Mission report – Berlin, 11-12 May 2023

Exchange with NGOs working on disinformation

opened the meeting by describing the situation in Germany. She noted that awareness about the disinformation-related threats is increasing, but people still confuse what it is and have hard time distinguishing it. Medical disinformation is still rampant, including anti-vaccination movement.

Conspiracy theories are on the rise (data that people’s believe in them are increasing). Energy crisis has been used to spread disinfo narratives. RT and Sputnik are still active in DE, despite shutting down their offices.

Political disinformation is focused on attacking elections and democratic institutions. Female politicians are subject to dedicated disinformation narratives and hate speech. Climate change remains a big focus on disinformation. Disinformation narratives overlap with hate speech and calls for violence. Attacks for journalists are also linked to the same sources.

The CSOs try to focus on media literacy, especially in schools.

She recognised there is no one coherent strategy to raise awareness about the threat. We are bad in anticipating what is happening next.

briefly outlined the state of play on the DSA and the Code of Practice. She asked on the feedback on the Code and on the NetzDG.

The participants responded that NetzDG did not change the situation much for the better. We continue to witness problems with the Telegram that is not present in Germany. DE authorities tried to deliver a fine to Telegram, but they could not find an address. Law firm was assigned in DE on behalf of Telegram.

Extremists’ voices and users migrated to fringe platforms to organise themselves. Now they are coming back to Twitter. But in general, there is trend of fragmentation of tools the extremists use.

So far enforcement and implementation of NetzDG did not achieve its stated objectives. But there are some positives. For instance, it showed that the platforms can comply with the law, even as harsh as the NetzDG. NetzDG impact cannot be assessed because transparency reports do not assess quality of anything. It is focused on quantitative data. Removal is 14% within 24h.

also asked about the views of participants on development of AI and its impact on disinformation.

The participants said that on Facebook it was getting better, but now they observe a lot of problematic content returning to Twitter. They see deep fakes and other AI generated content playing an increasingly bigger role. Female politicians and activists are target of that (fake porn, etc.).
On the Code of Practice, participants noted that its big advantage is unifying the reporting standards, definitions, etc. The CoP helped everyone to talk about the same things. The quality of the data on CoP has to improve, however. The reports are incomplete at this stage. We need more comprehensive information.

In this context, participants also recognised the positive role of EDMO that improved its work on the methodology. However, they noted that EDMO is focusing too much on the narratives, and too little on the analytical data work (e.g. recommender system).

Furthermore, they remarked that the Digital Services Coordinators should provide funding for research for NGOs. DE Ministry will not have capacity to enforce; they don’t have know-how.

On the Code, the participants concluded, that the most important aspect is to decide on enforcement. Only when the enforcement strategy is known, it would be possible to decide on the long-term strategy about the CoP (e.g. is it expert product? Does it aim to raise public awareness).

VJ concluded by recalling the continued work with the platforms (meeting with the signatories on 5 June). She stressed the work focuses not only on Russian disinformation, but also on supporting free and fair elections and protecting from the dangers of both domestic and external sources.

**Meeting with newspaper editors BZDV**

BDZV, recalled the history of the German press system and raised the concerns of the publishers that the Act would go against the German Constitution. He also said that the Commission was faster with the Media Freedom Act than with competition cases against tech giant. He explains that the problems of the media are related to AI/Chat GPT and the online platforms dominating the online space.

The Vice-President explained that the Act includes many safeguards for well working systems, including in Article 6 a specific reference to “constitutional or other national laws” which would remain untouched. The aim is to have minimum standards for the whole EU. No system is immune to threats. Regarding AI and platforms, she referred to existing legislation in this area, DSA, DMA and now AI Act being discussed. It is still possible to give inputs on AI Act as the negotiations are ongoing.