FH Rules of Fact Verification

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I.   How we collect submissions for fact-checking
In deciding whether to verify information, we take into consideration the following questions:

•   Does the submitted content refer to, or is it in any way related to, a fact that can be verified? We do not verify opinions and we recognise that in the free world socio-political statements and rhetoric are allowed their own assessment, promises and forecasts are for the future and cannot currently be verified.

•   Does the information or claim contained in the submitted content seem misleading or suggest a lack of accuracy?

•   Is the claim important and does it have significance for society? We avoid 'snatching at words' and dealing with obvious lapses and slips. We also do not verify claims concerning the field of general knowledge and the obvious (the sky is blue, the sun shines, and so on).

•   Is the information or claim concerning facts widely available, does it have a wide internet reach or come from a place, website or internet profile of high popularity and readership?
•   Would the average user, in hearing or reading the information or claim, have a problem in recognising its veracity, does the publication mislead or cause a state of uncertainty as to the facts?
•   We do not prioritise submissions, being guided by an arbitrary media hierarchy, dividing them into more and less important. We choose information and claims for fact-checking coming from various sources, apart from traditional and online media, they can also be written in commentaries published on social platforms. The criterion for selection is substantive and is based on the contents, knowledge, importance and reach of the information.
•   In the case of a submission suspected of manipulation, or mixing true and untrue information, compilation of incomparable data and other types of treatment, we evaluate the whole content and its overall value. If on the basis of selected evidence and sources we indicate that the submitted content is overall misleading, we evaluate it as false. If we do not know how to unambiguously evaluate that type of content, we do not give a verdict, marking the content as unverifiable through fact-checking.
•   In choosing content for fact-checking, we do not apply any prior assumptions or political criteria as to the source or author of the information or claim.

II.   The principles of conducting fact verification in our system

The positions that we verify can have the nature of text distributed on the web, social media comments, graphic memes with or without text, video, printed material (photo-scans of texts or fragments posted in repositories, publicly available discs and social platforms).

We try to establish the source of the fact or information we are verifying. If it is not provided in the submitted publication we try to find it anyway with the aid of a search engine, including in search engines on social media, deep web archives, tools such as the Wayback Machine Archive and with the aid of media monitoring.

If we do not find confirmation of the fact contained in the submitted publication through a search engine, we conduct research via searching related or connected subjects, key concepts associated with the primary search term or claims contradicting the fact, claim or thesis contained in the submitted publication. If multiple searches covering various related subjects online do not yield unambiguous confirmation or refutal of a verified fact, we try to concentrate on people or organisations that have appropriate knowledge or that can directly verify veracity. If a submitted fact concerns general scientific knowledge, we can run a search of printed sources (e.g. articles from scientific journals, medical and specialist sector press, books, stenograms of interviews, statistical sources, reports and analytical works) having a substantive connection with the subject of the verified publication.

We try as much as possible to use information and data sources with no political engagement (e.g. peer-reviewed magazines, official statistical sources, data bases).

If a verified fact is based on a source of a scientific-analytical nature, or of a known or even not fully clear political affiliation, or relies on an expert opinion of generally known political associations or relations, the source should be treated with scepticism and taken into account only as a means of deepening knowledge of the subject and not as evidence verifying a fact. Widely published sources (both paper and digital) that we cite, are grouped and enumerated in the form of a list in the 'sources' module under the description section of each report produced within the framework of the fact-checking procedure.

In the situation where an expert we have contacted does not have direct knowledge that would enable an unambiguous verification of the fact, we ask them to indicate a connected source where we can seek further and deeper or for a suggestion of other experts more likely versed in the matter at hand. In the event that during the verification process we contact people, institutions or organisations by mail or telephone with the aim of gaining a comment, that information is noted in the list of sources, identifying the person, position, role, academic title and similar information important from the perspective of fact-checking as well as exact time marking of the statement, claim or position gained. Copies of documents and emails can be

attached to the sources only after editorial treatment enabling the protection of privacy of the person giving the statement or sending the document.

III.   Fact Checkers

Fact-checking is conducted in duplicate, in the 'first' and 'second line.' The 'first line' of fact checking is the community recruited by means of open verifiers. The 'second line' is the Polish Press Agency team, which undertakes verification activities where the social fact-checkers' verdicts are contradictory or the fact-checking is not done by the community, although in the assessment of the PAP team the submission qualifies for it. Social fact-checkers are recruited on the basis of clear criteria. They cannot be anonymous to the recruiting entity. The entity responsible for their personal data is the Polish Press Agency.

The make-up of the Polish Press Agency fact-checking team is given on the page fakehunter.pap.pl together with a short biography of professional members.

Both social fact-checkers and the members of the PAP fact-checking team are subject to assessment and verification of their work's results. Verdicts and fact-checking reports prepared by them are subject to both internal and external assessment.