EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

(To be filled in and uploaded as deliverable in the Portal Grant Management System, at the due date foreseen in the system.
⚠️ *Please provide one sheet per event (one event = one workpackage = one lump sum).)*

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	101081294
Event name:	RADAR - FAKE NEWS - Wie groß ist die Gefahr für die europäische Demokratie? (Austria)
Type:	Public Event (Awareness Raising)
In situ/online:	In-Situ
Location:	Austria, Vienna
Date(s):	23.10.2023
Website(s) (if any):	https://www.oegfe.at/veranstaltungen/ecw/fake-news-wie-gross-ist-die-gefahr-fuer-die-europaeische-demokratie/
Participants	
Female:	51
Male:	69
Non-binary:	-
From Austria	109
From Belgium	3
From Germany	5
From Hungary	2
(From Switzerland)	1
…	
Total number of participants:	120	From total number of countries:	4 (5 incl. CH)

Description

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

PANEL AND SPEAKERS OF THE EVENT:

Lutz Güllner (online) – Head of Division for Strategic Communications and Information Analysis in the European External Action Service.
Ljudmyla Melnyk - senior project manager and research assistant, Institut für Europäische Politik, Berlin
Corinna Milborn – Author, journalist, TV presenter. Head of information at ProSieben, Sat1, PULS4. Current book: Change the Game – Wie wir uns das Netz von Facebook und Google zurückerobern (= Change the Game – How we can take back the network from Facebook and Google)
Dietmar Pichler – Disinformation Resilience Network
Andreas Schieder – Member of the European Parliament – Member of the Special Committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (INGE 2)
Chair: **Paul Schmidt**, Secretary General, Austrian Society for European Politics (ÖGfE) Words of Welcome: **Anna Knyazeva**, Head of Citizen Engagement, Networks and Outreach, European Commission, Representation in Austria (Vienna)

Main messages of the debate:

The panelists believe there is a great risk that the 2024 European elections will be manipulated by fake news. However, there is also the "relatively good news that we no longer see the massive influence" as in the 2016 US elections" at least in this form. "But that doesn't mean that the danger has been averted," says **Lutz Güllner**. The aim is to comprehensively uncover disinformation and be able to react to it. To achieve this, the EU must continue to invest in this area. Ultimately, this is a social task that cannot be solved by governments alone.

A few months ago, his team uncovered a new tactic that Russia in particular was using for disinformation, said Güllner. This consists of cloning websites in which media such as the "Guardian" or "Spiegel" are reproduced exactly, content is changed and then shared on a massive scale. For non-experts, such counterfeits cannot be distinguished. However, Güllner warns: "Disinformation is not just a problem of social media." Think tanks and non-governmental organizations are also the target of disinformation campaigns, and "fake" information platforms are founded "to get as much attention as possible".

Disinformation analyst **Dietmar Pichler** sees the European elections as a "big challenge, fueled by the war in Ukraine". The sanctions against Russia are a European issue and Russia is trying to exert influence through the right-wing parties. "It's getting worse," said Pichler. In the USA, aid to Ukraine has become now a major controversial topic, and we are already seeing the spread of disinformation from influencers in the United States. The EU election and the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine in particular are complex issues where "an excess of disinformation collides with a lack of information". More awareness is needed, especially with regard to the 2024 European elections.

"The problem is much bigger than we realize," warned MEP **Andreas Schieder** reflecting ont the work of the Special Committee on Foreign Influence (INGE2) of the European Parliament. The brutal attack by the radical Islamic Hamas on Israel and the Gaza war "gained a further dimension" to the issue. "Algorithms need to be disclosed," said Schieder, calling for stricter regulation of social media. With the Digital Service Act (DSA), which came into force at the end of August 2023, the EU has for the first time a means of deleting fake news, but this is "not enough".

There is a structural reason why lies spread better than the truth, and that is the algorithm, emphasized journalist and author **Corinna Milborn**. She also believes the risk of disinformation in the European elections is "very high, it is growing exponentially". Technological capabilities would increase, platforms like TikTok are unregulated, and geopolitical crises in Ukraine and the Middle East would coincide with the rise of the new right in the United States, which is using social media to destroy trust in democracy. "We are faced with a large disinformation machine and have no tools in our hands," said Milborn.

Ljudmyla Melnyk, a Ukrainian researcher at the Berlin Institute for European Politics, said Russia is trying to create a new reality through disinformation campaigns by state media. Ultimately, Moscow wants to "rob Ukraine of its subjecthood", i.e. destroy any statehood. The fact that NATO is portrayed as a threat to Russia is just "a backdrop". For Ukraine, "the disinformation war began in 2014," the year of Russia's annexation of Crimea in violation of international law. Melnyk described the fact that

there is little knowledge about the history of Ukraine among the Western public as a hindrance. She also criticized the long discussions in Germany about arms deliveries to Kiev.

So-called "debunking", i.e. direct exposure of fake news, is paramount, said Güllner. "But the fact check has a problem," said the expert. "It is always on the defensive."

So what needs to be done? **Paul Schmidt** summarizes the key statements:

(1) Contextualization and classification is key.

(2) Do not rely on one single source but refer to multiple sources of information.

(3) The fight against fake news is not just an issue for the government and authorities, but is a task for all of us as part of society.

(4) We have to boost media competence and media education especially in schools – and beyond.

Information on participants:

The event gathered a direct audience of **120 registered participants** (51 female / 69 male) from 4 EU-countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany and Hungary). Participants registered via an online registration form and were asked to sign an attendance sheet at arrival.

ÖGfE invited the general public and addressed especially universities and schools to send participants to join the event. To boost the impact and range of dissemination ÖGfE also invited the media to the event – i. a. the Austrian Press Agency covered the event.

The event was held in **German**. It was held **in situ** at the House of the European Union in Vienna.

Reporting and dissemination:

Social media coverage during the event. See: https://x.com/oegfe

The **event was recorded** and the recording was published on ÖGfE's social media channels and Youtube. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHKUyVBoTmI

Photos of the event: https://www.apa-fotoservice.at/galerie/34688

Surveys:

At the beginning and at the end of the event ÖGfE launched an **interactive survey** to collecting real-time data on participants' perceptions of disinformation, their concerns, needs and understanding of the topic.

Following the event ÖGfE disseminated the **European Commission's Survey on "Justice, Rights and Values C 2021-2027"** among participants.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).