

As a Christian initiative for Europe, when European values are at stake, we support European solutions. A common search for truth is a basis for faith and also essential for democracy. As believers, we stand up when truth is concealed and untruth takes its place. Massive disinformation is a threat and challenge that should not be underestimated. Russia is waging a barbaric, unprovoked war of aggression that violates international law and aims to destroy Ukraine as a nation. Many people have not understood that in the context of this aggression Europe is facing a hybrid war. Disinformation aims to change public opinion and spread fear in favour of those who want to abolish democracy and weaken our support for Ukraine, which upholds democratic values.

As a space of information and discourse, pluralistic, fact-based and free media are indispensable in today's democracy. Digital media open opportunities for a flow of information that enables people to contribute perspectives to the discourse. At the same time, they are particularly vulnerable to manipulation: election campaigns and political processes can be sabotaged. Radical forces use the internet to spread propaganda, misinformation, deepfakes and content glorifying violence. We are realising that the digital public sphere is controlled by a few oligopolists and monopolists. To maximise attention, they use algorithms that often reward hate speech with greater visibility. Some also use their own platforms to promote radical forces and defame democratic parties. This abundance of power is a threat to our democracy, affecting confidence in institutions, politicians, political parties as well as religious communities.

We state and request the following:

1. Europe must remain steadfast and take effective measures against disinformation. We advocate for mandatory labelling of AI-generated texts and images, as enshrined in the European Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act). The regulation is an important and unprecedented legal framework that promises greater transparency and protection against manipulation. **The Digital Services Act must be implemented swiftly and applied effectively in all member states.**
2. Effective legal regulations are needed to enforce the **protection of children and young people as well as of older people online.**
3. More than ever, curricula must be developed for **media literacy as a key skill for all stages of life**, especially children and young people in the member states. We need comprehensive support for formal and informal education, such as youth work. We need to invest in resilience which helps to 'immunise' against disinformation.
4. The recent deregulation and withdrawal of fact checking in social media in the United States, is a worrying trend. **Operators of social media platforms must effectively prevent hate speech and falsification** whilst allowing freedom of expression.
5. Appeals to the platform operators will not be enough. It is about **limiting market shares, abolishing monopolies and oligopolies and creating competition.**

6. The platforms are exempt from disseminator liability. Criminal content is reported to the operator, who then checks it and blocks it in the event of an infringement. This often takes too long, meaning that discursive damage occurs even before the content is removed. The Digital Services Act does not close this gap. We are convinced that **anyone who benefits economically from a certain content must assume full responsibility**. Accordingly, we must prohibit platforms from monetising criminal content without assuming full liability for it. These measures would ensure the assumption of responsibility.
7. The European elections as well as the national elections in Serbia, Moldova, Romania, France and Germany are disturbing examples of disinformation campaigns, false flag activities and further interventions in formation of opinion. The elections in Serbia were suspected of being manipulated, and in Romania the election results were cancelled due to external manipulation. The election campaign in Germany is also massively affected by interventions. **Especially before elections, vigilance, effective political measures and public awareness are needed in order not to jeopardise the democratic competition.** The EU Political Advertising Regulation, adopted in 2024 and ready to be applied in the future, is a pioneering tool aiming to achieve more transparency, to regulate online advertisement and to prevent foreign interference three months before an election.

We must stand up for truth and a respectful dialogue. Misuse of digital media and dissemination of disinformation seek to polarise our democracies. They even risk dividing us Christians. As believers, we should always respect each other and be tolerant, searching for the truth.

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*The Initiative of Christians for Europe (IXE) is an association of lay organizations and committed Christians from different European countries. General concern of IXE is to incorporate a more vivid awareness of a united Europe in the national debates. The initiative aims at fostering the encounter of Christians in Europe and to promote the Social Doctrine of the Church in order to achieve a better mutual knowledge and understanding of historical and cultural differences. Read more on <https://christiansforeurope.com/>.*