

Article – Propaganda: “The weapons used against us are continuously evolving” (interview)



How safe are European elections from interference by third parties, cyberattack and hostile propaganda?

We are talking about 27 parallel unique electoral processes in each member state, which can be targeted by hostile actors using a tailor-made set of tools: the malicious use of bots, algorithms, artificial intelligence, trolls, deepfakes and fake accounts in political campaigns as well as cyberattacks during the electoral process.

I am sure that following recent cases of meddling in elections and referenda, member states have started to assess situations within their territories. However, investing in capacity to counter disinformation campaigns and improve the ability of citizens to detect disinformation takes time, plus the weapons used against us are continuously evolving. This is why some specific steps have been taken at the EU level, like the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation, which ensures transparency of political advertising and encourages decisive action against fake accounts on social media platforms.

What do we need to do to improve?

We should think one step ahead, rather than merely reacting. We definitely need to put more focus on the malicious use of artificial intelligence – and developing and employing AI in order to be able to effectively counteract it.

Critical to success is publicly naming the perpetrators, their sponsors and the goals they seek to achieve. A robust response by the Union should include a range of measures including targeted sanctions.

Are some EU countries more vulnerable to disinformation?

Aggressive information operations are part of a broader strategy. Information warfare accompanying military offensives should be taken seriously and counteracted with determination and unity. Russia's disinformation campaigns continue to focus heavily on eastern Ukraine and Crimea, but always targets countries where it sees cultural, historical, linguistic or political links. The [EUvsDisinfo project](#) has debunked over 4,000 cases of disinformation campaigns on a wide variety of subjects.

How can we make sure that while countering propaganda we do not encourage censorship or hamper freedom of speech?

As we highlight in our report, freedom of speech and expression as well as media pluralism are at the heart of resilient democratic societies and provide the best safeguards against disinformation and hostile propaganda. Censorship would undermine us. This is why we underline the importance of the transparency of media ownership and pluralism. The biggest concern we highlight in our report are social media platforms. We understand that the banning of suspicious accounts may be seen as censorship, and therefore, such actions must be clearly justifiable.