



Press Release

Luxembourg, 17 March 2020

Auditors look into the EU's fight against disinformation

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) has launched an audit to examine the Union's efforts to fight the spread of verifiably false or misleading information for the purposes of economic gain or intentionally deceiving the public, which may cause public harm. The auditors will assess the EU action plan against disinformation in terms of its relevance, the results achieved so far, as well as its accountability framework. The examination includes the European External Action Service (EEAS) StratCom task forces' capacity to tackle disinformation, the establishment of the rapid alert system, the code of practice signed by online platforms and other bodies, as well as projects and EU initiatives to raise awareness and improve societal resilience.

The rise of the internet, social media and new digital technologies have revolutionised the way people are informed and communicate. At the same time, this has also brought about increasing challenges, such as unauthorised access and use of data, as well as rapid amplification of misleading content. Sensitive topics such as migration, climate change and health issues are often used to polarise society.

"Any attempt to maliciously and intentionally undermine and manipulate public opinion can represent a serious threat to the Union itself," said Baudilio Tomé Muguruza, the ECA Member leading the audit. "EU citizens must know whether the EU Action Plan against disinformation is effective."

Combating disinformation needs to strike the right balance between safeguarding democracy in the EU on the one hand and maintaining the fundamental rights to freedom of speech and media pluralism on the other. According to the EEAS, Russian disinformation poses the greatest threat to the EU, but other third countries have also started to deploy similar strategies.

In 2015, the East StratCom Task Force was set up to address Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns. By June 2017, the EEAS had set up two additional task forces: the Western Balkans Task Force for that region and the Task Force South for the countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa and the Gulf region. In September 2018, the Code of Practice was published - a voluntary self-regulatory set of commitments by online platforms and the advertising industry to improve transparency in political advertising, strengthen the closure of fake accounts, and demonetise incentives for purveying disinformation.

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' audit preview.

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In March 2019, the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy, in cooperation with the Member States, set up the rapid alert system to enhance cooperation and coordination between all actors involved in tackling disinformation.

The EU Action Plan also includes securing European elections, supporting multi-disciplinary independent fact-checkers and researchers while promoting media literacy. It provides the blue print for bringing together Member States and EU Institutions to build up capabilities and address disinformation proactively. The Member States have called for its regular review and update.

Notes to editors

Today, the auditors published an audit preview on the EU Action Plan against disinformation. The full audit preview is available in English on eca.europa.eu.

Audit previews provide information on an ongoing audit task. They are designed as a source of information for those interested in the policy or programmes being audited.

The audit report will be published in 2021. The ECA previously [reviewed](#) the challenges to effective EU cybersecurity policy.

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