

[My Net Take: "Avoid Censorship, Dilute Fake News with Quality"](#), by Christophe Leclercq
Blog post published on media4eu.blogactiv.eu (March 12, 2018)

(Keywords: #TackleFakeNews #FakeNews #HLEG #GAFA #Media4EU)

TACKLING "FAKE NEWS":
TWO WAYS TO FOLLOW

READ 48-PAGES REPORT FROM
THE EU HIGH-LEVEL GROUP...

AND/OR

...WATCH A 'STORY' IN 5 IMAGES!

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- 1/5 CENSORING "FAKE NEWS" ??
- 2/5 PLATFORM TRANSPARENCY
- 3/5 DILUTE "FAKE NEWS" WITH QUALITY
- 4/5 HUMAN SKILLS
- 5/5 FUNDING FOR QUALITY

Since January 2018, I joined the [High-Level Expert Group on "Fake News"](#) and disinformation (HLEG) set up by Commissioner Mariya Gabriel. 39 stakeholders advised on disinformation across traditional and social media, and actions to take. I was rapporteur of the subgroup representing the press (this is also about media policy at large), but write in personal capacity. You will see several points of interest [in the report \(link here\)](#): Code of practices & stakeholder coalition; training initiatives; cooperation with platforms on indicators, providing more visibility for quality content; policy frame, notably European strategy for the media sector 2019-2024, and use of any relevant EU instruments, including the powerful competition rules...

Let me summarise my 'net take', in simple words (I am re-gaining my freedom after the confidential stage, but do not quote the HLEG report before the embargo). One motto I suggested for our findings could be: **"Avoid censorship, dilute fake news with quality"**.

Further, here are blunt answers to four legitimate questions:

"Did we fulfill our mandate as High-Level Group?"

Yes! Every stakeholder engaged constructively. And, the end of April Communication of the Commission on disinformation is likely to take most of our recommendations on board.

"Will this have a real impact?"

Certainly! Because the follow-up is based co-regulation, meaning 'carrots and sticks'. First, there will be a voluntary Code to guide stakeholders. And then further policy initiatives if this proves not sufficient.

"Would this impact be timely?"

Probably! To put positive pressure on all, notably platforms, there are two review points before the EU elections of May 2019. Our High-Level Group and a broader conference will both meet in November 2018. And based on some independent assessment, the Commission will issue its findings and next steps in March 2019.

Will there still be fake news after 2019?

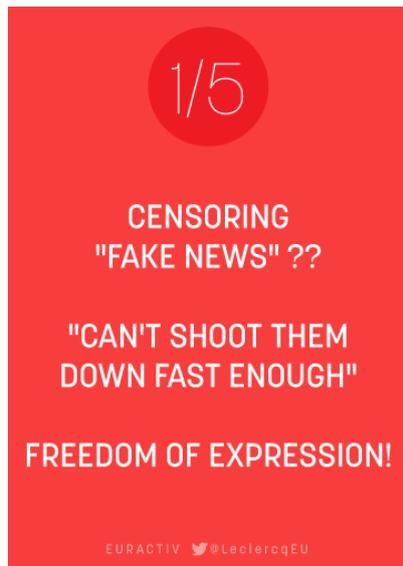
Of course! They are fast moving targets. Even their formats will keep changing. Our efforts are not about rooting them out but reducing their number and their reach. It's like vaccinating people against viruses and reducing exposure to contaminated areas. "

Now, our report is really good but rather long, understandably: it would seem technocratic to 'the woman in the street'. Perhaps even to some journalists on the front of fighting fake news? So, to keep things simple, here are further 8 quotes and 5 visual illustrations (all without ©, please just mention source: EURACTIV [@LeclercqEU](#)).

Possible quotes from **Christophe Leclercq, EURACTIV Founder and member of the HLEG on disinformation**, complemented by 5 visuals below, free to re-use:

CENSORSHIP?:

" Censorship is simply not going to work, especially in the grey zone of probably false but possibly legal 'news'. What is illegal should be removed, but it takes times..."



TRANSPARENCY:

"We need to harness the speed and methods of the platforms, while not leaving media assessment to them, given their own agenda and commercial angle. Trust Indicators (aggregated from media and NGO fact-checkers) could feed platforms' algorithms. This would dilute and slow disinformation automatically, instead of trying to censor it."

2/5

PLATFORM
TRANSPARENCY:

FILTER BIG DATA

SPOT ISSUES
VERSUS TRUST

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QUALITY:

“The best would be to “dilute” fake news with quality content. This requires Indicators, so that platforms algorithms allocate more visibility to likely quality and less to possible fakes, without taking away the latter. While details should be worked out, there is broad support for this ‘positive’, no-legalistic approach. Indicators should be provided by independent parties, chiefly press organisations, also because platforms do not wish to become publishers.”

3/5

DILUTE "FAKE NEWS"
WITH QUALITY...

FEED PLATFORM
ALGORITHMS WITH
"MAGIC POTION"

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CODE:

“The High-Level Group recommends a Code of Practices involving stakeholders into a “Coalition”. Notably platforms, media and civil society. This could provide short term impact, before the EU elections in 2019.

CO-REGULATION:

“The general frame is not just self-regulation but co-regulation: if there is not enough progress, notably by platforms, the review process would suggest further policy actions. This could include competition instruments, the EU’s main power tools. There are review points: in November 2018 and in March 2019, just before the elections.”

MEDIA LITERACY:

“There is a consensus on the need for media literacy – developing critical minds of citizens. But journalists and other media professionals also need better skills: fact-checking, and more generally media innovation.”



FUNDING:

“To provide quality information, we need journalists to survive!

It’s now likely that the EU will develop a Sustainability Strategy for the Media Sector 2019-2024. The means are there in principle, under R&D funding, training programmes and social funds. It’s timely since the EU reviews its long term budget perspectives (MFF) and prepares the next mandate.”



SPEED:

“While the media sector is not perfect, the problem of false news is mainly on social media platforms, inaccurate ‘news’ going viral. They cannot be caught by legal process: either because they are not illegal or because this would be too slow. For example, even expedited provisional judgments like the French référé need to respect the right of defense.”

Now, in search of an expert on “fake news”? For an interview, or just a short quote, or an OpEd? Or as conference speaker? If you are potentially interested, please read the background below, and contact: Christophe Leclercq (fondateur@euractiv.com; +32(0)2265813; [@LeclercqEU](https://twitter.com/LeclercqEU))

BACKGROUND:

[Christophe Leclercq](#), founder of EURACTIV, the media network for Europe, and chairman of Foundation EURACTIV, joined in January 2018 the [High-Level Group of Experts on Fake News](#) set up by European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel. He is a member, and rapporteur, of the subgroup representing the Press. The HLEG will meet one more time in November 2018.

In both Germany (NetzDG Law) and France (President Macron’s pre-announcements) legislative tools are in process. They raise issues of freedom of speech, indeed a perception of censorship could backfire. In addition to media literacy, Mr. Leclercq had initially proposed an approach based on [diluting disinformation with quality content](#), and [helping media sustainability in 2019-2024](#); and strong cooperation with online platforms like Facebook and Google. To do this, fact-checking organisations, tech companies, news organisations, advertisers, and academics could feed “Trust Indicators” helping algorithms to promote quality (some people call these “Trust Indicators”, “credibility indexes” or “source transparency indicators”).

As a respected commentator on policy issues, and a media entrepreneur, he is now looking at the whole sector’s business models and sustainability, also helped by his prior experiences as McKinsey strategy consultant and then EU Competition official.

Moreover he was the initiator of [training and exchanges projects](#). He managed the project [#Media4EU](#) with Université Libre de Bruxelles, where he teaches media and communication. He also addressed media innovation and disinformation at the multi-university ‘Ethical Forum’ (7 December, 2017), and at the Florence Summer School (European University Institute) in spring 2017.