

Amendment 1

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on behalf of the ID Group

Report**A9-0205/2020****Magdalena Adamowicz**

Strengthening media freedom: the protection of journalists in Europe, hate speech, disinformation and the role of platforms
(2020/2009(INI))

Motion for a resolution (Rule 181(3) of the Rules of Procedure) replacing non-legislative motion for a resolution A9-0205/2020

European Parliament resolution on strengthening media freedom: the protection of journalists in Europe, hate speech, disinformation and the role of platforms

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966, in particular Article 19 thereof,
 - having regard to the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No 34 on Article 19 of the ICCPR ('Freedom of opinion and expression'),
 - having regard to the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which provides for the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers, and for the freedom and pluralism of the media to be respected,
 - having regard to the Commission's Action Plan against Disinformation of 5 December 2018,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Culture and Education,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (A9-0205/2020),
- A. whereas media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists are crucial components of the right to freedom of expression and information; whereas in some Member States the mainstream media only conveys a subjective leftist narrative;

- B. whereas publically owned media outlets have expanded their activities and are now active on the internet and on social media platforms, often conveying a narrative which is uncritical of government action;
- C. whereas social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have on the one hand become subject to governmental regulation and on the other started to implement *nolens volens* a policy of self-censorship, whereby posts by social media users, including the President of the United States of America, have been censored or removed, and whereby social media users have even been blocked from using these platforms after their posts have been determined to be false by so-called ‘fact checkers’ employed by the social media platforms themselves;
- D. whereas China was known to have spread disinformation relating to the COVID-19 outbreak in December 2019; whereas this was covered up and downplayed by the European External Action Service (EEAS);
- E. whereas in September 2020, a documentary series entitled ‘Estonia: The Discovery That Changes Everything’ was released which investigated the 1994 sinking of the *MS Estonia* and revealed a previously undetected and unrecorded four-metre hole in the hull of the ship; whereas this new evidence contradicts the official explanation for the sinking; whereas in 1995, the Estonia Agreement was signed by Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Denmark, Russia and the United Kingdom, wherein those countries declared the sanctity of the site and prohibited their citizens from approaching the wreck of the ship; whereas the journalist Henrik Evertsson and his camera operator Linus Andersson have since been arrested and charged with ‘violating a burial site’ and face two-year prison sentences if they are found guilty at their trial, which is scheduled to start in Gothenburg in January 2021;
- F. whereas the European Parliament has repeatedly expressed its concern regarding the threat of disinformation; whereas opposition parties have been disproportionately and unfairly accused of using and benefiting from such disinformation;
- G. whereas the European Parliament spent EUR 36.3 million of European taxpayers’ money on its 2019 European elections communication propaganda campaign, which failed to equally represent all of the political sensibilities and different visions of Europe across the EU;
1. Considers the right to freedom of expression as one of the fundamental civil liberties that has been a hallmark of our Western democracies throughout history;
 2. Stresses that governments and public authorities, while there remains no clear possibility of distinguishing between the fight against disinformation and censorship, should refrain from fighting against disinformation; notes that it is impossible to determine a final arbiter on what constitutes disinformation and that governments should not engage in making such judgements;
 3. Considers that too general and indeterminate a definition of ‘hate speech’ could be ineffective and lead to a disproportionate and arbitrary use, damaging freedom of expression and compromising the original intentions;

4. Underlines that Member States are capable of addressing concerns regarding freedom of expression and the press, disinformation and propaganda in their respective countries and that EU interference runs counter to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality;
5. Encourages Member States to adopt effective and clear legislation that ensures the transparency of media ownership and to pay particular attention to the funding, transparency and objectives of mainstream media outlets;
6. Stresses the need to respect the independence of the media and to refrain from trying to set their agenda for them; considers that public broadcasters have a special obligation to provide neutral information and to refrain from political agenda-setting;
7. Respects the right of private companies to determine their own business models; encourages social media platforms, nonetheless, to promote a level playing field for all political, philosophical and religious beliefs in accordance with the right to freedom of expression; condemns self-censorship practices by social media platforms which demote, ban or demonetise their users for no other reason than expressing an opinion; believes that defining the legal framework for freedom of expression and regulating the content of platforms must remain a national prerogative, including any endeavours to scrutinise the monopoly or quasi-monopoly of these social media platforms in order to protect the free market and democracy;
8. Stresses that any involvement by the executive in deleting, altering or influencing individual or public opinion could infringe on the principle of free speech, which serves to protect the right to speech free from government interference; underlines that any direct or indirect governmental acts, such as when social media platforms are obliged to regulate content, must be reviewable by the national courts in order to avoid censorship by the executive and to guarantee the separation of powers;
9. Recalls that the EU should avoid imposing self-censorship on its citizens by instilling the fear that any form of criticism against the EU will be silenced and/or sanctioned; emphasises that the strategies against disinformation and propaganda should not be used as a tool to prevent or stifle criticism from being levelled against the EU;
10. Notes that China wilfully withheld information about the COVID-19 pandemic and has spread disinformation during the course of the outbreak, while the EEAS bowed to Chinese pressure instead of truthfully stating the extent of China's actions;
11. Insists that allegations of interference in elections should be based on solid and consistent evidence and not on unsubstantiated claims, as transpired after the Brexit referendum; notes that when there is no solid evidence of foreign interference in elections, disinformation campaigns are likely to arise;
12. Notes that there are numerous historical examples of governments being the main disseminators of false information, such as the claims that all economic migrants are refugees, that migration is not linked to terrorism, or that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction;
13. Expresses its concern about the arrest of Messrs Evertsson and Andersson following the

release of the documentary about the sinking of the *MS Estonia*, not least since their arrest appears to be a direct violation of the right to impart information and to freedom of opinion and the press, and constitutes an action that one would expect to encounter in a third-world dictatorship; expresses its doubts about the legality of the 1995 Estonia Agreement, which criminalises approaching the wreck of the *MS Estonia*; considers, in this regard, that having been extremely vocal in the past about the importance of protecting journalists from attacks and prosecution, specifically in third countries, the Commission should also take the same position in this case, where a liberal EU country is prosecuting journalists for doing valuable investigative work that is clearly in the public interest;

14. Notes that the deliberate dissemination of disinformation against so-called right-wing political parties has a serious impact on election results and hence undermines the level political playing field and the very fabric of democracy; emphasises that all forms of disinformation should be guarded against, including those directed against so-called right-wing political parties, in accordance with the European values of equality, the rule of law and democracy;
15. Warns against the EU becoming a self-proclaimed 'Ministry of Truth' and thereby limiting the freedom of expression and the right to impart information and ideas without interference by public authority; calls for the EU to take heed lest it become a (counter)propaganda machine that silences all forms of opposition against its narrative of ever closer Union;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

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