European Commission - Statement

Code of practice against disinformation: Commission takes note of the progress made by online platforms and urges them to step up their efforts

Brussels, 20 March 2019

Today the European Commission published the latest monthly reports from Google, Twitter, and Facebook, on the progress made in February towards meeting their commitments to fight disinformation. The online platforms are all signatories of the Code of Practice against disinformation and have committed to report their progress in the run up to the European Parliament elections in May 2019. The publication of the monthly reports follows a meeting yesterday afternoon between the Commission and the platforms to discuss the state of play.

Vice-President for the Digital Single Market Andrus **Ansip**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra **Jourová**, Commissioner for the Security Union Julian **King**, and Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** saidina joint statement:

"Yesterday's meeting and the reports published today show that online platforms are making progress. We had good discussions with them about how they can further improve the ongoing monthly reporting requested in the Action Plan against Disinformation. Such monthly progress is needed to ensure the transparency during the election campaign.

We take note of the progress described in the February reports in a number of areas. The platforms have all confirmed that their tools for assessing the transparency of political ads will be operational in advance of the European elections in May.

This is a substantial achievement, especially in such a short time-frame, which will enhance the transparency of online paid political advertisements and ensure that voters will be reliably informed throughout the election period and beyond. We also welcome the fact that all three platforms are taking election integrity initiatives that go beyond the specific commitments set out in the Code of Practice.

However, further efforts are needed by all signatories in key areas. More systematic information is needed for the Commission to assess the efforts deployed by the online platforms to scrutinise the placement of ads and to better understand the effectiveness of the actions taken against bots and fake accounts.

We encourage online platforms to work with researchers and fact-checkers on access to live information on public pages, streams and other services, as well as on data on inauthentic accounts they have identified and removed. Such access could help to obtain a comprehensive and independent picture of disinformation patterns and trends, and should be done in full respect of the General Data Protection Regulation. Finally, we need to make sure that the tools being developed by online platforms are available in all 28 EU Member States, not only in certain Member States."

Main outcomes of the reports:

- **Google** reported on actions to improve scrutiny of ad placements in the EU and provided further detail on its election ads transparency policy, including the specific verification requirements that advertisers must meet to run election ads. It confirmed that its EU Elections Ads Transparency Report will be introduced in April, covering all political adverts on the platform. Data was also provided on the removal of a significant number of YouTube channels for violation of its policies on spam, deceptive practices & scams and impersonation. Google needs to show further progress on the transparency of issue-based advertising and on abusive account creation as well as more detailed reporting on YouTube.

- **Facebook** reported on actions to improve the scrutiny of ad placements and highlighted a new policy on vaccine misinformation, as well as more information on their policy for issue-based advertising in the EU. Facebook confirmed its Ad Library will be launched in late March and will consist of a publicly searchable database for political and issue-based ads. The platform also reported that it had tackled three cases of coordinated inauthentic behaviour in February in Romania, the UK and Moldova. Facebook should provide more information on specific actions taken

against breaches of its community standards (such as misrepresentation or inauthenticity).

- **Twitter** has expanded its political campaigning ads policy to cover the EU and started enforcing its policy on 11 March. This policy includes a certification process and ads covered by the policy will be viewable in Twitter's Ad Transparency Centre. Twitter needs to show more progress on the scrutiny of ad placements, as well as report on actions to protect its services against malicious automated accounts, spam and other activities.

Next steps

Today's reports cover measures taken by online platforms in February 2019. These reports allow the Commission to verify that effective policies to ensure the integrity of electoral processes are in place before the European elections in May 2019.

The next reports, covering actions undertaken by the platforms in the month of March are expected to be published mid-April. The Commission hopes to see further progress in a number of areas by each of the platforms.

By the end of 2019, the Commission will carry out a comprehensive assessment 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 monthly reporting cycle builds on the Code of Practice, and 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 committed to the Code of Practice in October 2018 on a voluntary basis. In January 2019 the European Commission published the first reports submitted by signatories of the Code of Practice against disinformation. The [Code](#) aims to reach the objectives set out by the Commission's [Communication](#) presented in April 2018 by setting a wide range of commitments:

- 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.

Ahead of the European elections in May 2019, the Commission is monitoring the progress of the platforms towards meeting the commitments that are most relevant and urgent ahead of the election campaign: scrutiny of ad placements; political and issue-based advertising; and integrity of services.

The Code of Practice also goes hand-in-hand with the Recommendation included in the election package announced by President Juncker in the 2018 [State of the Union Address](#) to ensure free, fair and secure European Parliament elections. The measures include greater transparency in online political advertisements and the possibility to impose sanctions for the illegal use of personal data to deliberately influence the outcome of the European elections. Member States were also advised to set up a national election cooperation network of relevant authorities – such aselectoral, 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, and a second one on 27 February. The next meeting will take place on 4 April. Last week, Commissioner **Jourová** [wrote](#) to national political parties calling on them to ensure transparency of political advertising, to be ready to face cyberattacks and to respect European data protection rules during the campaign.

For more information

- [Reports on the implementation of the Code of Practice](#)
- [Security Union: 15 out of 22 legislative initiatives agreed so far](#)
- [Questions and Answers](#) [Reports by thesignatories 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 disinfowebsite](#)

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