

# EU to investigate Meta over election misinformation before June polls

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The EU is set to launch formal proceedings against Meta, the owner of Facebook and Instagram, amid concerns it is not doing enough to counter Russian disinformation before the EU elections in June, according to reports. It is also expected to express concerns about the lack of effective monitoring of election content and a potentially inadequate mechanism for flagging illegal content. It is understood the European Commission is concerned that Meta's moderation system is not robust enough to counterbalance the potential proliferation of fake news and attempts to suppress voting. The Financial Times reported that officials were particularly worried about the way Meta's platforms were handling Russia's efforts to undermine upcoming European elections, although it was expected to stop short of citing the Kremlin in proceedings. Reports suggest that the commission is particularly concerned over Meta's plan to discontinue CrowdTangle, a public insights tool that allows real-time disinformation researchers, journalists and others across the EU to monitor the spread of fake news and attempts to suppress voting. Under sweeping new laws forcing tech companies to regulate their own content for compliance with the law in the EU, Facebook and others are obliged to have systems to guard against the systemic risk of election interference. A spokesperson for Meta said: "We have a well-established process for identifying and mitigating risks on our platforms. We look forward to continuing our cooperation with the European Commission and providing them with further details of this work." If the move on Meta is confirmed it will come just days after the commission carried out stress tests on all the big social media platforms to determine whether there were adequate safeguards in place against Russian disinformation. The stress tests entailed a series of fictitious scenarios based on historical attempts at influencing elections as well as cyber-enabled information manipulation. This included deepfakes and attempts to suppress authentic opinions through online harassment and threats. Such opinion suppression was identified by the EU in February as a new weapon in silencing legitimate democratic voices. "The aim was to test platforms' readiness to address manipulative behaviour that could occur in the run-up to the elections, in particular the different manipulative tactics, techniques and procedures," said the commission. This allowed them to test the resilience of social media to manipulation, which politicians predict will intensify in the next six weeks. The European parliamentary elections are being held on 6-9 June against a backdrop of increasing disinformation across the bloc. On Monday the parliament released tips for voters with a list of previous incidents, including claims that only pens with certain coloured ink will be accepted on ballot papers. Politicians have also warned voters to be on the lookout for disinformation, given the experience of recent national elections. In elections in Slovakia, Spain, Finland and Estonia, stories that voting booths had pens with disappearing ink spread on social media, while

voters were told of physical threats including bombs at polling stations during last year's Spanish election. The EU DisinfoLab has tracked 17,000 incidents of disinformation of fake news with many attempts to discredit Ukraine's defence in the war against Russia, including Vladimir Putin's pseudo-historical grounds for his invasion. Last week a Czech news agency website was hacked to display fake news. One of the articles claimed that the Czech counterintelligence service had prevented an assassination attempt on the Slovak president, Peter Pellegrini; another carried an alleged reaction from the Czech foreign minister, Jan Lipavský, to the news. Last month the Czech government uncovered what it believed was a Moscow-orchestrated disinformation network. The Belgian prime minister also recently revealed the federal prosecutor had opened an investigation into alleged payments of MEPs by Russia with a view to electing more pro-Russian deputies to the European parliament.