



## Commission presents guidance to strengthen the Code of Practice on Disinformation

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Today, the Commission publishes its [guidance](#) on how the Code of Practice on Disinformation, the first of its kind worldwide, should be strengthened to become a more effective tool for countering disinformation.

It sets out Commission expectations, calls for stronger commitments by the signatories and foresees a broader participation to the Code. Based on a robust monitoring framework and clear performance indicators, signatories should reduce financial incentives to disinformation, empower users to take an active role in preventing its spread, better cooperate with fact-checkers across EU Member States and languages, and provide a framework for access to data for researchers.

Věra **Jourová**, Vice President for Values and Transparency, said: "*Threats posed by disinformation online are fast evolving and we need to step up our collective action to empower citizens and protect the democratic information space. A new stronger Code is necessary as we need online platforms and other players to address the systemic risks of their services and algorithmic amplification, stop policing themselves alone and stop allowing to make money on disinformation, while fully preserving the freedom of speech.*"

Thierry **Breton**, Commissioner for Internal Market, said: "*We need to rein in the infodemic and the diffusion of false information putting people's life in danger. Disinformation cannot remain a source of revenue. We need to see stronger commitments by online platforms, the entire advertising ecosystem and networks of fact-checkers. The Digital Services Act will provide us with additional, powerful tools to tackle disinformation.*"

### A strong, stable and flexible Code to support the fight against disinformation

The Guidance calls for reinforcing the Code by strengthening it in the following areas:

- **Larger participation with tailored commitments.** The Commission encourages established and emerging platforms active in the EU, relevant stakeholders in the online advertising ecosystem (e.g. ad exchanges, ad-tech providers, brands benefitting from ads), private messaging services, as well as stakeholders that can contribute with resources or expertise to the Code's effective functioning, to join the Code. The strengthened Code should include new tailored commitments corresponding to the size and nature of services provided by signatories.
- **Demonetise disinformation.** Platforms and players in the online advertising ecosystem must take responsibility and better work together to defund disinformation, notably by exchanging information on disinformation ads refused by one of the signatories, improving transparency and accountability around ad placements and barring participation by actors that systematically post debunked content.
- **Ensure the integrity of services.** The strengthened Code should provide a comprehensive coverage of the current and emerging forms of manipulative behaviour used to spread disinformation (such as bots, fake accounts, organised manipulation campaigns, account takeovers), and include tailored commitments to ensure transparency and accountability of measures taken to reduce its impact.
- **Empower users to understand and flag disinformation.** Users need to have access to tools to better understand and safely navigate the online environment. The signatories must make their recommender systems, i.e. the way users see content, transparent and take measures to mitigate the risks that these fuel such as the viral spread of disinformation. They should also provide their users with accessible, effective tools and procedures to flag disinformation with the potential to cause public or individual harm. Users, whose content or accounts have been subject to measures taken in response to such flagging, should have access to an appropriate and transparent mechanism to appeal and seek redress. The strengthened code should also enhance the visibility of reliable information of public interest, and warn users who interacted with content marked as false by fact-checkers.

- **Increase the coverage of fact-checking and providing increased access to data to researchers.** The new Code should include better cooperation with fact-checkers and increase coverage across EU countries and languages. The strengthened Code should also include a robust framework for access to data for researchers.
- **A robust monitoring framework.** The strengthened Code should include an improved monitoring framework based on clear key performance indicators (KPIs) measuring the results and impact of actions taken by the platforms as well as the overall impact of the Code on disinformation in the EU. Platforms should regularly report on the measures taken and their relevant KPIs to the Commission. Information and data should be provided by the platforms in standardised formats, with Member State breakdowns.

Finally, signatories should develop a **Transparency Centre** where they indicate which policies they adopted to implement the Code's commitments, how they have been enforced, and display all the data and metrics relevant to the KPIs. The Guidance also proposes the establishment of a **permanent task force** chaired by the Commission. It would be composed of signatories, representatives from the European External Action Service, the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) and from the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) that received more than €11 million to create eight regional hubs to help implement and expand its work in the Member States. The task force, which will rely also on the support of experts, will help review and adapt the Code in view of technological, societal, market and legislative developments.

## **Next Steps**

The Commission will call upon the signatories of the Code of Practice to convene and strengthen the Code in line with the Guidance. It also encourages new signatories to join the Code. To this end, the Commission will reach to potential new signatories and interested parties. The signatories should proceed swiftly with revision of the Code and provide a first draft of the revised Code in the autumn. As announced, the Commission will also propose this year a legislation to improve the transparency of political advertising. The Guidance also calls for reinforced commitments in this area, to pave the way towards the upcoming strengthened legislative framework and to devise industry-led solutions in its support.

## **Background**

The Code of Practice has been established in October 2018. As announced in the [European Democracy Action Plan \(EDAP\)](#), the Guidance addresses the shortcomings identified in the [Commission's 2020 Assessment of the Code](#) and draws from the lessons learned in the [COVID-19 disinformation monitoring programme](#). The Commission's proposal for the [Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#) establishes a co-regulatory backstop for the measures that will be included in the revised and strengthened Code.

The coronavirus crisis starkly illustrated the threats and challenges disinformation poses to our societies. The 'infodemic' has posed substantial risks to personal and public health systems, crisis management, the economy and society. It has shown that, despite important efforts taken to date, there is an urgent need to step-up efforts to fight disinformation.

The EU approach to countering disinformation is deeply rooted in the protection of freedom of expression and safeguarding an open democratic debate. It aims to create more transparency and accountability in the online environment and empower citizens. It goes hand in hand with the other aims of the European Democracy Action Plan, namely promoting free and fair elections and protecting media freedom and pluralism. The EU has mobilised industry, media, academia, public authorities and civil society and encourages a broader participation in the Code.

## **For More Information**

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