

Assessment of the Code of Practice on Disinformation - Achievements and areas for further improvement

This Staff Working Document (SWD(2020)180) sets out the key findings of the Commission services' assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of the Code of Practice on Disinformation during its initial 12-months period of operation.

The Staff Working Document (SWD (2020)180 Final - Assessment of the Code of Practice on Disinformation) delivers on a specific action point of the December 2018 Action Plan against Disinformation, which charged the Commission to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the Code at the conclusion of its initial 12-month period of application. It provides an overview and an assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of the commitments subscribed to by the signatories of the Code of Practice on Disinformation.

The assessment shows that the Code has proven a very valuable instrument, and has provided a framework for a structured dialogue between relevant stakeholders – the first one of its kind worldwide – to ensure greater transparency and accountability of platforms' policies on disinformation. The Code has also prompted concrete actions and policy changes by relevant stakeholders aimed at countering disinformation.

In broad strokes, the signatories to the Code have put in place policies aimed at:

1. reducing opportunities for advertising placements and economic incentives for actors that disseminate disinformation online,
2. enhancing transparency of political advertising, by labelling political ads and providing searchable repositories of such ads,
3. taking action against and disclosing information about malicious actors' use of manipulative techniques on platform services, to artificially boost the dissemination of information online and enable certain false narratives to become viral,
4. setting up technological features that give prominence to trustworthy information, so that users have more instruments and tools to critically assess content they access online, and
5. engaging in collaborative activities with fact-checkers and the research community, including media literacy initiatives.

However, the SWD highlights that, in order to ensure a complete and consistent application across stakeholders and Member States, the Code should be further improved in several areas by providing commonly-shared definitions, clearer procedures, more precise and more comprehensive commitments, as well as transparent key performance indicators (KPIs) and appropriate monitoring. Participation should be broadened to include other relevant stakeholders, in particular from the advertising sector.

Moreover, the lack of access to data allowing for an independent evaluation of emerging trends and threats posed by online disinformation, as well as the absence of meaningful KPIs, are fundamental shortcomings of the current Code. At present, it remains difficult to precisely assess the timeliness

and impact of signatories' actions, as the Commission and public authorities are still very much reliant on the willingness of platforms to share information and data. Therefore, a more structured model for cooperation between platforms and the research community should be developed.

A structured monitoring programme may constitute a pragmatic way to mobilise the platforms and secure their accountability. The programme for monitoring disinformation around COVID-19 foreseen in the June 2020 Joint Communication will be an opportunity to verify the adequacy of such an approach, and prepare the ground for further reflection on the best way forward in the fight against disinformation.

The information and findings set out in this assessment will support the Commission's reflections on pertinent policy initiatives, including the European Democracy Action, as well as the Digital Services Act, which will aim to fix overarching rules applicable to all information society services.

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Press release | 10 September 2020

The Commission has presented the assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of the Code of Practice on Disinformation. The assessment shows that the Code has proven a very valuable instrument, the first one of its kind worldwide, and has provided a framework for a structured

dialogue between relevant stakeholders to ensure greater transparency of platforms' policies against disinformation within the EU. At the same time, the assessment highlights certain shortcomings mainly due to the Code's self-regulatory nature.

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