

# The future of the anti-disinformation ecosystem and possible challenges

## Policy Brief

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## INTRODUCTION

This document is based on discussions with relevant disinformation experts in the broader network of the HDMO consortium. It also builds on the experiences of the [Disinformation Foresight Exercise: Anticipation and Counteract](#) workshop, which was held at the European Forum Alpbach in August 2025. This workshop was developed and delivered by experts from the Political Capital Institute, in cooperation with Marie-Doha Besancenot, a former advisor to the French Foreign Minister on disinformation-related issues. The aim of this document is to outline possible future developments in the anti-disinformation ecosystem, identify the challenges it faces, and highlight potential adaptation strategies.

## 1. SITUATION ANALYSIS

### 1.1. GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL TRENDS

- The preference for “hard power” over “soft power” has led to the dissolution of several international bodies that were responsible for fighting disinformation (e.g., NATO Public Diplomacy Unit and the G7 anti-disinformation cooperation).
- The term “*disinformation*” has officially become associated with censorship under the new U.S. administration. Hence,
- However, even before 2024, the anti-disinformation ecosystem had become a victim of political warfare in the United States, with researchers and institutions working on disinformation being cut off from funding and/or discredited.

### 1.2. TECHNOLOGICAL TRENDS

- Adapting to the changing political environment, major platforms increasingly perceive and exploit benefits in the new US administration’s “*pro-tech*” and “*pro-free speech*” stance. As a result, they are scaling back or abandoning policies designed to counter disinformation and instead amplifying the administration’s rhetoric on freedom of expression.
- The rapid rise of generative AI has flooded the media space with sophisticated forms of synthetic disinformation—such as deepfakes, fabricated audio, and AI-generated text—at a scale and level of realism previously unseen. This has dramatically raised the stakes for fact-checkers, regulators, politicians and civil society.

### 1.3. CONSEQUENCES FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

While the situation in the United States is more advanced, the European Union—despite its regulatory activism and efforts to strengthen a fact-based digital discourse—is beginning to experience worrying developments as well:

- **Anti-disinformation backlash in politics:** Rhetoric against anti-disinformation efforts is increasingly visible in the European Parliament, especially among groups such as the Patriots for Europe and other sovereigntist factions. Political forces hostile to platform regulation and aligned with the *pro-free speech* narrative are gaining influence, notably the FPÖ in Austria, Rassemblement National in France,

and AfD in Germany. Even the UK's Reform party, which is closely aligned with U.S. Vice President JD Vance, still has an impact on EU debates.

- **Circumventing new EU rules on political advertising:** With the *Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising (TTPA)* regulation entering into full force by **10 October 2025**, platforms such as Meta and Google will stop accepting paid political advertisements. However, disinformation actors are already adapting:
  - They are shifting to organic campaign strategies, relying on online activists, influencers, celebrities, and automated accounts.
  - Campaigns are increasingly centered on viral, divisive, and emotionally charged content that spreads without advertisement. It encourages using even more attention-attracting content such as conspiracy theories.
  - Actors with a diverse, decentralized presence across multiple platforms have a better chance of bypassing these new restrictions and pushing misleading content disguised as non-political ads.
- **Improved awareness of the presence, forms and risks of disinformation as a significant outcome of anti-disinformation efforts over the past decade:** Thanks to the commitment of EU decision-makers as well as the devoted work of researchers, journalists, and fact-checkers, among others, and with financial support from the EU and many member states, societies have become much more aware of disinformation, and their defenses are now stronger than before. This forces disinformation actors to adapt their tactics. For instance, in Hungary, increasingly elaborate lies are being sold for increasingly high prices, yet they are not necessarily effective. While there are still vulnerable groups and new challenges emerging, the efforts of the past decade bear fruit.

## 2. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND ADAPTATION TECHNIQUES

- 1) **Rethink the vocabulary.** The term *disinformation* itself has become increasingly discredited and politicized, especially in polarized environments where actors frame it as a partisan label. Exploring alternative formulations—such as *information integrity*, *information resilience*, or *harmful content*—could help depoliticize the discussion and make interventions more broadly acceptable among both policymakers and citizens.
- 2) **Shifting the focus** from individual, fact-checkable claims to hostile narratives, **or adding an additional focus** on the latter, can also prove effective. Not all distortive and harmful content consists of outright lies that can easily be debunked. Many narratives rely on selective framing, emotional manipulation, or half-truths, which cannot be categorized as disinformation in the strict sense. Focusing on narratives rather than isolated falsehoods allows experts, fact-checkers, and journalists to capture the broader meaning-making strategies at play. However, this approach must have a clear methodology and adhere to clear standards. Furthermore, it should be distinct from fact-checking, which deals with proven or provable disinformation. Otherwise, it would only reinforce the perception that opinions are being "censored".
- 3) **Prioritize issues that resonate directly with citizens' everyday concerns.** Disinformation is most effectively countered and the need for such initiatives are more present when people see its relevance in their own lives.

Priority areas include:

- **Foreign interference**, which raises questions of sovereignty and democratic integrity.
  - **Healthcare disinformation**, which in Europe is often less politicized than in the U.S. and can be addressed in a more pragmatic, cross-partisan way.
  - **Online fraud, cyberattacks, and scams**, particularly those targeting vulnerable groups characterized by low digital media literacy, a high degree of naivety and vulnerable situations, highlight the financial and personal data security costs of disinformation.
  - **Deepfakes and emerging AI technologies**, which create unprecedented risks for trust in institutions, media, and even interpersonal communication.
- 4) **Follow the money**. Disinformation is not only a political but also an economic enterprise. Mapping and exposing the financial flows behind disinformation campaigns – whether foreign state funding, opaque political advertising, or profit-driven clickbait farms or state-sponsored disinformation – can shift the focus from content policing to structural accountability.
- 5) **Broadening the coalition of actors** engaged in countering disinformation is essential. Corporations, especially in sectors vulnerable to reputational attacks (finance, pharmaceuticals, energy), are increasingly exposed to disinformation threats. Involving them more systematically – through public-private partnerships, information-sharing mechanisms, and corporate responsibility standards – can strengthen resilience.