

Committee: Legal Committee

Issue: Legislation to protect the public from misinformation and conspiracy theories

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Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Maria Tourni and I would like to hereby formally welcome you to the Legal Committee and to the 7th ATSMUN. I am really glad that you have chosen this committee and I hope this experience is educative, constructive and fun at the same time. I will do my best to ensure that all of you have the opportunity to express your opinion and actively participate in the discussion. We shall all work together in order for this conference to be fruitful and successful.

I have been active in the MUN community for quite some time and from the conferences I have attended, I have gained precious knowledge that I will share with you through this study guide and of course during the actual conference. To all the newcomers, I truly hope that this year's ATSMUN Conference is a proper setoff for your MUN career and that you get to understand what MUN is all about. To all the experienced delegates, I hope this conference will introduce you to new issues and contribute in expanding your skills and horizons.

I highly encourage you all to make thorough research on your topics and your country's position. This is admittedly a lot of work, but during lobbying and debate you will feel a lot more confident and certain. Also, while working on your draft resolutions avoid plagiarism and keep your writing authentic. Finally, bear in mind that a study guide should under no circumstances replace your individual research. It is a brief introduction to the topic and its aim is to assist you in understanding the context and fundamentals of it.

Do not hesitate to contact me for any kind of question, procedural or topic-related. To that end I have left my email address below.

I can't wait to meet you all in March!

Best regards,

Maria

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DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Misinformation¹

Misinformation, as a term, has a dual definition. It either refers to false, inaccurate and misleading information that does not necessarily intend to deceive, or to the fact that the public has received the aforementioned kind of information.

Disinformation²

False information that is widely spread through rumors or propaganda in order to altercate with the public opinion, especially concerning political matters, and to obscure the whole or parts of the truth.

Conspiracy theory³

A conspiracy theory aims at explaining an incident or event by using logical fallacies and theoretical lines of reasoning rather than proof or facts. It is essentially a theory that is founded on the false perception that an event has taken place as a result of a secret and devious plot organized by powerful conspirators or influential organizations.

Conspiracy⁴

The act of joining a secret pact to proceed to an unlawful action. The main difference of a conspiracy to a conspiracy theory is that the first refers to the act itself, whereas the second tries to explain a tragic event to a conspiracy.

¹ *Misinformation*. (n.d.). Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/misinformation>

² *Definition of disinformation*. (n.d.). Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disinformation>

³ *Conspiracy theory | Definition, examples, & facts*. (n.d.). Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/conspiracy-theory>

⁴ *Definition of conspiracy*. (n.d.). Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conspiracy>

Fake news⁵

The term fake news refers to the spread of false or falsified information mainly through the internet and social media that is highly influential and aims at altering the public opinion on a specific societal or political issue.

Cybersecurity⁶

Cybersecurity refers to the set of technologies and processes that are designed to protect networks, devices and personal data of users from digital attacks and unauthorized access.

Circular Reasoning⁷

Circular reasoning or circular logic is a logical fallacy that is often associated with conspiracy theories. It occurs when the premises presume that the conclusion, they are trying to demonstrate, is true from the beginning. It could be logically valid, since the premises of the assumption are true if the conclusion is true as well.

Propaganda⁸

Dissemination of false, selected, or one-sided information, facts, arguments, etc. with the purpose of influencing the public opinion. In essence, it is the systematic effort of mostly a government to manipulate the public's beliefs or sociopolitical stances to their favor. The deliberateness and distortion of reality are the key factors that differentiate propaganda from a casual conversation between people of opposing viewpoints.

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media and the internet as the fundamental source of information has brought grave changes in our modern society. Nowadays misinformation, fake news, conspiracy theories are widely spread and hard not only to tackle but also detect. It has

⁵ *Fake news*. (n.d.). Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fake-news>

⁶ *What is cybersecurity?* (n.d.).

Cisco. <https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/products/security/what-is-cybersecurity.html>

⁷ *Circular argument*. (n.d.). Encyclopedia

Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/circular-argument>

⁸ *Propaganda | Definition, history, techniques, examples, & facts*. (n.d.). Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/propaganda>

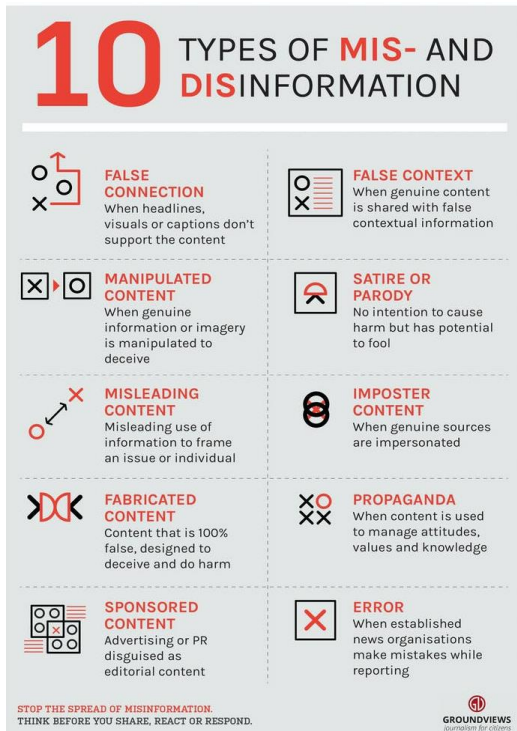
become evident that misinformation and conspiracy theories -by extension- are a result of society's need to attribute unexplainable events to improbable causes. However, the effects of such actions are often catastrophic due to the uncontrollable spread of these statements through the web. This sudden urge of people to produce and reproduce false facts finds fertile land in the plethora of current hardships the world is currently combatting and the deficient limitations and controls on the web.

There are plenty major conspiracy theories that are spreading ragingly nowadays and most of them relate to the COVID-19 pandemic and the numerous vaccines. Understandably, the various stances on an issue could lead to discrepancies especially on online platforms of discussion. The most extreme standpoints are usually the ones that inflame the generation of fake news and disinformation. Deceitful assertions relating for example to the existence of microchips inside the vaccine pose a challenge for the public health officials that strive to retain public safety and trust towards the government. This movement joined and enlarged an anti-vaccine sentiment that has existed for plenty of years. Although, all the false statements circulating in the web relating to conspiracy theories in general have no scientific basis they have caused severe unrest and disparities in the society. The aforementioned is only an example of the way conspiracy theories spread, are solidified, and influence the masses.

Through the years the natural human curiosity and need for an explanation have led to the formation of a variety of conspiracy theories and misinformation scandals. Characteristic examples are the belief that the Illuminati were the secret rulers of the world and currently most of mankind's problems afflictions are attributed to them or that the 9/11 attacks were an "insider's job," implying that the US government was either aware of the attack beforehand or even was even responsible for it. Admittedly, some theories have had more serious implications for society's functions than others, such as Adolf Hitler's death coverup or the still-existing assumption that the Earth is flat. Nonetheless, it is necessary that states take immediate action to alleviate the crisis by enacting legislation, bearing in mind the potential detrimental effects of the spread of conspiracy theories and fake news.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Conspiracy theories and misinformation have existed for thousands of years and have disrupted the way a society would normally function. We have observed a raging surge in their emergence; however, this does not mean that the current environment has led to their generation.



Types of conspiracy theories

There are three main types of conspiracy theories. First of all, there are Walker’s five kinds⁹ that aim at shedding light to the perpetrator rather than the act itself. More specifically, the five kinds are the following: ‘Enemy Outside’ (schemers outside the community), ‘Enemy Within’ (conspirators lurking inside the nation), ‘Enemy Above’ (powerful individuals acting for their own gain), ‘Enemy Below’ (lower classes overturning social order), and lastly, ‘Benevolent Conspiracies’ (people that work to improve society).

There are several categories of mis- and disinformation, ‘groundviews’, CC BY-ND

Conspiracy theories can also be classified in Barkun’s three types. These are ‘Event Conspiracy Theories’, which refer to

specific events, such as the Kennedy assassination or the spread of AIDS, ‘Systemic Conspiracy Theories’, the ones that are believed to be organized by evil organizations or ethnic groups (Freemasons, the Catholic Church, Communists, etc.) that plan to undermine solidified institutions, and ‘Superconspiracy theories’ that correlate multiple conspiracies. The last types are Rothbard’s¹⁰ shallow and deep theories that define the way an observer evaluates the conspiracy.

Historical Background

Academics sometimes say that we live in the “age of conspiracism.” However, the spread of conspiracy theories and falsified information has existed for hundreds of years. Although we have observed a surge in these phenomena due to the abundance of information sources. Nonetheless, it is important to note that scholarly interest in

⁹ *The history of American conspiracy theories holds some lessons for fake news debunkers, says Jesse Walker.* (n.d.). Nieman Lab. <https://www.niemanlab.org/2017/02/the-history-of-american-conspiracy-theories-holds-some-lessons-for-fake-news-debunkers-says-jessie-walker/>

¹⁰ *RADIO FREE ROTHBARD.* (n.d.). https://cdn.mises.org/20_2_2.pdf

conspiracy theories only began in the 1930s as part of a psycho-historical exploration into the origins of totalitarianism.¹¹

According to two researchers (Uscinski and Parent), there were two spikes in the data gathered on the prevalence of conspiracy theories. The first occurred shortly after 1900, at the height of the second industrial revolution. The societal changes that accompanied this era were the main reason for the feelings of insecurity and suspicion among powerless citizens. The second spike occurred during the late 1940s and early 1950s, a period marked by the beginning of the Cold War. A major theory of that time related to McCarthyism¹².

Even during the Roman era, in the year AD 64, the great fire of Rome erupted. Conspiracy theories on this event suggest that Emperor Nero was responsible for the destruction. To defend himself he blamed the Christian community for initiating the fire, leading to a significant number of Christians being crucified and burnt. More recent examples include major crises of the past years. For instance, there are a lot of theories circulating on the initiation of the 2008 financial crisis that assume that President Obama's election may have played a part. Others suggest that climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic are a hoax. Moreover, there have been efforts to attribute the wars in the Middle East to the motives of large oil companies. Although nowadays a lot of theories include governmental institutions or major corporations, various other groups have been implicated in the past, such as the Jewish people, which have been accused of scheming for world domination following the publication of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Finally, one of the most widely accepted conspiracy theories advocates that the US was responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks and that the Illuminati still exist.

There are various examples of false news throughout history. It was utilized by the Nazi regime to spread anti-Semitic propaganda and played a significant role in impeding the fraudulent actions of the Catholic Church that led to the Enlightenment. Racism and discrimination have also generated fake news stories, as in the 1800s in the US against African Americans.

¹¹ *Conspiracy theories as part of history: The role of societal crisis situations* - Jan-willem van Prooijen, Karen M Douglas, 2017. (2017, June 29). SAGE Journals. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1750698017701615>

¹² *McCarthyism*. (n.d.). Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/McCarthyism>

Modern-day misinformation

As mentioned before the current environment has changed the way information is transmitted. Social media platforms, online platforms, and media agencies facilitate their generation. Nowadays alongside political propaganda and partisan media outlets, social media algorithms and artificial intelligence are jeopardizing the accuracy and accountability of information. The most dangerous factor, however, is not the formation of conspiracy theories, rather the uncontrollable spread and influential nature. Among the favorite issues of conspiracy theorists in the past year was the spread of COVID-19 because of 5G, COVID-19 as a biological weapon, the manipulation of the pandemic by the 'deep state', and even the existence of the virus.

Causes and formation methods

In the latest years, psychologists and sociologists have strived to explain why conspiracy theories are formed and why people tend to believe false information or improbable scenarios. There are some simple explanations: firstly, some conspiracy theories prove to be true, which sets precedent for future theories to thrive, and secondly, they are often the easiest way to analyze an event, as they take advantage of an already existing societal belief and found their suspicions on it. Hence, it is no surprise that conspiracy theories are so widely influential.

More expert opinions suggest that there are two primary hypotheses¹³ on the aforementioned question. The first reads: 'conspiracy beliefs are a by-product of a suite of psychological mechanisms that evolved for different reasons.' This theory harnesses mechanisms like pattern recognition, agency detection, and threat management to explain human susceptibility towards conspiracy theories. The second hypothesis assumes that 'conspiracy beliefs are part of an evolved psychological mechanism specifically aimed at detecting dangerous coalitions.' This perspective focuses more on the adaptive feature of the human coalitional mind as an explanation.

¹³ *What causes people to believe conspiracy theories?* - Jean-Bruno Renard, 2015. (2020, August 24). SAGE Journals. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0392192120945621?journalCode=dioa>

Effects

As we observe how misinformation, conspiracy theories, and fake news escalate and grow, we can examine their impact on society and politics. A major issue arising from the influential nature of false information is the formation of an unrealistic perception of the world. Thus, the people are more prompt to engage in violent and aggressive behavior. Relevant examples are the Asian hate crimes and the discrimination against African Americans since both were triggered by misinformative stories and conspiracy theories. Falsified information is used to intensify social conflicts, as we have seen happen in Myanmar, India, and Sri Lanka, where there is currently a great surge in violence and imbalance.

Moreover, they cause distrust and political instability. Conspiracy theories and fake news are designed to provoke suspicion and disbelief in the government's motives and purposes, such as the 9/11 attacks. They can have a dual function, nonetheless. Apart from making the public question their political leaders, they can also help promote and glorify them. Such cases were documented multiple times during the US presidential elections, namely the involvement of Russia's Internet Research Agency¹⁴ and the Cambridge Analytica Scandal¹⁵.

During the pandemic, conspiracy theories resemble pseudoscience and can have an additional effect, since they can cause a serious health hazard. By the spread of misleading and false information relating to serious diseases and medical treatments jeopardize the safety of the public.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America (USA)¹⁶

¹⁴ *How Russia's troll farm is changing tactics before the fall election (Published 2020)*. (2020, March 29). The New York Times - Breaking News, US News, World News and Videos. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/29/technology/russia-troll-farm-election.html>

¹⁵ *Cambridge Analytica and Facebook: The scandal and the fallout so far (Published 2018)*. (2018, November 14). The New York Times - Breaking News, US News, World News and Videos. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html>

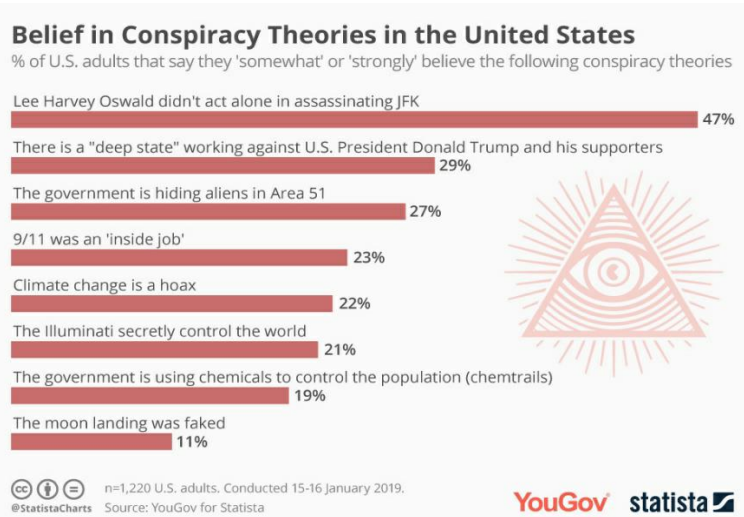
¹⁶ *Infographic: Belief in conspiracy theories in the United States*. (2019, May 28). Statista Infographics. <https://www.statista.com/chart/18196/belief-in-conspiracy-theories-in-the-united-states/>

The issue of fake news and conspiracy theories in the US has been widespread in the news industry. The concept grew in popularity during the 2016 election but has since then expanded outside the realm of politics.

Theories and false stories in the US started as soon as the Europeans began to colonize the area and the Natives were deemed as threatening factors.

American political conspiracy theories are defined by the general theme of small powerful groups engaging in illegal activities, striving to retain secretive and destructive information, and undermining the society in general or smaller societal groups. There is a variety of factors that

contribute to the formation of conspiracy theories. Such are the circumstantial fear, the affiliations of individuals to political parties, polarization, echo chambers in social media that facilitate the spread



of conspiracy, nationalism, ‘Belief in Conspiracy Theories in the United States’ and distrust in the government. The most popular conspiracy theories in the US include Area 51, Barack Obama’s birthplace, UFOs, and the ‘deep state’.¹⁷

The US government and lawmakers have proceeded in a series of measures to alleviate the crisis and reduce the amount of fake news and misinformation. Some of them include proposed federal laws, platform testimonies, state advisory groups, state media literacy law, threat assessment mechanisms, state media literacy initiatives, and state lawsuits.

Russian Federation

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, disinformation and conspiracism have become the main method of the government-controlled media and press to promote the regime. There have been numerous misinformation operations since the beginning of the

¹⁷ Olito, F. (2020, November 11). *36 of the most popular conspiracy theories in the US*. Insider. <https://www.insider.com/popular-conspiracy-theories-united-states-2019-5>

19th century. The Russians believe in theories such as the false Peter I, the Freemasonry, and the 'Killer Doctors'¹⁸. The European Union and NATO in response to these intense suspicions founded a facility in Latvia, the European External Action Service East Stratcom Task Force, which managed to identify and expose more than 3,500 pro-Kremlin disinformation cases during the years 2015-2017. Russia utilizes both media outlets, such as the Russia Today television channel and the Sputnik news agency that are targeted towards Western audiences. In the 2010s they started to increase their influence through the use of social media, tampering with the 2020 US Presidential elections and the situation in Ukraine and other former Soviet and Western states. All in all, the Russian government harnesses multiple media channels for self-promotion and to serve their foreign interests.

Contrary to the general circumstances in the country, lawmakers have taken a series of actions to counter the impact of misinformation. The government of the Russian Federation has published two main documents: the Information Security Doctrine and the Strategy for the Development of an Information Society in the Russian Federation for 2017-2030. Moreover, in November 2018 Russia signed a pact with Spain to form a joint cybersecurity group to protect their diplomatic relations, after Russia was accused of having meddled with the Catalan referendum.

China

According to various experts' reports, China is characterized by an increasing engagement in the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories. The current situations that they most often take advantage of are the Uighur population and the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been numerous China-linked disinformation campaigns that aim at spreading misleading content via inauthentic accounts on social media platforms. Although the previous assessment of these actions was an understatement, the researchers are now realizing the true influence and sophistication of their methods. The relation, though, of fake to official accounts have been exposed, so it is now harder for the Chinese government to deny their involvement. On the contrary, China has indeed one of the strictest legislation concerning misinformation and has criminalized the spread of false information.

France

¹⁸ Anasova, A. (2017, 2). *5 conspiracies: What do Russian conspiracy theorists believe in?* Russia Beyond. https://www.rbth.com/arts/history/2017/06/02/5-conspiracies-what-do-russian-conspiracy-theorists-believe-in_775327

The prevalent issue that the French government is addressing when it comes to misinformation relates to election fake news and political advertising. In these two areas speech is highly regulated in France and is controlled by defamation laws. They have established a 'period of silence' on the day before and on the day of the elections to secure legitimacy and equity. In early 2018, President Macron passed a law that provides the definition of 'fake news' and enacts strict rules on the media during electoral campaigns. The law functions as follows: First, a judge is authorized to halt misinformative stories before elections. Second, social media platforms have to publish the identity of the purchaser of political ads. Lastly, it grants the Higher Audiovisual Council, the broadcasting regulator, new administrative powers.

Germany

According to Deutsche Welle¹⁹, one-third of people in Germany believe in conspiracy theories. More specifically, this percent believes that "secret powers" control the world. 12% also named secret services such as the CIA, Mossad, and Russia's dissolved KGB. These surprising findings contribute to the lower level of education in Germany and the constant voting for the far-right AfD party. It is important, hence, to realize that German people are more prone to being affected by the spread of conspiracy theories and by extension misinformation. Nonetheless, the state has taken measures to prevent the dissemination of fake news. Germany has several civil and criminal law provisions that are applicable to safeguard the public from false information in social networks (2017-Network Enforcement Act)²⁰.

United Kingdom (UK)

The UK is also one of the countries facing severe issues when it comes to misinformation on the web. Local sources suggest that the exposure to fake news online has seen a significant surge in the past year. Nonetheless, there is a number of false stories circulating in the UK concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccines. The main measures taken by the UK lawmakers to avert the crisis are the following: They have set up the National Security Communications Unit, which is tasked with "combatting disinformation by state actors and others". This decision came alongside an investigation of

¹⁹ Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com). (n.d.). *One-third of people in Germany believe in conspiracy theories: Poll*. DW.COM. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-conspiracy-theories/a-54834488>

²⁰ *Network enforcement act (Netzdurchsetzungsgesetz, NetzDG) German law archive*. (n.d.). German Law Archive. <https://germanlawarchive.iuscomp.org/?p=1245>

Russia’s use of fake social media accounts to spread misinformation about the Brexit referendum in 2016. This initiative is said to resemble Cold War-era tactics.

United Nation Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

The UNESCO has recognized the imminent danger of the spread of false information for the well-being of the society and the state and therefore has proceeded in the construction of a series of measures that focus on the enhancement of journalism for media accountability. While some governments are seeking to tackle the issue through laws and regulations, it is unlikely that the issue will be resolved. Moreover, these policies carry major risks of abuses and violations, as the limitations in journalism are sometimes subjective. On the contrary, UNESCO proposes that journalists understand the magnitude of the threat and act accordingly to tackle them. To that end, the organization created a multi-dimensional plan²¹ that effectively combats fake news, provides advice to journalists, sets out an alternative framework to fight disinformation.

World Health Organization

The main sector in which conspiracy theories and misinformation are developed is healthcare because of the pandemic and its side effects. The World Health Organization (WHO) is at the forefront of the battle against the pandemic and is transmitting accountable and accurate information as well as seeks to counter myths. To that end, the WHO has established the Information Network for Epidemics (EPI-WIN) that brings together technical and social media teams to track and respond to misinformation and conspiracy theories. For example, at the beginning of the pandemic in Uganda, the native populations attributed the virus to evil spirits and targeted foreigners with hate speech. The WHO, in response to that and collaborating with the Ugandan government, disseminated accurate information about the virus. Moreover, they partnered with businesses, working with media and journalists, mobilized civil society, and spoke out for human and civil rights.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1 st Century BC	Octavian ran a campaign of misinformation against his political rival Mark Anthony.
2 nd and 3 rd Century AD	False rumors about Christians’ engagement in ritual cannibalism and incest were spread

²¹https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/journalism_fake_news_disinformation_print_friendly_0.pdf

1475	Fake news story claimed that the Jewish community had murdered a two-and-a-half-year-old Christian infant.
1780s	The invention of the printing press led to a great surge in misinformation.
18 th Century	Benjamin Franklin spread false information about Indians working with King George III so as to sway the public in favor of the American Revolution.
1835	The Great Moon Hoax ²²
1844	Anti-Catholic newspapers in Philadelphia published stories that falsely accused Irishmen of robbing schools and stealing Bibles.
Mid-1890s	Peak of Yellow Journalism ²³
1915-1917	The anti-German atrocity propaganda regarding the alleged "German Corpse Factory"
1924-1953	Communist leaders used disinformation as a war tactic and to discredit their enemies.
1938	Orson Welles' War of the Worlds radio broadcast that claimed an alien invasion caused public panic and unrest.
Nov 22 1963	John F. Kennedy assassination
Sept 11 2001	9/11 terrorist attack by Al-Qaeda
2007-2009	Global Financial Crisis
2016	US Presidential Election that were associated with the spread of fake news.
2017	Barack Obama's family was accused of receiving money from the government.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- 'Questions relating to information', adopted by the UN General Assembly on 14 December 2006²⁴

In this resolution, the UN resolution aims to tackle to broad issue of information and accordingly misinformation and accountable news media sources. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee proposes measures that include the development of

²² History.com Editors. (2009, November 24). "The great moon hoax" is published in the "New York sun". HISTORY. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-great-moon-hoax>

²³ Yellow journalism | Definition, history, & facts. (n.d.). Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/yellow-journalism>

²⁴ A/RES/61/121&Lang=E - E - A/RES/61/121&Lang=E-desktop. (n.d.). eSubscription to United Nations Documents. <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/61/121&Lang=E>

communication infrastructure in LEDCs, freedom of speech for the journalists, provision of support for special training programs, and enhancement of cooperation among countries.

- **‘Global media and information literacy week’, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 March 2021²⁵**

This is a resolution relevant to the aforementioned, as it addresses similar questions. Due to the Global media and information literacy week the UN General Assembly recommends that member states proceed in a variety of measures, such as implementation of policies to promote media and information literacy and increase awareness, incorporation of youth perspectives, enhancement of cooperation in the global, regional, and national level and deepening of the cooperation with the UNESCO Organization.

- **‘International Convention Concerning the Use of Broadcasting in the Cause of Peace’, adopted by the League of Nations in Geneva on the 23rd of September 1936²⁶**

The Convention is a 1936 League of Nations treaty, in which the signing states agreed to prohibit the use of media broadcasting for the purpose of spreading propaganda as well as the dissemination of false news. It was the first treaty that provided the tent of ‘restricting expression which constituted a threat to international peace and security’. Lastly, it also provides that upon request countries may offer information to foreign broadcasting services that can be used to promote knowledge of the ‘civilization and conditions of life of his own country’.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

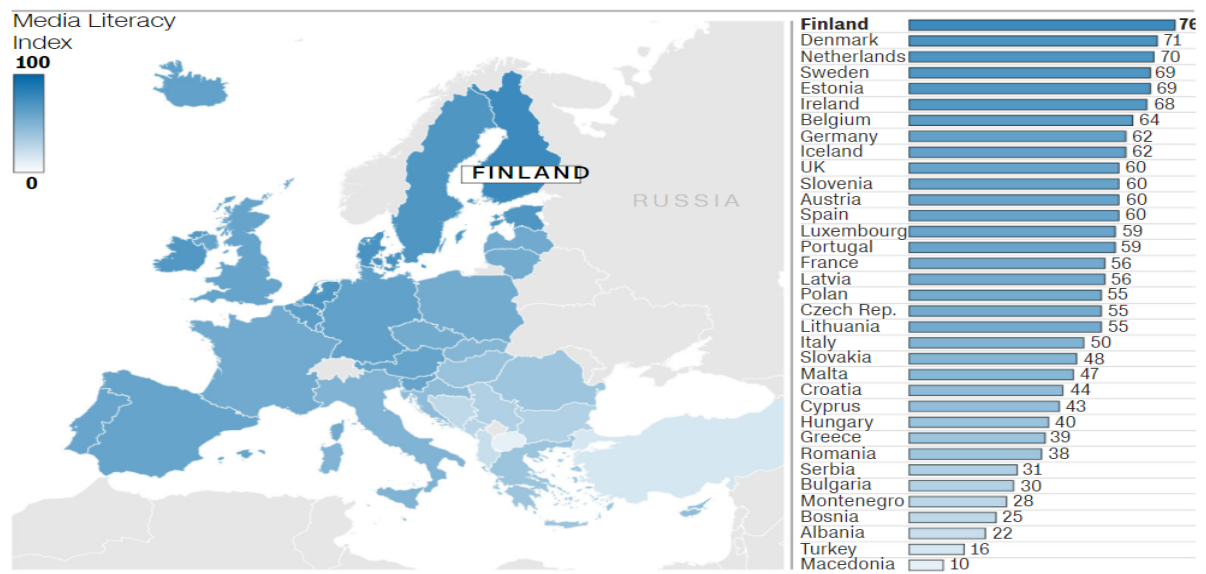
According to the United Nations the current ‘infodemic’ can be solved provided that all countries obey by the internationally affirmed rules against misinformation and conspiracy theories and there is a general cooperation towards the alleviation of the crisis. Apart from the treaties and resolutions, the UN and some member states have proceeded in a plethora of measures against the fake news and the spread of false information.

European Union Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024

²⁵ *A/RES/75/267 - E - A/RES/75/267 -desktop*. (n.d.). eSubscription to United Nations Documents. <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/267>

²⁶ *Untc*. (n.d.). United Nations Treaty Collection. <https://treaties.un.org/PAGES/LONViewDetails.aspx?src=LON&id=515&chapter=30&clang>

The European Union is committed to protecting the public from misinformation actions and conspiracy theories, as stated in the Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024²⁷. Their main goal is to enhance cooperation in detecting, preventing, and countering attacks. In December 2020, the EU proceeded in the introduction of further measures to enhance their responses to cyberthreats. Thus, EU ministers invited the European Commission to develop and implement additional transparency requirements for online platforms for the promotion of a well-functioning digital community and greater accountability and transparency.



Source: European Policies Initiative, Open Society Institute - Sofia, March 2018
 Graphic: Henrik Pettersson, CNN⁹

European Commission Action Plan against Disinformation

This Action Plan²⁸ addresses the European Council’s calls for initiatives to “protect the Union’s democratic systems and combat disinformation, including in the context of the upcoming European elections”²⁹. The initiatives that are promoted through this joint action plan include the improvement of Union institutions to detect, analyze, and expose disinformation, the strengthening of coordinated and joint responses to disinformation, and the mobilization of the private sector to tackle the issue at hand, such as online platforms, advertisers, news media outlets, etc. Moreover, the European Commission is in favor of

²⁷EU strategic agenda for 2019-2024. (n.d.). Consilium.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/eu-strategic-agenda-2019-2024/>

²⁸ [https://file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/action_plan_against_disinformation_2DE1F7F5-A0D0-841D-D7D2515E93C71907_56166%20\(1\).pdf](https://file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/action_plan_against_disinformation_2DE1F7F5-A0D0-841D-D7D2515E93C71907_56166%20(1).pdf)

²⁹ *Online disinformation*. (n.d.). Shaping Europe’s digital future. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/online-disinformation>

raising awareness and improving societal resilience, and calls for global cooperation for the implementation of the plan.

Finland

The Nordic countries and more specifically Finland have adopted several measures and according to news media outlets, they have 'won the war on fake news'. Their policies could exemplify other states to act accordingly. Ever since they declared independence from Russia, they have fought against Kremlin-backed propaganda campaigns. According to the chief communications specialist for the prime minister's office, they have faced numerous misinformation cases on issues like immigration, the EU, or the question of the Finnish full membership in NATO. Finland is a very strong democracy that has established trust among the citizens. Moreover, they do not interfere in the domestic politics of other states. It has remarkable performance in the areas of press freedom, happiness, transparency, and social justice. The state has also taken initiatives to teach media literacy and critical thinking. Lastly, they effectively combat any kind of false information produced by social media corporations.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

In order to address the issue of conspiracy theories and misinformation the states and intergovernmental organizations should develop multi-sided solutions to a problem that requires efforts in the sectors of the prevention of the dissemination of fake news, the protection of the public, cybersecurity, and the long-term and short-term impacts of the aforementioned in the society.

Fake news and sophisticated disinformation are especially problematic in the democratic system, as it is probable that the normal functioning of the tenets of the regime will be undermined. However, it is crucial to impose the appropriate number of controls and maintain an open and democratic system. Governments should promote media literacy and accountable journalism. Hence, a measure could be the organization of specialized non-governmental units that will systematically control the content of official news media websites and resources and will also be responsible for containing the uncontrollable spread of a false story that jeopardizes society's safety and well-being. The news industry must provide high-quality journalism to build public trust and correct fake news without legitimizing them. However, the users of media outlets, websites, blogs, and social media need to get in touch with the advisory board and refrain from sharing the material.

Conclusively, it is crucial to examine how both the public and private sector can address the issue.

Technology companies, subsidized by the UN and the according governments, should invest in tools that identify falsified information, reduce financial incentives for those that benefit from disinformation, and improve online responsibility. Educational institutions should focus on informing the public about the dangers of the web and the potential existence of fake information. Moreover, schools should attribute great importance to the correct education of the students on historic events to prevent the generation of conspiracy theories. The aforementioned measures that focus on UN initiatives and educate address the prevention and detection of false information.

A key step towards ameliorating the crisis is global cooperation to address the effects of conspiracy theories and misinformation through common legislation and diplomatic attitude.

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