Protecting Democracy against Disinformation: The European Experience

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EUI SCHOOL OF TRANSNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

Disinformation:

"false or misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain and which may cause public harm"
(Code of Conduct, 2025)

Misinformation:

No intention to harm

Influence operations coordinated efforts by either domestic or foreign actors to influence a target audience using a range of deceptive means,

Foreign interference: coercive and deceptive efforts to disrupt the free formation and expression of individuals' political will by a foreign state actor or its agents often as part of a broader hybrid operation

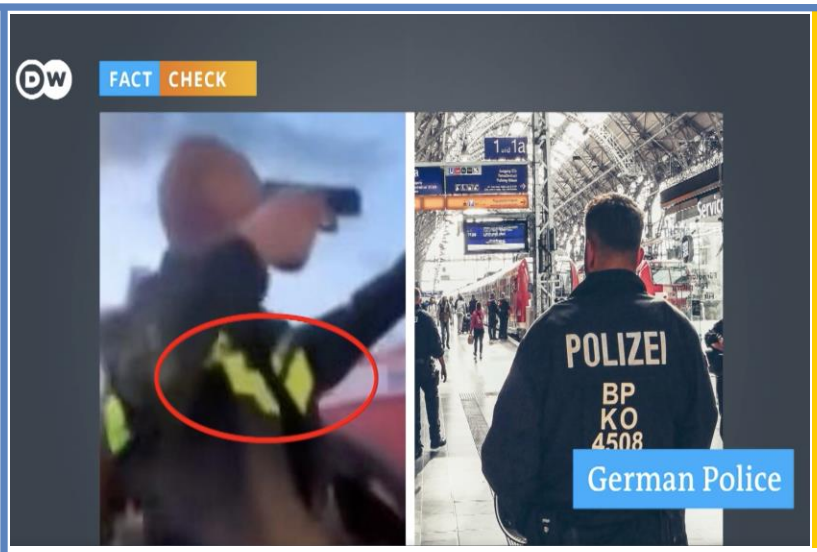
EU Policy

Disinformation is not necessarily illegal

Disinformation targeting the EU agricultural policy: Examples

Spanish parliamentary elections 2023

Spain will abolish agriculture in the name of climate



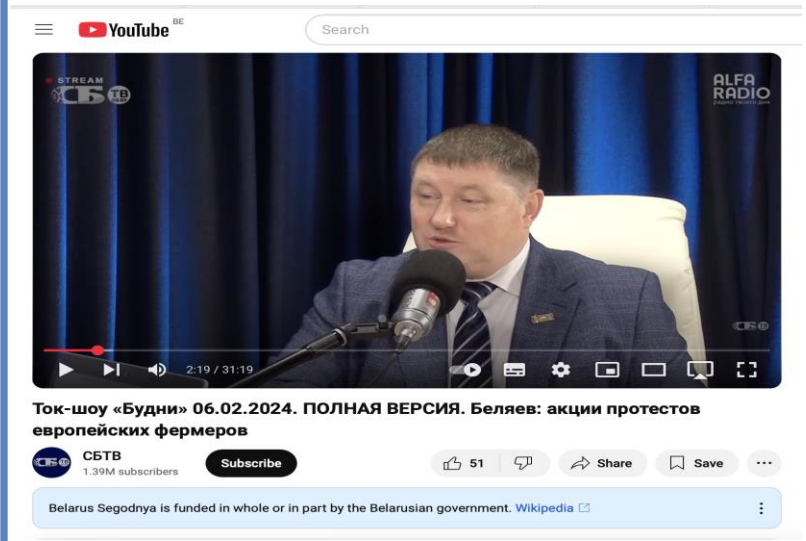
Farmers' protests February 2024

German police holding a farmer at gunpoint

gital Media Observatory

Sweden/Denmark January 2024

Wind turbines and poisoned animals



Farmers' protests September 2024

EU sactions against Russia have deprived its farmers of substantial earnings

Tackling Disinformation: a multidimensional approach

Respecting fundamental rights, including freedom of expression

Citizens' right to make informed decision in democratic processes

Making **online platforms** more transparent and accountable, through soft- and hard law

Improving the capabilities of public institutions to detect, analyse and expose foreign interference and hybrid threats

Creating an enabling environment for Media Freedom and resilient democracy

A **whole-of-society approach** (including media, civil society , academia and private sector) to understand the threats, calibrate responses and empower citizens

Making online platforms more accountable

The Digital Services Act (DSA)

No Liability Principle, subject to conditions:

- Common transparency and accountability rules for ALL online platforms

Enhanced obligations for Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines (VLOPSEs), i.e. with more than 45 million monthly active users:

- **Annual assessment of systemic risks** stemming from the design or use of services (e.g. dissemination of illegal content, negative effects on civic discourse and electoral processes, and public security)
- **Adoption of effective risk mitigation measures**, respectful of fundamental rights, including self-regulatory codes
- **Independent audits**
- **Hefty sanctions** in case of non-compliance

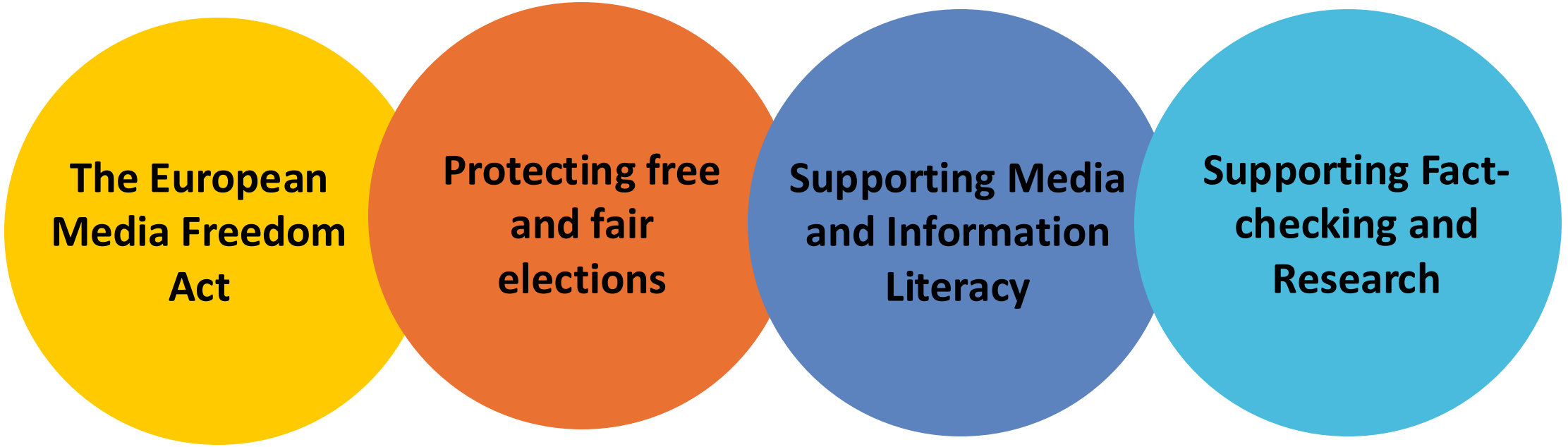
Making online platforms more accountable

A world-first Co-Regulatory Instrument:

The Code of Conduct on Disinformation

- **Demonetisation: cutting financial incentives for purveyors of disinformation**
- **Transparency of political advertising**
- **Ensuring the integrity of services, including transparency of AI systems**
- **Empowering users, including algorithmic accountability**
- **Empowering researchers**
- **Empowering the fact-checking community**
- **Transparency centre and Task-force**
- **Strengthened Monitoring framework**

Creating an enabling environment for Media Freedom and Resilient Democracy



Catalysing efforts for a whole-of-society approach

- Support and coordination of **fact-checking** activities
- Support and coordination of **academic research**
- Coordination of **media literacy** activities
- Support to relevant **policy** activities
- **Training** and **outreach**

A platform to support the work of the EU's largest **interdisciplinary** community of **independent** fact-checkers, researchers and media literacy organisations to counter disinformation

It connects and coordinates the activities of 14 regional and national EDMO hubs.

Improving the Capabilities of Public Institutions

Enhanced Strategic Communications

A Rapid Alert System, ensuring exchange of information and coordinated responses among EU Member States

Collaboration with with like-minded countries, Nato and G7

A Toolbox against FIMI including mechanisms to impose costs on perpetrators

Thank You!

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