

Daily News 29 / 01 / 2019

Le Plan Juncker soutient un programme d'investissement pour les entreprises croates et la modernisation d'un hôpital aux Pays-Bas

Le Plan d'Investissement pour l'Europe, ou [Plan Juncker](#), soutient un accord entre le groupe Banque d'Investissement Européenne (BEI) et la banque croate pour la reconstruction et le développement HBOR, qui crée un programme d'investissement de 70 millions d'euros, composés de fonds d'investissement. Ce programme accompagnera la croissance des petites et moyennes entreprises (PME) croates, tous secteurs confondus. Le Plan **Juncker** investit aussi dans la modernisation de l'hôpital Isala, dans la ville de Zwolle, aux Pays-Bas. Un prêt de 150 millions d'euros de la BEI soutenu par le Fonds européens pour les investissements stratégiques (EFSI), financera des travaux d'aménagement, la construction d'un nouveau bâtiment hospitalier économe en énergie dans la ville voisine de Meppel ainsi qu'un meilleur système de gestion de l'information avec un nouveau fichier patient électronique. Des communiqués de presse sont disponibles [ici](#). En décembre 2018, le Plan **Juncker** a mobilisé plus de 371 milliards d'euros supplémentaires en Europe, avec 856 000 entreprises bénéficiant d'un meilleur accès au financement. En Croatie, le Plan **Juncker** a déjà mobilisé 998 millions d'euros et soutient près de 1 180 entreprises, des chiffres qui s'élèvent respectivement à 10 milliards d'euros et 7 364 entreprises aux Pays-Bas. *(Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229-56153; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)*

La Commission reconnaît que le régime américain de fèves de soja est compatible avec les normes de durabilité de l'UE

La Commission a conclu aujourd'hui que les fèves de soja américaines satisfont les exigences techniques pour être utilisé dans les biocarburants dans l'UE, et a formellement reconnu le régime jusqu'au 1er juillet 2021. La décision d'aujourd'hui fait partie de la mise en œuvre de [la déclaration conjointe](#) convenue entre les présidents **Juncker** et Trump en juillet 2018. Dans la déclaration conjointe, les deux parties ont convenu [d'intensifier le commerce](#) dans plusieurs domaines et produits, notamment les fèves de soja. L'énergie renouvelable est l'avenir de l'Europe, et il est important que tous les biocarburants mis sur le marché respectent les normes de durabilité élevées que nous souhaitons pour nos énergies renouvelables. En soumettant la demande de reconnaissance, les États-Unis ont montré qu'ils sont prêts à jouer selon les règles. Les États-Unis sont le principal fournisseur de fèves de soja en Europe et la décision d'aujourd'hui élargira ses débouchés commerciaux en Europe. Dans l'UE, les biocarburants doivent remplir un ensemble de critères de durabilité, contenus dans la [Directive sur les énergies renouvelables](#) afin de pouvoir bénéficier des aides d'état et de pouvoir être comptabilisé vers les objectifs énergétiques de l'UE en matière d'énergies renouvelables. Un communiqué de presse complet est [disponible en ligne](#). *(Pour plus d'informations: Anna-Kaisa Itkonen – Tel.: +32 229 56186; Lynn Rietdorf – Tel.: +32 229 74959)*

Code of Practice against disinformation: Commission calls on signatories to intensify their efforts

The European Commission published today the first reports submitted by signatories of the [Code of Practice against disinformation](#) signed in October 2018. The monitoring of the Code of Practice is part of the [Action Plan against disinformation](#) that the European Union adopted last December to build up capabilities and strengthen cooperation between Member States and EU institutions to proactively address the threats posed by disinformation. In particular, Google, Facebook, Twitter, Mozilla and the trade associations representing the advertising sector have submitted their first reports on the measures they are taking to comply with the Code. According to the [reports](#), which cover measures taken by 31 December 2018, online companies' work is more advanced and comprehensive in some areas, for instance in taking down fake accounts and de-monetising the purveyors of disinformation, but less so in others. A [press release](#) and [Questions & Answers](#) are available online. Furthermore, today the European Commission is organising a conference "[Countering online disinformation – Towards a more transparent, credible and diverse digital media ecosystem](#)", which will take stock of the achievements made in tackling online disinformation in Europe and look at the way forward in view of the upcoming European Parliament elections. Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mariya **Gabriel**, Members of the European Parliament as well as representatives of the technology community, the industry and the media are participating. Commissioners Julian **King**, in charge of the Security Union, and Mariya **Gabriel** gave a [press conference](#) earlier today. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083 – Marietta Grammenou Tel.: +32 229 83583)

Property regimes for international couples in Europe: new rules apply in 18 Member States as of today

The EU Regulations clarifying the rules applicable to property regimes for international married couples or registered partnerships apply as of today. The regulations establish clear rules in cases of divorce or death and bring an end to parallel and possibly conflicting proceedings in various Member States, for instance on property or bank accounts. In short, it will bring more legal clarity for international couples. First Vice-President **Timmermans** said: *"The entry into application of these regulations is good news for the growing number of international couples in Europe. This is about giving certainty to thousands of European couples about what happens to their property if they divorce or one of them dies. I am confident that these regulations will help many European couples manage such difficult times."* Vera **Jourová**, EU Justice Commissioner said: *"These new rules will make it easier and cheaper to divide joint assets and provide some relief to people in difficult circumstances. More than 16 million international couples will benefit from clear procedures in case of divorce or death of a partner. They will be able to save around €350 million each year in legal costs. I encourage the remaining Member States to join the enhanced cooperation for the sake of all international couples across the EU."* The full press release is available [here](#). More information on the Regulations can be found in this [factsheet](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara

Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Cross-border e-commerce: Commission welcomes agreement on proposal to facilitate sales of goods and supply of digital content and services in the EU

The European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement today on the European Commission's proposals of December 2015 regarding the online sales of goods and supply of digital content and services. In conjunction with the [regulation to end unjustified geoblocking](#) that entered into force in December 2018, the new agreement on digital contract rules is the latest achievement of the [Digital Single Market Strategy](#), delivering concrete benefits to citizens and businesses. Andrus **Ansip**, Vice-President for the Digital Single Market, and Věra **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality welcomed the agreement with the following statement: "As a consumer, one of the biggest benefits of the EU's Digital Single Market is that you are just one mouse click away from buying goods in any EU country without additional costs. For businesses, it means being able to offer products, services and digital content everywhere in the EU and having access to millions of potential customers. This can only work well if we have EU-wide, clear, up to date and harmonised rules. With the agreement on our proposals for new rules on the supply of digital content and services, and on sales of goods, we are taking another step in that direction. Consumers across the EU will be better protected. For instance, when digital content such as music or software is defective, a consumer will now be able to be compensated. They will also have more time to prove that an item purchased was defective at the time of purchase. And when a product is defective, the same compensation possibilities, such as getting a discount or refund, will apply throughout the EU. As for businesses, they will benefit from more legal certainty and fair competition. We want to thank the European Parliament and the Council for their commitment to finding solutions that meet the challenges faced by consumers and sellers in a highly digitalised and borderless environment. Today's agreement will boost consumers' confidence and therefore also business. Ultimately, an increased supply of both digital content and goods across Europe will bring more choice at competitive prices to consumers, and this is what the Digital Single Market is all about. We hope to see the same level of commitment from the European Parliament and the Council on two other EU priority files, namely the proposed modernised copyright rules to make them fit for the digital world and the proposed Regulation on Privacy and Electronic Communications." The full statement can be found [here](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Concentrations : La Commission autorise la création d'une entreprise commune par SNCF Mobilités et Ceetrus

La Commission européenne a approuvé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, la création d'une entreprise commune par SNCF Mobilités et Ceetrus France (« Ceetrus »), toutes trois basées en France. Cette entreprise commune, dénommée « Gare du Nord 2024 », prendra la forme d'une société d'économie mixte à opération unique (SEMOP) et aura pour objet la conclusion

et l'exécution d'un contrat de concession et d'une convention d'occupation temporaire du domaine public, autorisant la SEMOP à occuper des espaces en gares dédiés à des activités de commerces et de services. SNCF Mobilités intervient dans le secteur du transport de voyageurs et de marchandises et, via sa branche Gares & Connexions, dans la gestion et le développement des 3000 gares françaises de voyageurs. Ceetrus, contrôlée par la holding Suraumarché, est active dans le développement immobilier mixte. La Commission a conclu que la concentration envisagée ne soulèverait pas de problème de concurrence, compte tenu de son impact très limité sur la structure du marché. La transaction a été examinée dans le cadre de la procédure simplifiée de contrôle des concentrations. De plus amples informations sont disponibles sur le [site internet concurrence](#) de la Commission, dans le [registre public](#) des affaires sous le numéro d'affaire [M.9170](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of RHP Platform by Ivanhoe Cambridge, Macquarie and RHP Manager

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over RHP Platform of the US by Ivanhoe Cambridge ("Ivanhoe") of Canada, Macquarie Group ("Macquarie") of Australia and RHP Manager also of the US. RHP Platform holds and manages real estate assets across the US. Ivanhoe is a global real estate investor and a subsidiary of the pension manager Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec. Macquarie is a global provider of banking, financing, advisor, investment and funds management services. RHP Manager owns, manages and operates manufactured home communities in the US. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because RHP Platform is only active in North America and has no foreseen activities in the European Economic Area. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.9232](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Tom Tailor by Fosun International

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of sole control over Tom Tailor Holding SE ("Tom Tailor") of Germany by Fosun International Limited ("Fosun International") of China. Tom Tailor is a fashion house that mainly offers classic and modern casual wear for men, women and children. Fosun is part of a group with activities in (i) pharmaceuticals, medical services and health, (ii) tourism, leisure, fashion and consumer products, and (iii) insurance, finance and investment. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns given the companies' limited combined market shares in Europe under any possible market definition. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.9233](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Eurostat : Le revenu réel des ménages par habitant en hausse dans la zone euro et dans l'UE28

Dans la zone euro, en termes réels, le revenu des ménages par habitant a augmenté de 0,3% au troisième trimestre 2018, après une hausse de 0,4% au trimestre précédent. La consommation réelle des ménages par habitant a progressé de 0,1% au troisième trimestre 2018, après une hausse de 0,2% au deuxième trimestre 2018. Dans l'UE28, le revenu réel des ménages par habitant a augmenté de 0,8% au troisième trimestre 2018, après une hausse de 0,4% au trimestre précédent. La consommation réelle des ménages par habitant a progressé de 0,4% au troisième trimestre 2018, après une hausse de 0,2% au deuxième trimestre 2018. Un communiqué de presse complet est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidhardt – Tél.: +32 229 56153; Annikky Lamp – Tél.: +32 229 56151; Enda McNamara – Tél.: +32 229 64976)

[Upcoming events](#) of the European Commission (ex-Top News)

[The Commission recognises the U.S. Soya bean – scheme as compatible with EU sustainability standards](#)

Today's decision is part of the implementation of the [Joint Statement](#) agreed between Presidents **Juncker** and Trump in July 2018. In the Joint Statement, the two sides agreed to [increase trade in several areas and products, notably soya beans](#). Renewable energy is the future of Europe, and it is important that any biofuels put in the market respect the high sustainability standards we want for our renewables. By submitting the request for recognition, the U.S. has shown that it is ready to play by the rules.

The United States is Europe's main soya beans supplier and today's decision will further expand its market opportunities in Europe. In the EU, biofuels must fulfil a set of sustainability criteria, contained in the [Renewable Energy Directive](#), in order to be eligible for public support or to count towards the EU's renewable energy targets.

The Commission's recognition can be extended beyond 2021 if the scheme puts in place the changes regarding the sustainability criteria in line with the requirements of the [new revised Renewable Energy Directive](#), adopted last year for the period 2021-2030. The US Authorities are required to notify to the Commission all changes it aims to apply to the certification procedures and the Commission may repeal its Decision if the scheme is not correctly implemented, if it fails to submit annual reports or if it does not introduce improvements that may be set out in the future.

Imports of U.S. soya beans by the European Union increased by 112% over the

current market year (July-December 2018), compared to the same period in the previous year. With a share of 75% of EU soya beans imports, the U.S. remains Europe's number one supplier.

Background

To demonstrate compliance with those criteria, the United States submitted to the Commission on 15 November 2018 a soya bean production scheme, the Soybean Sustainability Assurance Protocol (SSAP), which is owned and managed by Soy Export Sustainability, LLC (SES), a subsidiary of the U.S. Soy Export Council (USSEC).

The EU imports about 14 million tonnes of soya beans per year as a source of protein to feed our animals, including chicken, pigs and cattle, as well as for milk production. Soya beans from the U.S. happen to be a very attractive feed option for European importers and users thanks to their competitive prices.

This decision on the recognition of the "U.S. Soybean Sustainability Assurance Protocol" for demonstrating compliance with the sustainability criteria under the renewable Energy Directive does not increase the share of crop-based biofuels, eligible to account toward the renewable energy target.

[Code of Practice against disinformation: Commission calls on signatories to intensify their efforts](#)

Today, Google, Facebook, Twitter, Mozilla and the trade associations representing the advertising sector have submitted their first reports on the measures they are taking to comply with the [Code of Practice on Disinformation](#). There has been some progress, notably in removing fake accounts and limiting the visibility of sites that promote disinformation. However, additional action is needed to ensure full transparency of political ads by the start of the campaign for the European elections in all EU Member States, to allow appropriate access to platforms' data for research purposes, and to ensure proper cooperation between the platforms and individual Member States through contact points in the Rapid Alert System.

Andrus **Ansip**, Vice-President for the Digital Single Market said: *"Signatories have taken action, for example giving people new ways to get more details about the source of a story or ad. Now they should make sure these tools are available to everyone across the EU, monitor their efficiency, and continuously adapt to new means used by those spreading disinformation. There is no time to waste."*

Věra **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality said: *“With the launch of European election network with EU authorities last week and this report today, we are stepping up the pace on all fronts to ensure free and fair elections. I expect companies will fully follow up on their rhetoric and commitment. Time is short so we need to act now.”*

Julian **King**, Commissioner for the Security Union said: *“Given the proximity of the European elections, any progress made in the fight against disinformation is welcome. But we need to go further and faster before May. We don’t want to wake up the day after the elections and realise we should have done more.”*

Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, said: *“Today’s reports rightly focus on urgent actions, such as taking down fake accounts. It is a good start. Now I expect the signatories to intensify their monitoring and reporting and increase their cooperation with fact-checkers and research community. We need to ensure our citizens’ access to quality and objective information allowing them to make informed choices”.*

According to the reports which cover measures taken by 31 December 2018, **online companies’ work** is more advanced and comprehensive in some areas, for instance in taking down fake accounts and de-monetising the purveyors of disinformation, but less so in others. In particular, the reports show that:

- **Facebook** has taken or is taking measures towards the implementation of all of the commitments but now needs to provide greater clarity on how the social network will deploy its consumer empowerment tools and boost cooperation with fact-checkers and the research community across the whole EU.
- **Google** has taken steps to implement all its commitments, in particular those designed to improve the scrutiny of ad placements, transparency of political advertisement and providing users with information, tools and support to empower them in their online experience. However some tools are only available in a small number of Member States. The Commission also calls on the online search engine to support research actions on a wider scale.
- **Twitter** has prioritised actions against malicious actors, closing fake or suspicious accounts and automated systems/bots. Still, more information is needed on how this will restrict persistent purveyors of disinformation from promoting their tweets.
- **Mozilla** is about to launch an upgraded version of its browser to block cross-site tracking by default but the online browser should be more concrete on how this will limit the information revealed about users’ browsing activities, which could potentially be used for disinformation campaigns.

For the upcoming reports, the Commission expects Google, Facebook, Twitter and Mozilla to develop a more systematic approach to enable a proper and regular monitoring and assessment, on the basis of appropriate performance data.

When it comes to the trade associations representing the **advertising sector**

(World Federation of Advertisers, European Association of Communication Agencies and Interactive Advertising Bureau Europe), the Commission notes their positive efforts to raise awareness about the Code, but also notes the absence of corporate signatories and stresses the key role brands and advertisers play in the efforts to demonetise purveyors of disinformation.

Next steps

Today's reports cover measures taken by online companies and advertising sector by 31 December 2018. For January 2019, online platforms should provide detailed information to the Commission in the coming days. This first monthly report will be published in February 2019 and will be followed by similar reports every month until May 2019. This will allow the Commission to verify that effective policies with particular pertinence to the integrity of the electoral processes are in place before the European elections.

By the end of 2019, the Commission will carry out a comprehensive assessment at the end of the Code's initial 12-month period. Should the results prove unsatisfactory, the Commission may propose further actions, including of a regulatory nature.

Background

The monitoring of the Code of Practice is part of the [Action Plan against disinformation](#) that the European Union adopted last December to build up capabilities and strengthen cooperation between Member States and EU institutions to proactively address the threats posed by disinformation.

The reporting signatories adhered to the Code of Practice in October 2018 on a voluntary basis. [The Code](#) aims at achieving the objectives set out by the Commission's [Communication](#) presented in April 2018 by setting a wide range of commitments articulated around five areas:

- Disrupt advertising revenue for accounts and websites misrepresenting information and provide advertisers with adequate safety tools and information about websites purveying disinformation.
- Enable public disclosure of political advertising and make effort towards disclosing issue-based advertising.
- Have a clear and publicly available policy on identity and online bots and take measures to close fake accounts.
- Offer information and tools to help people make informed decisions, and facilitate access to diverse perspectives about topics of public interest, while giving prominence to reliable sources.
- Provide privacy-compliant access to data to researchers to track and better understand the spread and impact of disinformation.

The Code of Practice also goes hand-in-hand with the Recommendation included in the election package announced by President Juncker in its 2018 [State of the Union Address](#) to ensure free, fair and secure European Parliament's elections. The measures include greater transparency in online political advertisements and the possibility to impose sanctions for the illegal use of personal data in order to deliberately influence the outcome of the European

elections. Also, the Member States were advised to set up a national election cooperation network of relevant authorities – such as electoral, cybersecurity, data protection and law enforcement authorities – and to appoint a contact point to participate in a European-level election cooperation network. The first meeting at the European level took place on 21 January 2019.

For more information

[Questions and Answers](#)

[Reports by the signatories of the Code of Practice](#)

[Press release: A Europe that Protects: The EU steps up action against disinformation](#)

[Factsheet: Action plan against disinformation](#)

[Communication on tackling online disinformation: a European approach](#)

[EU vs disinfo website](#)

[Questions and Answers – Code of Practice against disinformation: Commission calls on signatories to intensify their efforts](#)

What do the reports published today cover?

As part of the [Action Plan against disinformation](#) that the European Commission and the High Representative presented last December, the online platforms and the advertising sector that have signed the [Code of Practice on Disinformation](#), have been required to provide reports including up-to-date and complete information on the actions they took in 2018 to comply with their commitments. These reports were published today by the Commission on its website, in parallel with the [conference on “Countering Online Disinformation”](#) organised by the Commission in Brussels.

The Code of Practice is a set of industry self-regulatory commitments to fight disinformation on a voluntary basis. Signatories of the Code have committed to taking precise, measurable and concrete measures to fight online disinformation.

How will the Code of Practice contribute to tackling disinformation before the European elections in May?

By implementing the commitments set out in the Code, the signatories will increase transparency for European citizens about political advertising and will limit techniques such as the malicious use of bots and fake accounts.

Through the Code, the signatories have committed to help counter mass online disinformation campaigns intended to polarise public opinion or sow distrust in the European institutions, especially in relation to national elections in Member States and the European Parliament elections.

Can you describe the online companies' first concrete actions?

The four online companies that are signatories of the Code of Practice have taken or are taking measures to help them meet their commitments. However, complying with all the commitments in the Code of Practice still requires significant efforts.

Work is more advanced and comprehensive in some areas, for instance in taking down fake accounts, transparency of political ads or on de-monetising some purveyors of disinformation, and less in others. These are of key concern for elections across the EU. However, more significant progress is required in key parts of the Code, such as transparency of issue-based ads or the operational cooperation with fact-checkers and the research community. The availability of consumer empowerment tools seems to be limited only to a number of Member States.

For instance, **Facebook** implements measures to make political advertising more transparent, take action against fake accounts and malicious automated systems, provide users with contextual information, tools and support to empower them in their online experience and encourage research into disinformation. Facebook's political ads transparency system will be available across the European Union in advance of the EU elections. In its report, the social network also provides insights on a number of tools to help consumers make decisions when they encounter online news that may be false or to make it easier to find diverse information. However, some consumer empowerment tools such as the *context button* or the cooperation with fact-checkers are not yet available throughout the EU, and more clarity on deployment plans across the EU would be welcome. Actions to support research also appear to be of limited scope and implementation of research activities has not started yet.

Google's work is making progress with regard to the scrutiny of ads placements through its Ad Sense network, the fight against fake accounts and impostor websites, and the transparency of political ads, which will be rolled out in advance of the May 2019 European elections and will include an *Election Ads Transparency Report*. Google has also taken steps to provide users with information, tools and support to empower them in their online experience: its ranking algorithms prioritise relevant, authentic and authoritative information in the search results, and the *Fact Check label* is available to users in all EU 28 Member States. However, other tools that may

help improve users online experience, such as *Breaking News* and *Top News* are available only in a small number of Member States and more clarity about future deployment plans is needed. Google's actions to support research are developing, including through its participation in the *Trust Project* and the *Credibility Coalition*, but are still of limited scope and should be broadened to a wider research community.

Twitter has prioritised new measures designed to act against malicious actors harnessing the vulnerabilities of its services, in particular the closure of fake or suspicious accounts and automated systems/bots used to spam or increase the distribution of inauthentic content and disinformation. The social network provides some illustrative data, which suggest significant progress on this front. On the other hand, its report does not sufficiently discuss how its advertising policies restrict persistent purveyors of disinformation from promoting their tweets and achieving prominence in user timelines.

Mozilla is about to launch an upgraded version of its browser to block cross-site tracking by default. This will limit the information revealed about users' browsing activity, which may be harnessed in support of disinformation campaigns. The upgraded browser will be available across the EU. The Firefox EU Election Promo will promote transparency of political advertising. Its availability across the EU will depend in part on Mozilla's ability to localise features by Member State. It would be useful for Mozilla to provide further details on the features, availability and timing for the rollout of the Firefox EU Election Promo.

In conclusion, the Commission expects the companies to put in place a more systematic approach that will allow compliance with their commitments under the Code to be properly monitored and assessed on the basis of appropriate performance data. The companies have committed to continue working on these issues. The Commission will closely follow their progress and expects them to deliver substantially before the European Parliament elections.

What about the progress made by the advertising sector?

The Commission welcomes the efforts of the trade associations representing the advertising sector to raise awareness about the Code and promote its uptake among their respective memberships. The Commission notes that four national associations have now subscribed to the Code.

The Commission notes, however, the absence of corporate signatories and stresses the important role brands and advertisers play in the efforts to demonetise purveyors of disinformation. The Commission therefore expects brands and advertisers to step up and commit to the effort to counter disinformation, in particular ahead of the 2019 EU elections. The Commission will remain in contact with the trade association signatories, which will provide aggregated reporting in September 2019.

Can you provide examples of what will actually change with the implementation of the Code of Practice?

With this year's European elections in prospect, online political advertising distributed through social media should be clearly marked as such, and should be distinguishable from other types of sponsored content on social networks. The entity that has paid for the advertisement on the social media should also be identified.

There should also be a reduction in the number of fake websites: i.e. sites that are designed to look like those of a particular media outlet or legitimate political candidate and whose intention is to promote disinformation.

The Code should also contribute to a reduction of fake accounts that manipulate public opinion by spreading and amplifying disinformation.

Consumers should also be able to easily identify and report information they receive as disinformation, and platforms will take action to reduce the visibility and dissemination of this content.

Will the Code of Practice be enough?

Disinformation is a very complex issue that requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach. A single solution cannot address all challenges related to disinformation.

The Code is just one element of the toolbox proposed by the Commission on 26 April 2018 in its [Communication on tackling online disinformation](#).

The Communication includes other relevant actions, such as the creation of an independent European network of fact-checkers and academic researchers, the use of new technological tools to detect, report and counter false information, and measures to support quality journalism. The aim is also to empower citizens, notably by promoting initiatives on media literacy such as the Media Literacy Week starting on 18 March and by making sure that Member States also promote similar programmes.

As part of the [Action Plan](#) presented by the Commission and the High Representative in December 2018, the Strategic Communication Task Forces and the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell in the European External Action Service (EEAS), as well as EU delegations in the neighbourhood countries are being reinforced with additional specialised staff and data analysis tools. The EEAS' strategic communication budget for addressing disinformation and raising awareness about its adverse impact has significantly increased, from €1.9 million in 2018 to €5 million in 2019. EU Member States should complement these measures by reinforcing their own means to deal with disinformation and participate in the Rapid Alert System that is being set up (more details below).

How does this Code relate to the measures linked with the European elections announced by President Juncker in his State of the Union speech in September 2018?

The Recommendation included in the election package is addressed to Member States and European and national political parties, foundations and campaign

organisations.

The Code of Practice sets out self-regulatory commitments for online companies and the advertising industry to fight disinformation on a voluntary basis.

The Code of Practice and the Recommendation go hand-in-hand. European and national political parties would be required to make available on their websites the same sort of information on political advertising that platforms would be committed to make available for online political ads distributed over their services.

What is the European cooperation election network and who is a member?

The European election cooperation network brings together national election authorities, audiovisual media regulators, cybersecurity and data protection authorities as well as relevant expert groups, for example on media literacy. The European election network was convened for the first time in January 2019. The outcome of the work of the Rapid Alert System will be shared with the European cooperation election network, to exchange information on threats relevant to elections and support the possible application of sanctions.

What does the Code of Practice set out as next steps?

Today's reports are just a first step. Ahead of the European Parliament elections, online platforms and the advertising sector have committed to providing regular and complete information on a monthly basis about how they are implementing the commitments to which they subscribed in the Code of Practice, including by replying to the Commission's specific requests starting in January 2019. This information will be made public.

In addition, the Code of Practice requires that signatories provide a full report after twelve months. These reports should include complete data and information to enable a thorough assessment by the Commission. On this basis, the Commission, assisted by independent expertise and with the help of the [European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services \(ERGA\)](#), will assess the overall effectiveness of the Code of Practice. The Commission may also seek the assistance of the European Audiovisual Observatory as well as leading international researchers and experts.

What is the Rapid Alert System and how will it work?

As part of the [Action Plan against disinformation](#) presented by the European Commission and the High Representative in December 2018, the Rapid Alert System will be a hub for Member States, EU institutions and partners to share information on ongoing disinformation campaigns and allow them coordinate their responses. The Rapid Alert System embodies the European approach, in that its purpose is to protect fundamental freedoms and open, democratic debate.

The system will be based on open-source and unclassified information only. As the Rapid Alert System should be set up by March 2019, Member States are currently working urgently to designate national contact points, map their

capacities and draw up collective workflows.

What is the role of the European network of fact-checkers and researchers in tackling online disinformation, and when will it be launched?

The role of fact-checkers is essential in tackling disinformation. Their work contributes to make the information ecosystem more robust by verifying and assessing the veracity of content based on facts and evidence. The Commission's aim is to facilitate cooperation between European fact-checkers through the creation of a network of European fact-checkers.

The network will gather fact-checkers operating on the basis of high standards and will be editorially independent.

The Commission supports a project for a Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis (SOMA), with EUR 1 million, which started its work in November 2018. It is developing a platform that has become operational on the 1 November 2018 and will facilitate cooperation amongst fact-checkers in view of the European elections

In March, this project organises a meeting with European fact-checkers to foster cooperation ahead of the European elections.

The Commission will also provide additional funding for the platform (€2.5 million under CEF) which, building on the experience learnt with SOMA, will scale up the joint work between fact-checkers and researchers and provide additional tools for fact-checking and network analysis.

This digital service infrastructure should scale up the collaboration between fact-checkers and academic researchers in order to ensure full coverage of the Union territory and facilitate the build-up and interconnection of relevant national organisations.

Meanwhile, the Horizon 2020 support action SOMA (Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis) is providing a platform in order to create a multidisciplinary community, including fact-checkers and academic researchers, to enhance detection as well as analytical capabilities and better understand various types of disinformation threats.

What is the Commission doing to support media?

The Commission supports quality news media and journalism as an essential element of a democratic society. As confirmed in the progress report of December 2018, the Commission wants to enhance the transparency and predictability of State Aid rules for the media sector; it also launched a [call](#) of about €1.9 million for the production and dissemination of quality news content.

The Commission co-funds, together with initiatives of the European Parliament, independent projects in the field of media freedom and pluralism. These projects, among other actions, monitor risks to media pluralism across Europe, map violations to media freedom, fund cross-border investigative journalism and support journalists under threat. New calls for projects are

expected in the coming weeks.

To support quality journalism, media freedom, media literacy and media pluralism, the Commission proposed a dedicated budget of €61 million in the 2021-2027 Creative Europe programme.

In addition, in its proposal for Horizon Europe programme (2021-2027), the Commission has foreseen funding for the development of new tools to combat online disinformation; to better understand the role of journalistic standards and user-generated content; and to support next generation internet applications and services including immersive and trustworthy media, social media and social networking. So far around €40 million have been invested in EU projects in the area.

Press Release: EFSI's effectiveness must be better substantiated, say EU Auditors

[Download PDF](#)