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**Resolution 2255 (2019)[1]**

# Public service media in the context of disinformation and propaganda

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly considers that public service media have an indispensable mission to fulfil in democratic societies. They should be a forum for pluralistic public debate and a means of promoting a broader democratic participation of individuals, and also a factor of social cohesion and integration of all people, groups and communities.

2. Editorial and institutional independence, as well as sufficient and stable funding, constitute indispensable conditions for public service media to effectively fulfil their mission. In return, public service media should deliver high-quality journalism by focusing on matters of public concern and providing the public with reliable information and a diversity of opinions. This is all the more important in the new media environment, where the dissemination of disinformation, propaganda or hate speech is growing exponentially, in particular via social media.

3. While hate speech may require legal prosecution, disinformation, propaganda and more broadly information disorder – created from decontextualised facts, leaps of logic and repetitious falsehoods – can more easily be countered by the provision of reliable information. Commercial media might not always do this, especially when they are owned by entrepreneurs with political connections or ambitions. Public service media, as independent sources of accurate information and unbiased commentary, are by definition well placed to counteract the phenomenon of information disorder.

4. Fully aware of the threat that disinformation, propaganda and other forms of information disorder represent for democratic societies, the Assembly joins its voice to international forums such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which have recognised the need for robust and diverse media ecosystems and acknowledged the role of public service media in counteracting disinformation and propaganda.

5. The Assembly is aware that today public service media must meet a number of challenges. In many member States, there is an emerging trend of threats to the independence of public service media or to their regulatory bodies. Many governments' preference for taxpayer-generated funding has given them more budgetary influence, which can result in more State-controlled content. Moreover, due to commercial pressures from media markets, public service media sometimes face criticism from commercial competitors for allegedly distorting the digital news marketplace. Also, public service media are fundamentally national institutions, consequently no one model to counter national or international information disorder fits all contexts. All these challenges may weaken the capacity of public service media to counter disinformation and propaganda.

1. *Assembly debate* on 23 January 2019 (5th and 6th Sittings) (see Doc. 14780, report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr Petri Honkonen). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 23 January 2019 (6th Sitting).

6. The Assembly considers that in the present media environment, there is a need for strong public service media that are able to counter information disorder. Consequently, the Assembly recommends that member States:

6.1. guarantee editorial independence, as well as sufficient and stable funding, for public service media, to ensure that they are capable of producing accurate, reliable news and information and ensuring quality journalism deserving the trust of the public;

6.2. ensure that their national legal frameworks allow for public service media to make use of the internet and to broadcast online;

6.3. secure adequate funding to public service media, so that they can allocate sufficient resources to innovation in content, form and technology to foster their role as major players in countering disinformation and propaganda and as a cutting-edge stakeholder in protecting communication and media ecosystems in Europe;

6.4. avoid the term “fake news”, which has been excessively politicised and frequently used to negatively label independent critical journalists or media outlets; use instead – as recommended by the Council of Europe – the concept of “information disorder” to describe the content, the purpose and the extent of dissemination of misleading information;

6.5. support research on information disorder to better understand its impact on the public, and try to find adequate solutions to neutralise its negative effects;

6.6. open a multi-stakeholder discussion on the public service obligations of social media to ensure public interest benefits for society, as well as debates on the issue of the economic model of information media organisations, which still champion quality journalism but are under economic pressure as their advertising revenues are eclipsed by the social media platforms;

6.7. support multi-stakeholder collaborations aiming to develop new tools for user-generated content fact-checking and artificial intelligence-driven fact-checking;

6.8. ensure proper follow-up to the recommendations of the European Commission High-Level Expert Group on fake news and online disinformation, namely to create a network of research centres to study disinformation in order to monitor the scale, techniques and tools, the precise nature and potential impact of disinformation in society, to identify and map disinformation sources and mechanisms that contribute to their digital amplification, to provide a safe space for accessing and analysing platforms’ data, and to better understand the functioning of algorithms.

7. The Assembly calls on public service media organisations to:

7.1. fully implement the European Broadcasting Union guidelines and editorial principles to guarantee quality journalism and trustworthiness, and act as national hubs for reliable information and role models, engaging audiences in all their diversity;

7.2. consider countering disinformation and propaganda as one of their priority missions and, in this respect, seek to enhance their role by engaging with social media platforms, legacy media, policy makers and other stakeholders in a joint action against information disorder, and to take part in local, regional and global fact-checking initiative partnerships;

7.3. cultivate analytical points of view**,** develop current affairs and education programmes to inform audiences about the importance of source criticism, fact-checking and “filter bubbles”, explaining the harm of disinformation, propaganda and “alternative news”;

7.4. attract audiences through quality and innovation, using creative and informative online content and social media platforms with a wider audience in order to reach young people and other hard-to-reach audiences;

7.5. in parallel with speedy reaction to news, develop slow, deliberative, analytical stories that are verified, contextualised and reported impartially.

8. The Assembly calls on internet intermediaries to**:**

8.1. actively participate in fact-checking projects, like those of First Draft and the International Fact-Checking Network, and develop specific tools that allow users and journalists to detect disinformation and foster a positive engagement with fast-evolving information technologies;

8.2. co-operate with public and private European news outlets to improve the visibility of reliable, trustworthy news and facilitate users' access to it, as well as with civil society and organisations specialising in the verification of content to ensure the accuracy of all information on the social media platforms.

9. The Assembly calls on the European Broadcasting Union to continue to promote its guidelines and editorial principles and, in this context:

9.1. provide its members with advanced strategies regarding various means of countering information disorder and of helping audiences develop critical and analytical capacities for news consumption;

9.2. further develop innovative, collaborative fact-checking initiatives and systems to verify user-generated content among its members, looking for synergies with other quality news partners;

9.3. organise systematic workshops and training for its members on verification techniques and encourage the exchange of good practice in the area of countering disinformation and propaganda;

9.4. actively take part in, and contribute to, targeted studies focusing on information disorder.