



Doc. 14780

17 December 2018

Public service media in the context of disinformation and propaganda

Report¹

Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

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Summary

In the new media environment, where the dissemination of disinformation, propaganda or hate speech is growing exponentially, public service media, as an independent source of reliable information and unbiased commentary, are well placed to counteract the phenomenon of information disorder. Member States should guarantee their editorial independence, as well as sufficient and stable funding, to ensure quality journalism deserving the trust of the public.

Public service media should resolutely engage in countering disinformation and propaganda by developing educational programs for the general public and encouraging a critical approach to information and sources. They should engage with social media platforms, legacy media, policy-makers and other actors in a joint action against information disorder.

Member States should support research on information disorder to better understand its impact on the public, as well as multi-stakeholder collaborations aiming to develop new tools for user-generated content fact-checking and artificial intelligence driven fact-checking.

As for internet intermediaries, they should 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 accuracy of all information on the platforms.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 14312](#), Reference 4303 of 30 June 2017.



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A. Draft resolution²

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 and 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 fulfil this task, especially when they are held by entrepreneurs with political connections or ambitions. Public service media, as an independent source 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 like 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 that 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.
6. The Assembly considers that in the present media environment, there is a need for a strong public service media 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 broadcast online;
 - 6.3. secure adequate funding to public service media, so that they can allocate sufficient resources to innovation in content, forms and technology to foster their role as a main actor 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;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 7 December 2018.

- 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 capped 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, namely 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 guidelines and editorial principles delivered by the European Broadcasting Union to guarantee quality journalism and trustworthiness, and act as national hubs of reliable information and role models, engaging the 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 actors in a joint action against information disorder, and to take part in local, regional and global fact-checking initiative partnerships;
 - 7.3. cultivate critical outlooks, develop current affairs and educational 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 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 accuracy of all information on the 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 of verification of user-generated contents 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.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Petri Honkonen, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Disinformation via media content is nothing new. What is novel today is that old forms of disinformation and propaganda, including editorial decisions, are now combined with human influencers and opinion makers, viral online sharing, and automated content creation of disinformation.³ The issue of disinformation, propaganda and related phenomena is a challenge to Europeans. The Eurobarometer of March 2018 reveals that almost 40% of Europeans come across fake news every day or almost every day. Over 80% of the respondents perceive fake news as a problem in their country and for democracy in general. In the respondents' view, journalists, national authorities, and the press and broadcasting management should be the main actors responsible for stopping the spread of fake news.⁴

2. There are several interconnected broad trends that can be said to contribute to the challenge. As societies, and individuals, we have witnessed a shift in our relationship to knowledge, that is, common ideas of objectivity and "truth" are no longer prevailing as a preference in public debates. This is coupled with a cultural shift that is marked with distrust in elites and institutions, whether political, journalistic or scientific. More broadly, cases of deep dissatisfaction in existing political actors, systems and structures are continuously emerging. Economic conditions of the media and communication landscapes are marked by fierce competition. Technology has fostered fragmentation among media public and created information habits based on algorithms, micro-segmenting and viral content sharing among like-minded users and closed groups.⁵ All these developments together have resulted in the "information disorder" of rampant disinformation and in an increasing trend of "information and media capture" (where the freedom of the press is subtly limited by political and commercial actors).⁶

3. The Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News", Disinformation and Propaganda of March 2017, by Special Rapporteurs of several intergovernmental bodies,⁷ the [report on "Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making"](#) commissioned by the Council of Europe and the [Report by the European Commission multi-stakeholder High Level Expert Group \(HLEG\) on fake news and online disinformation](#) all recognise the need for robust and diverse media ecosystems and acknowledge the role of public service media in that regard. The Joint Declaration notes that independent and resourced public service media, with a clear public mandate for high-quality journalism is essential for freedom of expression. The report commissioned by the Council of Europe recommends that support for public service media organisations and local news outlets, as well as support for quality journalism initiatives at the local, regional and national levels, needs to be a priority.⁸ The report by the European Commission posits that the general objectives of the European Union are to increase the long-term resilience of European Union citizens, communities, news organisations, member States and the European Union as a whole; as well as to always respond to various challenges of disinformation with up-to-date and appropriate measures. One dimension of this is support for demonstrably independent public service media which can help produce quality information, counter disinformation, and increase media and information literacy.

4. The main objective of this report is to highlight some core activities and novel "best practices" by public service media organisations: How do they provide quality content and counter different forms of disinformation by informing and educating audiences? First, the report seeks to define disinformation and the institutional contexts of public service (chapter 2). It then highlights a variety of examples of the ways in which public service media can act as an antidote to disinformation (chapter 3).

3. <http://aej-belgium.eu/fake-news-undermines-democratic-freedoms-aejs-road-map-right-responses/>.

4. <http://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/flash/surveyky/2183>.

5. McNair B. (2018), *Fake News: Falsehood, Fabrication and Fantasy in Journalism*, London and New York: Routledge.

6. For example Schiffrin A. (2017), Introduction to Special Issue on media capture. Journalism. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917725167>.

7. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organisation of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information; with the assistance of the non-governmental organisations ARTICLE 19 and the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), www.osce.org/fom/302796?download=true.

8. www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/news/-/asset_publisher/thFVuWFiT2Lk/content/tackling-disinformation-in-the-global-media-environment-new-council-of-europe-report?_101_INSTANCE_thFVuWFiT2Lk_viewMode=view/&desktop=false.

5. My analysis of these issues is essentially based on the expert report by Ms Minna Aslama Horowitz,⁹ whom I warmly thank for her excellent work. I also rely on various Council of Europe standard-setting instruments,¹⁰ and I have taken into account contributions by other experts,¹¹ and by several members of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, as well as my fact-finding visit to the BBC, in London, on 25 October 2018.

2. Information disorder and public service media

2.1. Definitions: from “fake news” to information disorder

6. There is consensus¹² that “fake news” as a term should not be used. The challenges of current media landscape are numerous and this term does not adequately highlight that complexity. In addition, the word “news” should have a connotation of fact. Finally, the term “fake news” has been far too politicised to be useful in analytical and policy work.

7. This report uses the terminology from the above-mentioned Council of Europe report on information disorder. Information disorder refers to the complex set of factors contributing to, and impact of, false content. It is created from de-contextualised facts, leaps of logic and repetitious falsehoods. Its impact comes from appearing on many different sites and apparently from many different sources, including traditional news organisations. This gives the audience the illusion of a fluency which makes the incredible, credible. According to the above-mentioned report, information disorder covers three main categories: disinformation, which means information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organisation or country; misinformation, which means information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm; and mal-information, which means information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organisation or country. One of the primary effects of the information disorder is the erosion of trust in the media. The public is often lost between accurate information and disinformation, and this may seriously damage the notion of truth and undermine trust in the democratic society as a whole.

2.2. Definitions and practices of public service broadcasting and public service media: from normative principles to multiple variations

8. In the European context, public service broadcasting (PSB), and its digital multi-platform version, public service media (PSM), are core institutions in many societies. The normative characteristics assigned to PSB and PSM by core stakeholders seem quite uniform: the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the global advocacy organisation Public Media Alliance (PMA), as well as the Council of Europe and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) refer to the following main features:

- public service broadcasting and public service media refer to broadcasting and related services made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public. They are often established by law, are non-partisan, independent and run for the benefit of society as a whole;
- they are neither commercial nor State-owned, but are free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces;
- their output is designed to inform, educate and entertain all audiences;
- they have universality in terms of content and access;
- they maintain accuracy and high standards of journalism, as well as excellence in broadcasting;

9. Assistant Professor in International Communication, Finland.

10. See for instance Committee of Ministers [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2012\)1](#) on public service media governance and [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2007\)3](#) on the remit of public service media in the information society, as well as Parliamentary Assembly [Resolution 2179 \(2017\)](#) on political influence over independent media and journalists and [Recommendation 1878 \(2009\)](#) on the funding of public service broadcasting.

11. Ms Helen Boaden, Member of the Advisory Board, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University (United States), former Director of BBC Radio and BBC News, London, and Mr Giacomo Mazzone, Head of institutional and members relations, European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Geneva.

12. See for instance Council of Europe report on “Information Disorder”; the European Union HLEG report; several [policy briefs](#) and commentary, as quoted in: Derakhshan H. and Wardle C., Information Disorder: Definitions. In: <https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The-Disinformation-Ecosystem-20180207-v2.pdf?x72166>, also <http://aej-belgium.eu/fake-news-undermines-democratic-freedoms-aejs-road-map-right-responses/>.

- they enhance social, political and cultural citizenship and promote diversity as well as social cohesion, and ultimately, support an informed democracy (the Council of Europe has noted that these principles apply whatever changes may have to be introduced to meet the requirements of the 21st century);
- in addition, the EBU lists innovation as one of its core PSM values, including creativity in terms of formats and technologies, as well as connectivity with audiences.¹³

9. In reality, PSB/PSM organisations in Europe vary significantly in terms of institutional arrangements, reach and budgets.¹⁴ PSB/PSM are national projects. A recent nine-country study highlights this: in Switzerland, Germany and the United Kingdom, PSM dominate the audiovisual market. On the other hand, in Ukraine, Romania, Portugal and Italy, strong competition has resulted in both public television and public radio comprising less than 20% of their respective markets.¹⁵

10. Institutional configurations in Europe range from the globally present multi-channel, multi-platform, multi-project BBC – often considered as the benchmark model for public service broadcasting – to the multiple independent organisations, defined by political-religious history, that make up the public broadcasting system in the Netherlands, to the relatively newly established public broadcasters in the Balkans that may still bear some characteristics of their predecessor, State media.¹⁶ For instance, in Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and the Slovak Republic, the regulatory and governance structures have not radically distanced public service operators from government and political control.¹⁷ The growing preference of taxpayer-generated funding by governments has given them more budgetary influence that, in many cases can, and has, lead to more State-controlled content or weakened possibilities to counter challenges such as disinformation and propaganda.¹⁸ Some evidence seems to point to the fact that PSM *de jure* may also be used to spread content bordering disinformation.¹⁹

11. Another challenge is the relationship between public service broadcasting and the multi-platform public service media. The Council of Europe has endorsed a broad view of PSM in relation to both programming and platforms. It has concluded that PSBs should be able to diversify their services through, for instance, on-demand and internet-based services, and has called for PSM to respond positively to audience expectations of enhanced choice and control stemming from digital developments. The European Union has similarly accepted a broad view of PSM.²⁰ Yet, already during the early stages of digitisation, different European countries responded in a variety of ways²¹ and a global review of State-administered and public service broadcasters showcase a variety of developments all around the world.²² Still today, due to commercial pressures from media markets, even in established PSM countries such as Denmark, Finland and Sweden, PSM are facing criticism from commercial competitors for allegedly creating market distortion, especially in the digital news marketplace.²³ To sum up, the European institutional guidelines are broad and the European realisations of PSM are varied, in terms of the reach, resources as well as political and commercial pressure and the extent of digital content and services. In particular, the challenges posed by political interests seem to be on the rise.

13. www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/EBU-Empowering-Society_EN.pdf.

14. For example, <https://en.ejo.ch/media-economics/europes-public-service-media-no-common-strategy>.

15. <https://en.ejo.ch/media-economics/accountable-and-or-responsible-public-service-media-in-europe>.

16. See, for example, the recent thorough reviews of the Balkan situation by the Analitika Center for Social Research, www.analitika.ba/publications.

17. Psychogiopoulou E., Anagnostou D., Craufurd Smith R. and Stolte Y. (2017), *Mediadem, The Freedom and Independence of Public Service Media in Europe: International Standards and Their Domestic Implementation*. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 20, <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/5965/2017>.

18. See, for example, www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/public-media-loss-of-journalistic-integrity-by-marius-dragomir-2018-03 and www.reuters.com/article/us-denmark-media/denmark-to-scrap-mandatory-public-service-broadcasting-fee-idUSKCN1HC1TR.

19. www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/13/hungary-journalists-state-tv-network-migrants-viktor-orban-government.

20. Psychogiopoulou E., Anagnostou D., Craufurd Smith R. and Stolte Y. (2017), *op. cit.*

21. Aslama M. and Syvertsen T. (2007), *Public Service Broadcasting and New Technologies: Marginalisation or Remonopolisation?*, in E. de Bens (ed.), *Media Between Culture and Commerce*, Bristol: Intellect Books.

22. Tambini D., *Public Service Media, Five Theses on Public Media and Digitisation: From a 56-Country Study*. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 25, <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/2795/1370>.

23. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital%20News%20Report%202017%20web_0.pdf; <http://mediapowermonitor.com/content/danish-public-media-loved-people-hated-politicians-0>.

3. Examples of approaches by public service media countering disinformation

12. The challenges of information disorder have been widely noted and addressed by news organisations and public broadcasters in particular. The aftermath of the United Kingdom's Brexit vote, the United States presidential election of 2016, and the related questions of interferences and (mis)use of data have kept newsrooms reporting about the phenomena, and of European cases and policy responses. Besides news reports, PSM organisations have countered disinformation also in other ways. According to the 2017 survey of 21 members of the European Broadcasting Union, all participants considered tackling “fake news” a high or medium priority; over half of them were planning activities, and half of them were taking part in a global or local fact-checking initiative partnership or were considering joining one. Over half of the organisations were in favour of the EBU launching a fact-checking initiative of some sort.²⁴ The following gives examples of fact-checking projects but also other activities countering disinformation, ranging from quality content to reaching young audiences via a variety of ways and platforms.

3.1. Providing quality and innovative communication practices

3.1.1. Quality, engaging programming

13. The European Broadcasting Union has addressed the digital challenge with the plan Vision 2020 that was created in 2014.²⁵ It focuses on the changes that digital technology is bringing to various fields of the audiovisual industry. Based on this vision, and on further research on the challenges of digitisation and journalism,²⁶ the EBU has defined “quality journalism” as one of its strategic priorities. An initiative led by the EBU Media Department has been launched in order to position PSM news as the most trusted source, and to bring news in various formats to all audiences.²⁷

14. Quality news is a common strategy for many PSM organisations. However, a thorough and concrete understanding of “quality” is essential. A recent multi-stakeholder conference on public service media in Slovenia, organised by the national broadcaster, highlighted the special relevance of PSM within smaller nations. PSM were seen as one of the few stable media institutions that should fight manipulation and where citizens should receive credible information. The newly established (2018) Journalismin akademia (Journalism Academy) of the Finnish public broadcasting company Yle is specifically focused on quality journalism and its potential in countering information disorder. One of its current main activities is, together with different Yle units, to go through a major strategic process of defining quality principles: the characteristics of Yle journalism as well as quality criteria specific to different units.

15. Also in younger public broadcasting contexts, editorial integrity is the key: the political talk show “Nedeljom u 2” from the Croatian radio-television, is highly popular as it manages to stay independent from political pressures. Other forms of content can foster quality and engagement. Radio-television of Serbia launched already in 2009 its experimental digital channel RTS Digital (now renamed as RTS 3) reporting on culture and the arts. While the channel was not popular it was important for the internal development of RTS; it provided an airspace for those missing topics. An experiment of added value through audience engagement was featured in the Swiss “Hallo SRF!” audience week in October 2017, during which 50 ordinary citizens were invited to take part in programme production.²⁸

16. According to the BBC's editorial guidelines, BBC News is committed to achieving the highest standards of accuracy and impartiality and to being rigorous in establishing the truth of the story. Fully engaged in countering disinformation, the BBC is currently expanding its projects globally, notably to chaotic and noisy markets like India and Africa. The company's ambition is to bring trust in the news and current affairs delivered by a public service broadcaster in countries where media have been compromised.

17. At the heart of all quality news operations is the constant tension between, on the one hand, instinctive, fast thinking by journalists, which leads to stories getting on air quickly, and, on the other hand, slow, deliberative, analytical thinking, which ensures the stories are verified, contextualised and impartial. This is why journalists from the BBC speak now about the importance of “slow news”, news with more depth – including data, investigations, analysis, expertise – giving context and significance to news information. They

24. ARD, BBC, BR, CT, Channel 4, DR, DW, France Televisions, HRT, MTVA, NOS, NRK, ORF, RAI, RTP, RTS, SRF, TF1, VRT, YLE, ZDF and ERNO.

25. www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/EBU-Vision2020-Full_report_EN.pdf.

26. www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/EBU-Perfect-Storm_EN.pdf.

27. www.ebu.ch/digital-media/fake-news.

28. www.srf.ch/medien/chronik/?v=chronik&c=2017&l=123&pID=97984.

keep high editorial standards by constantly checking and double-checking their sources, and they realise that, in an age when any mistake is portrayed as evidence of an intention to mislead, professional journalists must re-double their efforts to provide the public with accurate and reliable information.

18. As for “quick news”, snapshots and user-generated content in general, disseminated via social media, no doubt this way of distributing information has revolutionised the manner in which the public experience major news events. Companies like the BBC make extensive use of such material insofar as the information can be verified. But journalists there are aware that snapshots capture just a part of the reality, while their ambition is to cover the whole landscape, revealing causes as well as effects, helping audiences discover not just *what*, but also *why* and *why it matters*.

3.1.2. Online versioning, apps and other technology-driven solutions

19. Versioning for online and mobile presence is another key part of innovation. This is an evident solution, while not without some challenges. A recent (2018) study of Yle (Finland), France Télévisions and Radio France (France), ARD and ZDF (Germany), RAI (Italy), Polskie Radio (Poland), and the BBC (United Kingdom) indicates that PSM organisations observe some tensions between their strategic priorities, remit and organisational imperatives and those of commercial platform companies. But they also see social media as an important opportunity for increasing their reach, especially among young people and other hard-to-reach audiences.²⁹

20. A typical response to engagement is to include social and mobile media services to news. For instance, in Germany, the main news broadcast “Tagesschau” by ARD has its own app³⁰ which summarises the news in 100 seconds.³¹ The programme uses Instagram for innovative and high quality video communication on news stories.³² A video series called “#kurzerklärt” (#explained briefly) on the ARD Tagesschau website explains background information on complex topics briefly and clearly.³³ Another example is the Croatian app HRTi for all HRT’s productions. Also, RTK in Kosovo has developed a popular web page (rtklive.com), with a modern design, and many Albanians living outside Kosovo are following it as a primary source of information.

21. Other technological solutions are used to enhance engagement and quality. NXG – Next Generation Radio house by Swedish Radio (SR) – is a smart remote control that transports audio in standard networks by using only a smartphone or a tablet.³⁴ By using this powerful remote control protocol, NXG allows a radio show to be broadcast from anywhere with a sufficient network connection. The NXG remote production solution won the EBU Technology & Innovation Award in 2017.

3.2. Fostering critical thinking about and around information disorder

22. In the context of disinformation and propaganda, many PSM are not just focusing on verifying the truth and exposing false stories, but they are also showing how stories can be manipulated and how statistics can be misused to create false and misleading perspectives. There are a multitude of examples of PSM organisations reporting, and educating the viewers, about the dimensions of information disorder. For instance, the Spanish RTVE featured the documentary “Guerra a la Mentira”³⁵ that depicted the use of technology to combat war propaganda and to end the impunity of war criminals. The documentary has an interactive version in the RTVE Lab.³⁶ At the Finnish Yle, a young reporter created a crowd-sourced series on Russian online trolling activities in Finland.³⁷ In Germany, Deutsche Welle provides a special webpage on “fake news”, reporting on the issue extensively.³⁸

23. Specific fact-checking initiatives both verify information and foster awareness. “Reality Check” is the BBC’s principal fact-checking service, which runs on TV, radio, on the website and via social media. This service tackles false news stories and challenges statements from public figures and institutions which may be false or misleading, and presents the verifiable facts instead, providing also the real context, which often changes the whole meaning of a story. A team of journalists is specifically devoted to explaining the facts

29. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-03/sehl_et_al_1803_FINAL_0.pdf.

30. www.tagesschau.de/100sekunden/index.html.

31. www.tagesschau.de/app/.

32. www.instagram.com/tagesschau/.

33. www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/kurzerklaert/index.html.

34. <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=4042&artikel=6648515>.

35. www.rtve.es/television/en-portada/guerra-mentira/.

36. www.dw.com/de/themen/fake-news-krise-der-fakten-krieg-der-meinungen/s-36840487.

37. <http://kioski.yle.fi/omat/my-year-as-a-pro-russia-troll-magnet>.

38. www.dw.com/de/themen/fake-news-krise-der-fakten-krieg-der-meinungen/s-36840487.

behind the news and debunking misleading headlines. The plans also include establishing an expertise network drawing on staff across the BBC, creating an “intelligence unit” within the World Service, and putting more resources into data journalism.

24. The Danish Broadcasting Corporation provides weekly fact-checking videos on politics.³⁹ The German public service broadcasting units host numerous initiatives. BR has a team called “BR Verifikation” and “#ZDFcheck17” is a cross-media fact-checking initiative against fake news spread on social media.⁴⁰ “Faktenfinder” is a fact-checking site hosted by ARD, providing specialised content informing about various forms of disinformation, discussing how to handle them, and offering tutorials on how to recognise them: the project aims at countering decreasing trust in the media.⁴¹

3.3. Developing targeted online communication with young people

3.3.1. Understanding journalism

25. Media literacy and media education for young people is a staple of many public service broadcasters. Some broadcasters, such as Belgium’s RTBF, have a special policy on media literacy. The objective of their official strategy, in place since 2014, is to help audiences access any kind of platform, use it and be able to analyse and sort all kinds of information they get through the press, radio, television, movies, internet and social media. The strategy has given birth to “RTBF Inside” and “RTBF Lab”. RTBF Inside offers the public different thematic tracks that highlight the stages of the production of radio, TV and web content, and the professions in the audiovisual sector.⁴² RTBF Lab offers experimental activities around the production of news, radio, TV and web.⁴³

26. In terms of understanding the current information disorder, some PSM organisations have responded with toolkits. For instance, “France TV Éducation” has a collection of videos on the phenomenon⁴⁴ and the Swiss SRF “My School” has published an educational teaching module specifically on “fake news”.⁴⁵ Some focus on the nature of quality journalism, fact-finding and trust, with a comprehensive approach to media and information literacy.

27. The Yle “Uutisluokka” (News classroom) project in Finland allows students to make their own news with Yle’s professional journalists. The mentors, that is Yle’s journalists, help students to come up with ideas for news stories, assist students with the production of their own news, and teach the principles of good journalism. The project also organises News Class video workshops in schools.⁴⁶

28. The BBC has offered a thousand schools mentoring in person, online, or at group events by BBC journalists. All schools have free access to online materials, including classroom activities, video tutorials and an interactive game called “BBC iReporter”.⁴⁷ The game allows players to experience being a BBC journalist in the heart of the newsroom. BBC iReporter gives the player first-hand experience of working in a newsroom facing the fast-paced pressures behind covering a breaking news story, whilst maintaining impeccable accuracy, impact and speed, and navigating the various pitfalls thrown up by potential disinformation elements. The game helps students to explore and discuss the importance of checking sources, which sources to trust or not, identify false stories by developing their critical thinking and media literacy skills, and understanding the benefits and pitfalls of using social media to gather information.⁴⁸

39. www.dr.dk/tv/se/detektor-tv/detektor-10/detektor-2018-04-26.

40. <https://presseportal.zdf.de/pressemitteilung/mitteilung/zdf-startet-crossmedialen-zdfcheck17-zur-bundestagswahl/>.

41. <http://faktenfinder.tagesschau.de/index.html>.

42. www.rtbef.be/auvio/emissions/detail_rtbef-inside?id=2291.

43. www.rtbef.be/entreprise/article_rtbef-lab?id=8231120.

44. <https://education.francetv.fr/tag/fake-news>.

45. www.srf.ch/sendungen/myschool/fake-news-2.

46. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/uutisluokka/>.

47. The game is part of the broader BBC Young Reporter national programme, which is a partnership between BBC News, BBC Academy, BBC Sport and BBC Children. The project gives 60 000 young people each year the opportunity to research and produce their own reports with the help of BBC staff mentors. There is an annual BBC Young Reporter News Day when the BBC promotes their stories across platforms and on www.bbc.co.uk/schoolreport.

48. www.bbc.co.uk/academy/en/articles/art20180305143328629.

3.3.2. Current affairs that matter to the target audience via multi-platform presence

29. Online, and especially mobile social, presence seems to be the key to reaching younger audiences – a challenge for many PSM organisations.⁴⁹ For instance, Yle Kioski, the Finnish public broadcaster’s content hub for younger audiences, offers comprehensive social media content on its website, on Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, as well as streaming via Yle’s platform Areena.

30. German public broadcasters are creating an especially wide variety of content for young audiences. Deutschlandfunk Nova addressed political news literacy and created an unconventional interview series “Ich würde nie” (“I would never”) during the German elections in 2017, that targeted young voters, addressing political topics that are particularly relevant within this age group.⁵⁰ DASDING Radio station, operated by SWR, focuses on local news and young audiences aiming to increase participation by commenting or voting via Whatsapp on programme aspects.⁵¹ Also, the digital Deutschlandfunk Nova, directed at young audiences, expanded its editorial offerings with a new late-night programme: “Ab 21” (21+). This programme seeks to make more creative space for topics that interest young target audiences, but with content that is created and presented with the quality standards of Deutschlandradio.⁵² “Funk” is a German digital video content platform launched by ARD and ZDF in 2016. The project publishes both entertaining and informative, critical videos on over 60 different channels. The channels can be watched on Youtube, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, but they are all available together on funk.net, the home platform. One of the main purposes of Funk is to not only provide content but also drive audience participation. Viewers are invited to discuss content and develop ideas, to raise criticism or questions.⁵³

3.3.3. Attracting young audiences through fiction

31. Radio-television of Vojvodina, a northern Serbian province, has produced a satirical show “Državni posao” (State job), which is very popular especially on social media, and its YouTube channel has more subscribers than any single public broadcaster in the region. In Finland, in 2016, the drama series “#sekasin” (#messedup) – a collaboration between Yle’s channels and civil society organisations working on mental health – became a success, greatly due to the related service, a live chat with mental health professionals that generated significant audience participation.

32. The web series “Skam” (Shame, 2015-2017) by NRK of Norway may be the most well-known and successful current programme by a public service broadcaster for young audiences. It follows a group of friends attending the Hartvig Nissen School in the capital city of Oslo. Each season corresponds to one school semester of about 12 weeks and focuses on a different character in the group, focusing on their particular struggles with peer pressure, sexual abuse, mental illness, homosexuality or religion. Each (fictional) character has a social media account that facilitates further conversation and dialogue between the episodes. A major international following emerged, including fan-run YouTube and Twitter accounts.⁵⁴ The series, “built for social”, has been bought for an English-language remake on Facebook Watch.⁵⁵

3.3.4. Global reach: the BBC case

33. Given its human and budgetary resources, as well as its excellent reputation and high professional standards, the BBC sets out today its ambition to be a global leader in the fight against disinformation and propaganda. The BBC is putting a major focus on raising global awareness regarding the phenomenon of information disorder and the need for close co-operation between various news media in the field of fact-checking and media literacy.

34. As the extent of information disorder has started to emerge, the BBC has expanded to more parts of the world its fact-checking service “Reality Check” to include global news stories and audience questions. This is particularly useful in the perspective of the next major elections in India and Nigeria in 2019. Monitoring and analysing statements from political figures and parties constitutes an indispensable watchdog function during

49. For example van Dijk J. and Poell T. (2015), Making Public Television Social? Public Service Broadcasting and the Challenges of Social Media, Television & New Media, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476414527136>.

50. www.deutschlandfunknova.de/serien/ich-wuerde-nie-1.

51. www.dasding.de/.

52. www.deutschlandradio.de/ab-21-deutschlandfunk-nova-sendet-ab-1-maerz-neues.2174.de.html?dram:article_id=411725.

53. www.funk.net/.

54. www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/06/the-norwegian-teen-drama-series-loved-around-the-world/532008/.

55. <http://deadline.com/2017/10/facebook-watch-skam-shame-remake-simon-fuller-mipcom-1202190370/>.

election campaigns. Beyond elections, verification of news and delivering quality trustworthy information is crucial, notably for the Indian context, where false rumours spread via encrypted closed groups like WhatsApp lead to fears of child abduction, mob killings, etc. BBC professionals are sharing investigative expertise with partners across India and Africa, including training of local journalists on verification techniques.

35. BBC Monitoring is another service which monitors media worldwide and is dealing amongst other things with the investigation of disinformation and propaganda globally; this includes reporting on various trends and false news stories. Based in London, it has several overseas bureaux. BBC Monitoring selects and translates information from radio, television, press, news agencies and the internet from around 150 countries in more than 100 languages.

36. Also, the BBC is expanding its media literacy programmes well beyond the United Kingdom, notably across six different regions in India. It is building on the work that has already been done by School Report “Real News” in the United Kingdom, developing materials that can be rolled out globally – through workshops and online resources that can be used as classroom material – to help young people understand what disinformation is and how to distinguish it from reliable information.

3.4. Collaborations

37. Collaborations with other news providers as well as with independent fact-checkers are a strategy for several public service broadcasters. In Austria, the ORF is joined in awareness-raising with partners through the Austrian Press Agency (APA), of which it and most daily newspapers are shareholders.⁵⁶ Some public broadcasting companies, such as Germany’s BR and Italy’s RAI use the browser extension “FactFox”, a product that supports management of and replying to user comments. BR uses the tool to identify false information.⁵⁷ Some RAI news programmes host regular external fact-checking organisations to show investigations and data on given ‘facts’.⁵⁸

38. In Norway, *Faktisk.no* is an independent fact-checking organisation, owned by the media companies VG, Dagbladet and TV 2, and public broadcaster NRK.⁵⁹ Following this model, Swedish Television (SVT) and Swedish Radio (SR), as well as the two largest daily newspapers *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*, have started a project to collaborate on fact-checking methods and news spreading during the electoral movement. The project is expected to last until December 2018. The stakeholders have already conducted a joint training programme for journalists. The participants collaborate on the fact-checking method that is based on the guidelines from the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).

39. Perhaps the most well-known multi-stakeholder collaboration is First Draft, hosted at Harvard University. The project has over 40 members including commercial and public service media around the world (for example ADF, BBC, France Télévisions, ZDF, Deutsche Welle, as well as Eurovision), not-for-profit journalism organisations (such as Global Voices and ProPublica), and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter).⁶⁰ In addition to its collaborative fact-checking efforts (most notably around the French elections, with a project called Cross Check), and its contributions to analyses of the complex phenomena around information disorder (including the aforementioned report to the Council of Europe), its latest contribution is a free online course for journalists and the general public on identifying misinformation.⁶¹

40. The EBU efforts in the realm of quality programming, innovation and media literacy⁶² are, by nature of the organisation, collaborations. They range from its core activities such as the Eurovision News Exchange,⁶³ to business innovation including big data,⁶⁴ journalism training and toolkits, workshops and other events, research, and specific policy advocacy for support of quality media to counter disinformation.⁶⁵ Recent projects include innovative collaborative fact-checking and a collaborative governance initiative. In 2017, the

56. <http://orf.at/stories/2386889/2386925/>.

57. <https://factfox-staging.herokuapp.com/>.

58. <https://pagellapolitica.it/progetto/index>, also www.washingtonpost.com/video/national/from-rai-fact-checking-politicians/2017/07/13/038a4a6a-67f4-11e7-94ab-5b1f0ff459df_video.html?utm_term=.ae10ce3ce8a0.

59. www.faktisk.no/.

60. <https://de.firstdraftnews.org/partners-network/>.

61. <https://firstdraftnews.org/free-online-course-on-identifying-misinformation/>.

62. The EBU co-ordinates the efforts of its members in digital and media literacy initiatives: www.ebu.ch/fr/contents/news/2012/03/empowering-citizenship-through-m.html.

63. www.ebu.ch/news-exchange.

64. www.ebu.ch/events/2018/02/big-data-conference-2018.

65. www.ebu.ch/news/2018/03/ebu-urges-european-policy-makers-to-improve-conditions-for-quality-media-to-fight-fake-news-and-disinformation.

EBU created a co-operative system of verification of user-generated content that works in a networked way with various members' newsrooms but also with other quality news partners, thus decentralising the fact-checking process.⁶⁶ A new collaborative initiative to combat disinformation online is the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), launched in April 2018 by the EBU, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Agence France Presse (AFP) and the Global Editors Network (GEN). The JTI is designed to promote journalism by adherence to an agreed set of trust and transparency standards to be developed and implemented. This will happen by means of the so-called Workshop Agreement of the European Centre of Standardisation (CEN), which was opened in April 2018 for the participation of media outlets, professional associations and unions, self-regulatory entities like press councils and regulatory bodies, as well as digital platforms, advertisers and consumer interest representatives.⁶⁷ In late April 2018, the EBU published its own "Position Paper: 'Fake News' and the Information Disorder", advocating a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to the phenomenon.⁶⁸

41. Finally, collaborations of a different type might also be useful: social media platforms may wish to invest in media literacy projects developed by some PSM. A concrete example of such collaboration is the BBC research project regarding the problem of disinformation in India. Taking into account the seriousness of the issue in this country, especially in the period before the elections in 2019, Google and Twitter have supported financially the BBC research project aiming to understand the psychology of people who spread disinformation, then synchronising it with network analysis and providing a comprehensive understanding of the complete chain of disinformation circulation: messages, actors and technology. This example shows that technology giants are also interested in finding effective solutions to the information disorder and can usefully co-operate with public service media and possibly other actors.

4. Conclusion

42. While the multi-stakeholder policy documents highlighted in this report recognise the key role of public service media, they do not give specific recommendations for PSM. The core actions of the European Union High Level Expert Group are about enhancing transparency of online news, promoting media and information literacy to counter disinformation; developing tools for empowering users and journalists; tackling disinformation and fostering a positive engagement with fast-evolving information technologies; safeguarding *the diversity and sustainability of the European news media ecosystem*, and promoting *continued research* on the impact of disinformation in Europe to evaluate the measures taken.⁶⁹ This list could be continued by calling for quality journalism. The provision of reliable news should include developing slow, deliberative, analytical thinking which ensures that stories are verified, contextualised and impartial.

43. Many PSM organisations are engaging in awareness raising and media literacy. Some are actively using tools for fact-checking and creating related collaborations. However, while PSM organisations are a part of the diversity of the European media landscape, many have faced funding challenges in their respective countries, and/or are being used for political rather than public communication tools. This is where strong support from the Council of Europe and the European Union, as well as from civil society, are needed. And while internal research and development is core to PSM, this is clearly an area where the Council of Europe can initiate participatory, multi-stakeholder projects to better understand the aspects of information disorder for PSM and democratic communication, as well as to innovate in content, form and technology, to aid the role of PSM as a cutting-edge stakeholder in protecting communication and media systems in Europe.

44. There are three broad aspects of the current media environment that do not solely pertain to information disorder, but are crucial in capturing the opportunities and limits of PSM organisations combating disinformation.

45. First, there is an urgent need to know more about audience and disinformation. Europeans tend to trust broadcasting more than online media, especially in the countries where PSM organisations are strong.⁷⁰ At the same time, generational and other differences may be key in terms of news consumption and media literacy. Also, the general trend of distrust in authority and expertise must be analysed in much more detail.

66. www.ebu.ch/social-newswire-extending-your-newsrooms-reach.

67. www.ebu.ch/news/2018/04/ebu-partners-with-rsf-on-journalism-trust-initiative-to-combat-disinformation.

68. www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/Position%20papers/EBU-Position-EN-Fake_News_Disinformation-18.04.2018.pdf.

69. <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>.

70. www.ebu.ch/news/2017/05/trust-gap-between-traditional-and-new-media-widening-across-europe.

46. Second, there is a need to fully understand, and re-conceptualise, the role of national public broadcasters in the global media ecosystem. Many see internet intermediaries as the core of the challenge.⁷¹ At the same time, some posit that social media, because of their participatory possibilities and importance as distributors of publicly relevant information and forums for public engagement, “makes it vital to subject them to public service obligations to ensure public interest benefits for societies”.⁷² Understanding policy and regulatory challenges of global platforms is thus imperative for policy makers and national media organisations. Yet, the “beyond national” approach can also be seen in multi-stakeholder solutions, the First Draft project being a prominent example.

47. Third, PSM organisations are facing national challenges, be it in contexts where State media are being transformed into PSM (for example in former eastern Europe); or where public interest media (including PSM, community, and local media) face severe commercial competition and/or need to be revitalised. Coupled with this is a wider challenge: an emerging trend of threats to the independence of PSM or to their regulatory bodies. Accordingly, there is a need to fully understand current challenges to PSM, from economic-commercial and political perspectives.

48. An essential action by the PSM is developing various initiatives and programming fostering audiences’ critical thinking about and around information disorder. PSM like the BBC, France Télévisions, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation or the German ZDF and ARD, as well as other outlets, develop specific fact-checking initiatives both to verify information and foster audience awareness.

49. Media literacy and media education for young people are indispensable elements of many PSM strategies. Their objective is to help audiences access any kind of platform, use it and be able to analyse and sort all kinds of information they get through the press, radio, television and social media. Some PSM organisations have prepared special toolkits to help the public better understand and find their way in the current information disorder.

50. PSM have fully understood that, to reach young audiences, they must be present online and on mobile applications like Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Youtube, etc. One of the main purposes of such online presence is not only to provide content but also to drive audience interactive participation, as viewers are invited to discuss content and develop ideas, to express criticism and pose questions.

51. In the current context of disinformation disorder, most PSM have realised that multi-stakeholder collaborations with other news providers, as well as with independent fact-checkers, are absolutely crucial. Guidelines from entities like the International Fact-Checking Network or First Draft are extremely useful for their strategies to counter disinformation and propaganda.

52. Finally, when we think about the future of PSM in the context of information disorder, we have to consider important issues such as their scale, sustainability and relevance. We must realise that a company like the BBC, which is today the largest PSM organisation in the world, is only a small player compared to the new media giants like Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Netflix or Google. This should be taken into account in the current and future dialogue with the technology platforms regarding the need for the latter to take responsibility for countering disinformation online. Moreover, social media platforms may be usefully involved in collaborations with PSM and other stakeholders by supporting research in the domain of information disorder or concrete projects developed by PSM to counter disinformation and spread media literacy, as shown in the example above regarding the BBC research projects in India and Africa.

71. <https://rsf.org/en/news/europe-tackles-disinformation-attention-good-political-will-makes-difference>.

72. Hjarvard S. (2018), Public Service in the Age of Social Network Media. In Van den Bulck H., Donders K., Lowe G.F. (eds.), *Public Service Media in the Networked Society*, www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/kapitel-pdf/04_hjarvard.pdf.