



“FACT & ACT: YOUTH FOR DEMOCRACY”

POLICY PROPOSALS



Co-funded by
the European Union

INTRODUCTION



Welcome to the policy proposals developed during the Erasmus+ Youth Participation Activity “Fact & Act: Youth for Democracy”. This project brought together young people from the Czech Republic, Spain, Latvia, and St. Maarten with a shared goal: to better understand how democracy works in practice and how they, as young citizens, can actively contribute to it. Responding to challenges such as disinformation, low youth engagement in politics, and limited awareness of European institutions, the project aimed to strengthen participants’ media literacy, critical thinking, and democratic participation.

Throughout a series of activities including workshops, debates, online seminars, and international mobilities participants explored the role of the European Parliament, learned how policies are shaped, and developed skills in leadership, negotiation, and advocacy. Using non-formal education methods, they engaged in intercultural dialogue and gained hands-on experience in addressing real societal issues affecting young people and democratic processes today.

A key milestone of the project was the European Parliament simulation, where participants stepped into the role of policymakers. Working in international teams, they debated, negotiated, and drafted concrete policy recommendations aimed at tackling pressing challenges particularly the impact of disinformation on democracy and youth participation.

The proposals presented in this booklet are the outcome of that process. They reflect the ideas, collaboration, and commitment of young people determined to strengthen democratic values, promote inclusion, and contribute to a more informed and participatory Europe.



FOREIGN AFFAIRS

From a Foreign Affairs perspective, fighting disinformation is not about controlling opinion, but protecting European sovereignty, security and democratic stability in an increasingly hostile international environment. Right now, disinformation is being used as a tool of foreign interference, not just misinformation. And foreign-driven disinformation campaigns are weakening the structure and the trust in the European institutions. For young Europeans, this influence is critical as they are the primary consumers of digital content, where international narratives are often disguised as “alternative truths” or “hidden facts”. However, we must distinguish between the “fake news” propagated by hostile foreign powers and the fundamental right to Freedom of Speech.

The relevance of this proposal lies in protecting the cultural integrity and the family unit from external ideological subversion. Therefore, this is a matter of national and European security. Protecting freedom of speech must go hand in hand with protecting citizens from coordinated foreign interference that aims to destabilize European societies from the outside. Our priority must be identifying external interference without infringing upon the domestic liberties of our own people or the educational autonomy of families.

Currently, the European Union perceives disinformation as a threat of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI). Under the supervision of the AFET Committee, the European External Action Service (EEAS) has deployed the FIMI Toolbox, an operational framework that prioritizes early detection and diplomatic response to hostile state actors. The work of the AFET Committee has been fundamental in providing budgetary support to StratCom units, such as EUvsDisinfo, tasked with monitoring Russian and Chinese narratives, and in integrating information resilience into the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Furthermore, AFET leads the Rapid Alert System (RAS), which enables Member States to coordinate real-time responses to hybrid attacks. Despite these efforts, the current institutional approach has room for improvement. The Digital Services Act (DSA), while pioneering, delegates a significant portion of moderation to the technology companies themselves, allowing Big Tech to maintain opacity regarding their recommendation systems. Currently, the AFET Committee is limited to reacting to already disseminated falsehoods but lacks the tools to intervene in the technical root of the problem. Consequently, the current framework remains insufficient: while the EU invests resources in debunking lies, platforms continue to profit from the virality of hate.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs proposes a Sovereignty-First Framework to combat foreign disinformation through the following measures:

1. **Sanctions on Foreign Hostile Actors:** Instead of policing European citizens, the EU should implement immediate diplomatic and economic sanctions against non-European entities and individuals proven to be financing coordinated inauthentic behaviour directed at European elections.

2. **Regulating Algorithms as a Threat to Peace:** Nowadays social media platforms operate on “engagement maximization” algorithms. These systems prioritize content that triggers strong emotional reactions, such as hate, fear, or outrage, because it keeps users connected longer. Foreign hostile powers exploit this design to inject disinformation that spreads virally, automatically, and at no cost. It is not about banning opinions; it is about removing the automatic megaphone from those who use hate to destabilize Europe. Our proposal involves intervening in the technical design of these systems through three key pillars:

- a. **Security Audits:** Platforms must grant EU experts access to their algorithmic programming to ensure they are not designed to favour extreme polarization. If these platforms do not want to collaborate with the EU, there will be restrictions made to them.
- b. **Amplification Accountability:** Platforms can no longer claim to be neutral “notice boards”. If their algorithm chooses to show a dangerous falsehood to millions for the sake of profit, the company must be held legally responsible.
- c. **Deceleration Mechanisms:** During more critical times, like wars or elections, the EU would have the power to require platforms to deactivate automatic recommendation systems for unverified content, preventing lies from outrunning the truth

3. The "Free Speech Safeguard": Establish a legal framework that strictly separates Foreign Information Manipulation (FIMI) from Domestic Political Expression. This "Shield" ensures that no EU institution, national government, or private digital platform can use anti-disinformation regulations to de-platform, shadow-ban, or penalize European citizens for expressing ideological, cultural, or political opinions. This way, if a citizen posts a critique of EU migration policy or a defence of traditional family structures, this is protected "Domestic Discourse." A platform must not remove it by claiming it "aligns with foreign propaganda narratives." However, if a network of 10,000 automated accounts from a non-EU country shares the same post to artificially create chaos, the network (the bots) is sanctioned, but the citizen's original post remains untouched.

4. Transparency of Foreign Funding: Introduce a mandatory registry for any NGO or media outlet receiving more than 10% of its funding from outside the EU. This ensures that the public knows when a voice is actually a foreign interest, without banning the speech itself.

5. Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Realignment: We propose the creation of a Defence Fund, that will be the primary financial engine for all anti-disinformation activities, ensuring that the burden of cost falls on hostile actors rather than on the European taxpayer or traditional educational institutions. These funds should be redirected toward Cybersecurity Infrastructure and in "Media literacy" workshops in schools and universities. We will implement this plan with the following measures:

- **Direct Sanction Levies:** 100% of monetary fines collected from foreign state-owned entities or third-country agents found guilty of "Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour" (bot farms, deepfake campaigns, etc) will be redirected.
- **The Transparency Fine:** Any NGO, media outlet, or think-tank operating within the EU that fails to register in the Mandatory Foreign Funding Registry (as proposed in Measure 4) will face a daily administrative fine. These penalties will scale based on the organization's global revenue. This way, if a foreign-funded NGO is caught hiddenly lobbying against national energy interests without being registered, the resulting multimillion-euro fine will be used to purchase advanced cybersecurity firewalls for national infrastructure or to develop AI-detection tools for parents to monitor their children's digital exposure.

6. Diplomatic Reciprocity: The European Union shall implement a "Mirror Clause" regarding the digital and broadcast presence of state-owned or state-controlled media from third countries. If a foreign nation restricts, blocks, or heavily censors European public service media or independent outlets, the EU will apply equivalent restrictive measures to that nation's state-media apparatus within the European information space.

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Disinformation in the EU is a risk to democratic participation, particularly in the context of increased digitalisation, geopolitical instability, and declining trust in public institutions. It is known through empirical evidence and practical every-day life situations that exposure to disinformation negatively affects electoral participation, public health compliance, and intergroup relations, especially impacting young people, elderly and socially vulnerable groups.

Data from a Flash Eurobarometer in 2026, indicated that 36% of EU citizens report being exposed to disinformation “often” or “very often” in the preceding seven days, 31% report this exposure “sometimes,” indicating that around 67% of respondents perceive such situations as regular basis of their information environment.

Adding, 83 % of Europeans regard fake news and disinformation as a danger to democracy. These patterns are complementary to other Eurobarometer findings showing that a majority of younger Europeans (63 %) encounter fake news more than once per week, showing demographic and behavioural dimensions of vulnerability. The disinformation across digital and social media platforms with potential to decrease democratic participation, justifies the need for educational and cultural interventions to build resilience. The European Commission, the European External Action Service, and the European Parliament have identified education and culture as foundational pillars of long-term societal resilience, because they affect cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions of information manipulation.

Cultural narratives, historical memory, and education shape how citizens perceive, understand and interpret information and engage in democratic debate. Therefore, strengthening stronger critical thinking, media literacy, and civic responsibility through formal education and cultural institutions is essential, vitally important to safeguard the EU’s fundamental values.

The EU recognizes disinformation as a major threat to its democracies, following there are existing EU initiatives, regulatory frameworks, and programmes relevant to fighting disinformation in the context of culture and education. At the regulatory level, the “Digital Services Act” (DSA) (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065) introduces obligations for very large online platforms to enhance transparency and content moderation. In the education sector, the European Commission has developed guidelines for teachers and educators that provide practical methods for combating disinformation and supporting digital media literacy within formal education in both primary and secondary education. These guidelines are part of the broader “Digital Education Action Plan” (2021-2027), which marks digital competence and resilience as core educational priorities. Other initiatives include media literacy funding calls under Creative Europe to support innovative projects that promote media literacy.

At the cultural level, EU-supported platforms such as the “European Digital Media Observatory” (EDMO) and the “European Fact-Checking Standards Network” (EFCSN) bring together researchers, educators and civil society to coordinate fact-checking, research and media literacy activities.

Moreover, programmes like “eTwinning” under Erasmus+ make transnational educational collaboration that can integrate competencies for critical thinking and media awareness. Together, these instruments show the EU approach to address disinformation through education and cultural engagement.

The goals of the Proposal are to combat disinformation and promote European diversity and culture. “European Cultural Months” in secondary schools. Each school dedicates one day per month to the culture of one EU Member State, rotating throughout the academic year. Also every three months there would be a national day to present the national culture instead of the culture of another European country. The objectives of this initiative are to build familiarity with EU cultures beyond stereotypes, promote media literacy through cultural narratives and encourage curiosity.

It would be structured as frequent 9-10 cultural days per school year (depending on national calendars) and three of those would be national just for promoting the culture of the country. Countries would be assigned centrally or chosen from an EU-curated list. The coordinators should ensure geographic and cultural balance themselves.



Activities would have to be age-adjusted based on: culture and daily life (food, music, traditions, values), language (songs, basic phrases), history (historical context, debunking myths and stereotypes).

Implementation strategy would have to include standard (with flexibility) cultural kits per country and digital materials (fact sheets, videos, interactive games), teacher training (online course and guidance if needed), a coordinator per school and integration of the days into existing curricula, evaluation checks and student feedback surveys.

Expected impact would be increased cultural awareness, reduced disinformation in cultural context and stronger European cohesion with cost-efficient approach due to existing scalability and adaptability across all EU Member States.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGIES

Politicians have a powerful platform from which to promote their ideas. These ideas are constantly present in our daily lives through television, newspapers, radio, and social media, shaping public debate and influencing how citizens understand current events.

This role plays an important position in society, however, it can become dangerous when it is used to spread propaganda and fake news instead of accurate information. Many people are exposed to this false content repeatedly and may perceive it as true, especially when it comes from authoritative figures. As a result, individuals can develop mistaken beliefs and opinions based on misinformation rather than facts.

For this reason, we believe that the use of fake news in political discourse should be closely monitored. Combating false information is essential to protect democratic values, encourage critical thinking, and ensure that politicians take greater responsibility to verify their statements. This effort can also help prevent the spread of hate speech, manipulation, and deliberate lies within society.

The European Parliament has already implemented multiple policies regarding dismantling disinformation in digital spaces within a dynamic transformational time we are in currently. One of the root policies is The Digital Services Act (DSA). This regulation provides the legal "teeth" for enforcement. It mandates that Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) identify systemic risks, such as illegal content, misleading ads and transparency in content removals the spread of disinformation, under threat of significant fines.

The Code of Practice on Disinformation is now integrated as a formal Code of Conduct under the DSA and converts high-level law into specific industry commitments. It focuses on demonetizing distributors of fake news and ensuring transparency in political advertising.

European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) is serving as the EU's interdisciplinary backbone. EDMO coordinates a vast network of fact-checkers and academics by providing independent.

It ensures policy decisions are rooted in evidence rather than intuition. Together, these instruments transform our digital space from an unregulated environment into a transparent ecosystem where democratic integrity is protected.

We suggest to create an EU-level digital platform combining free speech, news aggregation, and fact-checking tools. News from different world services will be divided thematically, with verified sources, contextual explanations, and mandatory source citation for every claim or news item.

Important part of the platform will be user participation. Users can discuss, analyse, and debate news articles. Platform provides tools to assess credibility, fact-check links, warn about articles that provide no reliable sources or distinguish AI content.

The platform will help to shape digitally literate generation, because users will use their critical thinking skills while interacting with content, helping especially young people develop media literacy in practice.

Digital verification and registration will be required to enter discussions for accountability. Offensive behaviour, spamming, or manipulation attempts result in warnings or temporary/permanent blocking.

We suggest creation of a platform, where speeches and all public statements of politicians will be analysed by a committee of experts and academics, possibly based within the EDMO. The committee will have the right to assess the claim and issue a strike to politicians for each time they more than 10 000 people from the public vote on the platform that they suspect a politician of spreading disinformation. After three strikes assigned by the committee, politicians are obligated to resign from the position they were in. A tool like this serves to ensure factual scrutiny of European politicians.

This tool will be helpful for tracking politicians and keeping them accountable in front of the public. Also, it will help with tackling disinformation and false narratives that are often spread in political speeches.

We propose a regulation, that will demand a mandatory pop-up on all social media posts that are generated by artificial intelligence.

HUMAN RIGHTS

We find ourselves in a context in which the media and the internet are flooded with disinformation, misinformation, and AI generated content. For average users, it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate this vast ocean of information and to distinguish truth from hoaxes. Our mission is to protect vulnerable individuals who are exposed to risks on the World Wide Web, in much the same way that the police ensure safety on the streets.

Young people, the elderly, and individuals with lower levels of education are particularly vulnerable to the risks of the internet. This is why protecting human rights online is essential. Safeguarding human rights in the digital sphere is now more important than ever. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, it will become even more challenging to identify reliable information. Protecting the digital environment helps safeguard democracy, prevent social polarization, and counter authoritarian practices.

We must take into account that the application and the proposal seek to respect human rights. In accordance with Articles 2 and 6 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which state that every proposal must safeguard equality, peace, and freedom of expression, we aim to offer a space of freedom and information free from hoaxes and fake news.

For this reason the proposal seeks to address compliance with human rights from a digital perspective. In line with the article Ensuring the Protection of Human Rights, provided by the United Nations Secretariat, the proposal aims not only to respect human rights, but also to protect them in the rapidly evolving digital world.

To this end, we directly cite the following sections to ensure their implementation:

1. Place human rights at the centre of regulatory frameworks and legislation on digital technologies.
2. Greater guidance on the application of human rights standards in the digital age.
3. Address protection gaps created by evolving digital technologies.
4. Discourage blanket internet shutdowns and generic blocking and filtering of services.
5. Human rights-based domestic laws and practices for the protection of data privacy.
6. Clear, company-specific actions to protect privacy rights and other human rights.
7. Adopt and enhance safeguards related to digital identity.
8. Protect people from unlawful or unnecessary surveillance.
9. Human rights-based laws and approaches to address illegal and harmful online content.
10. To ensure online safe spaces, transparent and accountable content governance frameworks that protect freedom of expression, avoid overly restrictive practices, and protect the most vulnerable.
11. United nations system-wide guidance on human rights due diligence and impact assessments in the use of new technologies.

Providing such a channel is of vital importance in order to prevent the misuse of information, harm to those involved, and defamation. We take Articles 18 and 20 of the Spanish Constitution as reference points; these articles address defamation and disinformation primarily through Article 20, which protects freedom of information while limiting its exercise in order to respect the rights to honour, privacy, and one's own image (Article 18). Article 20.1.d requires the dissemination of truthful information, thereby limiting the spread of disinformation, and Article 20.4 establishes boundaries against defamation.

Combating disinformation thus becomes a matter of vital importance in relation to human rights. By providing a channel of truthful and verified information, the integrity of both journalists and the subjects of news stories is protected.

- Optional submission of passport data would allow information publishers to verify their identity, thereby increasing the reliability of the content they share. Verified publishers would receive a verification mark on their posts. All information publishing platforms, including social media platforms, would be required to implement this verification system.
- Right of access to information: Every individual should have the right to request specific information from the government, municipalities, or organizations regarding their activities and official data, and institutions should be obliged to provide such information in a transparent manner.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The reason why youth participation isn't included in the policy is because we needed to specify the proposals which weren't clear enough.

The proposals were unrealistic and wouldn't work in real life. There are too many resources in need to make this proposal happen. The committees had concerns about how we are going to create a hub that includes explainers on issues, polls and quick discussions, a "Myth vs Fact" section updated weekly, and a "Track your idea".

Fighting disinformation is highly relevant to youth participation because young people are among the most active users of digital platforms, where political information is increasingly consumed through short-form content, influencers, and algorithm-driven feeds. As a result, disinformation can directly shape young citizens' political attitudes, voting behaviour, and trust in democratic institutions. According to the European Parliament, disinformation is a growing threat to democracy because it manipulates public opinion and undermines citizens' ability to make informed decisions, especially during elections. This is particularly concerning for youth, as the European Commission has highlighted that online disinformation spreads rapidly through social media ecosystems and can distort public debate. When false or manipulated narratives spread online, they can discourage youth engagement by creating cynicism, confusion, or the belief that politics is meaningless or "rigged," which reduces participation in elections and civic initiatives.

From a European perspective, disinformation also threatens social cohesion by polarising communities and amplifying extremist narratives that often target younger audiences. The EU's Action Plan against Disinformation recognises that coordinated disinformation campaigns are frequently used to weaken democratic resilience and increase societal divisions. Young people are particularly vulnerable to emotionally appealing content, especially during crises such as war, economic instability, or migration debates. Disinformation campaigns can exploit these fears to mobilise youth towards radical ideologies or encourage political apathy instead of democratic involvement. Therefore, combating disinformation is essential for protecting informed youth participation, strengthening democratic resilience, and ensuring that young Europeans can engage critically and responsibly in civic life.

From the perspective of youth participation, the spread of misinformation is not only a political issue but also a daily reality for young people who rely heavily on digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and other social media networks for news and public information. Due to the fast-paced and algorithm-driven nature of these platforms, misleading content can spread rapidly and influence public opinion before it is fact-checked or corrected. In response to these risks, the European Union has introduced legislative measures such as the AI Act, which aims to regulate artificial intelligence systems and includes provisions requiring the labelling of AI-generated content, including deepfakes. Such regulations represent an important step towards increasing transparency and limiting the impact of manipulative digital content.

In addition to legal frameworks, the EU has also developed practical tools to counter disinformation. One example is the EUvsDisinfo platform, which provides verified information and exposes false narratives, particularly those linked to foreign information manipulation. Platforms like this contribute to improving media literacy and strengthening young people's ability to evaluate information critically. However, despite its usefulness, EUvsDisinfo remains relatively unknown among many young Europeans, which limits its overall impact. Therefore, the EU could consider expanding its promotion through social media campaigns and educational initiatives targeted specifically at youth audiences.

Furthermore, programmes such as Erasmus+ play an essential role in supporting youth engagement and resilience against misinformation. Through non-formal education, international cooperation, and civic-focused projects, Erasmus+ strengthens critical thinking skills and encourages young people to become more informed and active participants in democratic life. Overall, while the EU has already taken meaningful steps to address the issue of disinformation, further awareness-raising and youth-targeted outreach remain necessary to ensure these measures reach their full potential.

Supporting youth participation beyond elections means making it routine, not something limited to “special events.” This can be done by building permanent channels that young people actually use, rather than creating yet another useless website. A single youth participation hub could include one-minute explainers on issues, polls and quick discussions, a “Myth vs Fact” section updated weekly, and a “Track your idea” feature that allows young people to see when their ideas are evaluated and whether they were adopted or not. A mandatory feature of this system should be a response section that clearly shows what was done with ideas submitted by young people. We believe that youth should be met where they already are, through Instagram Reels and TikTok summaries that link to full details.

Another key idea is to use trusted youth messengers, not just institutions. Young people are more likely to listen to people they relate to than to official statements. This can be achieved by training youth leaders, influencers, student representatives, and youth parliamentarians as fact-check ambassadors, supporting peer-to-peer campaigns where youth speak directly to other youth, and funding youth-led content that explains EU processes simply and honestly. Programmes like Erasmus+ already provide a strong platform for this, but they need to be made more visible.

A further priority is making EU institutions more transparent and understandable, so that everyone can understand. Disinformation becomes a serious threat when systems feel complicated and inaccessible. To address this, EU decisions should be explained more simply using short videos, infographics, and plain language, while clearly showing who made the decision, why it was made, and how young people can influence future decisions. Additionally, Youth-friendly outreach from bodies like the European Parliament should be expanded, because when young people do not understand how power works, disinformation fills the gap.

In conclusion, by continuously supporting participation outside of elections, investing in peer-to-peer campaigns, and simplifying information from EU institutions, we can combat disinformation while promoting meaningful youth participation with the EU.

Thank you for joining us in presenting the ideas, commitment, and vision of the young people who took part in “Fact & Act: Youth for Democracy”. Throughout this journey in the Czech Republic and Sint Maarten, participants enhanced their media literacy, critical thinking, and participation in democratic life. Through interactive simulations of the European Parliament, policy debates, and advocacy actions, participants gained direct experience in how EU policies are shaped and how they could influence decision-making.

Together, we continue to believe in a Europe built on dignity, equality, participation, and respect for all.

Content of this booklet was created by following participants of the “Fact & Act: Youth for Democracy” project:

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Represented by following organisation:

Caribbean Education and Culture Foundation(Netherlands)
Cesta rozvoje, z.s. (Czechia)
ILEWASI (Spain)
Youth for City - City for Youth (Latvia)

This project was co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of European Union.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Dutch National Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



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