



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology  
Director-General

Brussels, 13 Jan. 17

Limited, via SECEM

**NOTE FOR THE ATTENTION OF  
VICE-PRESIDENT ANSIP**

**Subject: Online platform policy: building trust in information flows online**

**Context**

Recently, the issue of online misinformation and its role in shaping public opinion has generated considerable political and media attention, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] The term 'fake news' was coined to describe deliberately constructed lies, in the form of news articles, meant to mislead the public, or to generate online ad revenue. There is concern by a range of commentators that such fake news stories have the ability to weaken the quality of democratic deliberation in society. President Juncker has recently called upon online platforms to do more to tackle such misinformation.

On 10 January, Commissioner Oettinger sent a letter (annexed here) to President Juncker, stressing the importance of the issue, and outlining some initial policy options based on a very preliminary analysis. With this note **we seek your political orientation on the issue of fake news and online misinformation.**

[REDACTED]

One set of reflections currently in progress relates to [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] through improvements in existing mechanisms.

However, fake news is not *per se* illegal content, and therefore represents a distinct category of material which is likely to require a dedicated approach, as any more general obligations to take down such news from online platforms would severely limit freedom of speech.

## Detail

The letter to President Juncker sketches an initial problem analysis of fake news online driven by the trend towards using social media as the primary news source, especially for younger population segments; the shift of trust away from authorities towards the views of peers; the ease of sharing and propagating news online without necessarily critically engaging with its content, combined with the competition for attention in the digital economy.

This has led to a certain proliferation of fake news sites, especially targeted at US audiences, which intentionally spread misinformation, in some cases for the purpose generating ad revenue.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The response to those [REDACTED] different categories must be carefully considered. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Facebook and Google have announced self-regulatory measures to reduce ad-generated revenue for fake news as well as supporting fact-checking systems, although the exact details are not known.

The policy area remains dynamic and contentious, with simultaneous concerns on how to strengthen the effectiveness of the democratic control function of the free press while not engaging in government or platform censorship by giving these actors sole discretion on what constitutes the truth. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The DE Justice Ministry is reported by the media to be working on legal proposals for a dedicated centre where fake news can be flagged, coupled even with potential fines for non-removal by platforms such as Facebook. In Italy, the head of the competition authority has called for an EU-wide approach and the President of the parliament is supporting work on observatory, while the FR Senate is considering an Internet Ombudsman type construction, although not limited specifically to the issue of fake news. In addition, the CZ government is reportedly setting up a specialist “anti-fake news” unit to counter alleged Russian interference ahead of their upcoming elections, similar to the approach taken by the EastStratCom Task Force under HR/VP Mogherini.

[REDACTED]

In the area of media literacy, the European Commission has been facilitating the visibility and exchange of media literacy good practices from Member States and stakeholders. In 2017 the Commission – further to an initiative of the Parliament - will also implement two pilot projects on "Media literacy for all" [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Additional options could be developed, e.g. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

This domain is rather new and did not form part of our reflection on platforms. Therefore **we recommend further evidence gathering through a public consultation**, as a first preliminary step, while continuing in parallel the work aiming towards more effective removal of illegal content.

*eSigned*  
Roberto Viola

cc: J. Lepassaar, K. Kloc, M. Frenay, J. Gren (Cab Ansip)