Bilderberg Conference – Session: Disinformation
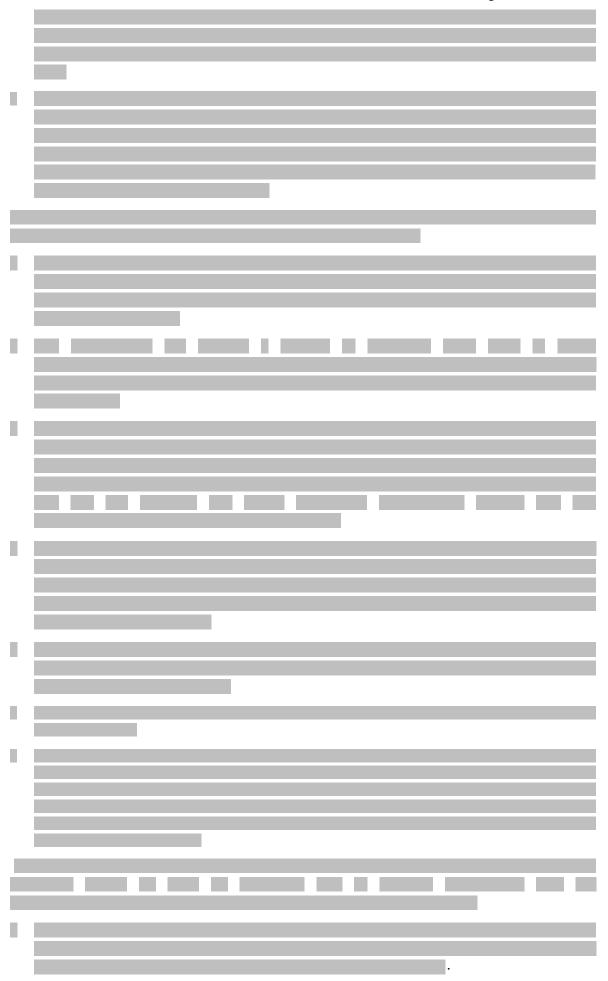
Scene setter:

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- Democracies have encountered many challenges in recent years, including citizen disengagement, foreign interference and disinformation, the need to adapt to the pandemic and lately to the prospect of war looming over Europe after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

- The digital revolution has also brought, along with its opportunities, new challenges for our democracies. More and more citizens are getting their information and engaging in the democratic process online.

- Our latest Eurobarometer shows that 51% of respondents report having been exposed to disinformation.

- Citizens need to be able to form and express their political views freely. Fundamental rights must be respected and free media and civil society must be able to participate in an open debate, free from malign interference. New technologies should be tools for emancipation, not for manipulation.

- These challenges are affecting each of us, in all aspects of our lives. The European Union has a strong story to tell about our response to these global challenges. I will present the most recent of our actions on democracy.

- The EU response to these important challenges is taking place in the framework of the European Democracy Action Plan, adopted in December 2020.

- The Action Plan includes measures to strengthen media freedom and pluralism, alongside measures targeted to fight disinformation and ensure free and fair elections.

- We are also enhancing the EU's and Member States' capacity to address disinformation.

- In May 2021, the Commission issued guidance to strengthen the Code of Practice on Disinformation. We set up a robust framework for monitoring its implementation.

- At the same time, the EU has been articulating and implementing a vision for the digital transformation that is re-shaping our world, one that is human-centred and that empowers citizens and fosters innovative businesses.

- On 25 November 2021, delivering on its commitments in the Action Plan, the Commission adopted a package of legislative and other measures to reinforce democracy and protect the integrity of elections. It includes specific measures to support cooperation on resilient elections and legislative proposals on transparency and targeting of political advertising.

- Political ads play an important role in informed decision-making in European democracies in the digital age. People must know why they are seeing a political ad, who is being it including when it comes from abroad, who paid for it how much and what targeting criteria were used.

- By providing for a high standard of transparency and strengthening the protection of individuals' personal data when it is used in the targeting and amplification of political advertising, on the basis of a broad, common definition applicable to all media, the Commission aims to support accountability in politics, to empower citizens, support journalists, researchers, authorities and other interested actors in playing their vital roles in democracy.

- Delivering on the Commission's European Democracy Action Plan, a joint mechanism on election resilience was established this year in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections to support Member States as a capacity-building tool to support the exchange of expertise in areas such as disinformation, cybersecurity, and online forensics.

- The Commission also intends to deliver in the coming year a compendium on e-voting practices, which should also address elements of disinformation.

- In addition, responding to the growing phenomenon of Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation – so-called SLAPPs, on 27 April the Commission presented an initiative to protect journalists and human rights defenders against SLAPPs. For the EU action against SLAPPs to be efficient, both legislative and non-legislative measures are needed.

- This is an important and exciting period in the Union's efforts to shape how we adapt our democracies to overcome new challenges.

- The challenge for the EU, and for all of us, is to enable the best of the tremendous opportunities that new technology offers us, through our world-leading tech regulation, by making sure we safeguard our values and our democracy.

Defensives

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Contact(s) – briefing contribution: **(JUST-D3)**