allowed to identify a distinct cross-border disinformation campaign from external sources specifically targeting the European elections. However, the evidence collected revealed a continued and sustained disinformation activity by Russian sources aiming to suppress turnout and influence voter preferences. There was a consistent trend of malicious actors using disinformation to promote extreme views and polarise local debates, including through unfounded attacks on the EU. Domestic political actors often adopted the same tactics and narratives to attack the EU and its values.

Malicious actors have used the fire in the Notre Dame Cathedral to illustrate the alleged decline of Western and Christian values in the EU. They have also been quick to attribute the political crisis and the subsequent collapse of the government in Austria to the 'European deep state', 'German and Spanish Security Services' and individuals.

▶ **Rapid Alert System (RAS)**

- Set up in March 2019.
- Facilitates cooperation with international partners, such as G7 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
- Has strengthened cooperation with online platforms to identify and prevent spread of disinformation campaigns.
- The number of interactions between authorities has been growing steadily. The tool has become a reference point for the fight against disinformation.

DEDICATED DIGITAL PLATFORM where EU Member States and EU institutions can share insights on disinformation and coordinate responses.

NETWORK OF 28 NATIONAL CONTACT POINTS who coordinate their government's participation and sharing of information and best practices in the RAS.

Implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation

The **Code of Practice** on disinformation was agreed with the platforms, leading social networks, advertisers and advertising industry in October 2018 to address the spread of online disinformation. In the run-up to the European elections, Facebook, Google and Twitter committed to report every month on their progress.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PERIOD JANUARY-MAY 2019

Scrutiny of ad placements:

Google took action against more than **130,000** EU-based accounts that violated its ads policies to fight misrepresentation, and almost **27,000** that violated policies on original content.

Facebook reported over **1.2 million** actions in the EU for violation of policies on ads and content.

Twitter reported on rejecting more than **6,000** ads targeted at the EU for violation of its unacceptable business practices ads policy as well as about **10,000** EU-targeted ads for violations of its quality ads policy.

Political ads transparency:

All platforms took actions in advance of the European elections by labelling political ads and making them publicly available via searchable ads libraries.

Only **Facebook** progressed further by increasing transparency of issue-based ads.

Integrity of services:

Facebook disabled **2.2 billion** fake accounts in the first quarter of 2019 and acted specifically against 1,574 non-EU-based and 168 EU-based pages, groups and accounts engaged in inauthentic behaviour targeting EU Member States.

Twitter challenged almost **77 million** spam or fake accounts.

Youtube removed over **3.39 million** channels for violation of its spam, misleading, and scams policy, and more than **8,600** channels for violation of its impersonation policy.

In the days preceding the elections, online platforms identified and took down additional accounts spreading disinformation and hate speech following alerts from independent investigators and journalists. More than 600 groups and Facebook pages operating across France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland and Spain were reported to have spread disinformation and hate speech or have used false profiles to artificially boost the content of parties or sites they supported. These pages generated 763 million views.

WHAT STILL NEEDS TO BE DONE BY ALL ONLINE PLATFORMS

Provide information that allows the identification of the actors involved or the Member States targeted.

Empower users to better detect disinformation.

Intensify their cooperation with fact checkers in all Member States.

Make additional datasets available to the research community, in line with personal data protection rules.

Awareness raising and improving societal resilience

▶ **Promoting media literacy:** First ever European Media Literacy Week was organised in March 2019 with 320 events all around Europe.

▶ **Raising awareness:** EU institutions launched a number of initiatives to inform about disinformation. Information sessions were offered to visitors groups including during the European Youth Week.

▶ **Better communication on EU policies:** EU institutions provided proactive communication to millions of EU citizens. The European Parliament launched its "This Time I'm Voting" campaign and several national authorities encouraged Europeans to vote.

▶ **Boosting the EU capacity to react to disinformation:**
- An internal network was set up in May 2018 with officials from Commission services, Representations in the Member States and the European External Action Services (EEAS), in liaison with the European Parliament.
- Several Representations created pages rebutting myths about the EU and developed partnerships with fact checkers.
- The EU's three corporate campaigns, Invest EU, #EUandMe and EU Protects reached millions of European citizens in 2019.

InvestEU

240 million potential contacts

EUandME

60 million potential contacts

EUprotects

60 million potential contacts

▶ **Supporting quality journalism and independent fact-checking**
- Under the Horizon 2020 programme, the Commission supported investments in new technologies for content verification and distribution through social media.
- The Commission supports the Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis (SOMA), which facilitates networking, knowledge exchange and development of best practices among independent fact-checkers.
- The Commission will provide €2.5 million for a new digital service infrastructure aimed at networking fact checkers and researchers.
- The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) created a European branch of independent fact-checkers covering 14 member States and launched a website in 11 EU languages.

Protecting the integrity of elections

▶ **Cooperation:** Improved national and European cooperation on potential threats through the establishment of election networks at EU and national level, with links to the Rapid Alert System (RAS).

▶ **Transparency:** The Commission recommended to Member States to focus on promoting the transparency of online political advertising, including campaign expenditure, and invited all political parties to respect transparency recommendations.

▶ **Data protection:** The Commission issued guidance on the processing of personal data in the electoral context. The European Data Protection Board issued a statement on the use of personal data in the course of political campaigns, and several data protection authorities provided guidance at national level.

DATA PROTECTION
CYBERSECURITY
TRANSPARENCY
COOPERATION
APPROPRIATE SANCTIONS

▶ **Cybersecurity:** The Commission organised with the EU Cybersecurity Agency, the European Parliament and Member States preparedness exercises involving the Computer Security Incident Response Teams in all Member States. EU institutions and Member States met in April for a scenario exercise on countering election interference, organised with the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats.

▶ **Appropriate sanctions:** The Commission proposed new rules on the statute and funding of European political parties and foundations, which entered into force in April 2019. European political parties trying to influence elections by misusing personal data can now be fined up to 5% of their annual budget.