European Commission: High-Level Expert Group and public consultation on fake news

IRIS 2018-1:1/8

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On 13 November 2017, the European Commission launched a public consultation on “fake news” and set up a High-Level Expert Group (HLG), in order to tackle fake news online. The initiative against the dissemination of fake news within traditional and social media requires a comprehensive approach, including the identification of the problems faced by journalism and the role of social media in the dissemination of fake news. The balancing of fundamental freedoms, freedom of expression and media pluralism on the one hand, and the right of citizens to reliable information on the other, is also necessary. The consultation, together with the recommendations of the HLG, aims to contribute to the development of an EU-level strategy to combat fake content and to equip citizens with the necessary tools to identify them, in order to facilitate the dissemination of reliable information.

Only fake news and disinformation online falls within the scope of the consultation; therefore, content that is per se illegal under the existing EU or national legislative framework (such as incitement to hatred, violence or terrorism and defamation) is not covered. The scope shall be clarified by the HLG. Citizens, social media platforms, researchers and public authorities are invited to contribute to the public consultation before 23 February 2018. Contributions are expected in three main areas. The first concerns the scope of the problem - more specifically, the way in which citizens and stakeholders identify online disinformation and trust different media. The second one pertains to the measures already taken by the relevant players (platforms, news media companies, civil society organisations) to tackle fake news. The third area of contribution is expected to address possible future action.

Moreover, the HLG is mandated to advise the Commission on the scope of fake news, to formulate recommendations, to define the responsibilities of relevant stakeholders and specify the international reach on this issue. The HLG is to comprise representatives from academia, online platforms, news media and civil society organisations. The first meeting of the HLG is to be held in January 2018.

This initiative is based on (i) the previous endeavours of the European Commission (see IRIS 2016-7/5), namely, the second Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights on the topic of "Media Pluralism and Democracy", which took

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place in November 2016, (ii) the concerns of European citizens regarding the independence of the media, and (iii) the Resolution adopted by the European Parliament calling on the Commission to establish the current legal framework on fake content (See IRIS 2017-8/7). The initiative against fake news online is part of the Commission's 2018 Work Programme.

The work of the HLG and the results of the public consultation is to be presented in spring 2018.

European Commission, Public consultation on fake news and online disinformation, 13 November 2017

https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/public-consultation-fake-news-and-online-disinformation

European Commission, Call for applications for the selection of members of the High Level group on Fake News, 12 November 2017

https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/call-applications-selection-members-high-level-group-fake-news

European Commission, Next steps against fake news: Commission sets up High-Level Expert Group and launches public consultation, 13 November 2017

http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-4481_en.htm

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