Strengthening the Fight
against Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)

Approved at the YEPP Council Meeting in Chisinau, Moldova, on 10th of May 2025

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Recognizing:

- Open and factual discussions are a fundamental requirement for a democracy. Disinformation intentionally distorts these discussions and poisons political debate.
- Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) is a significant threat to democratic processes, national security, and public trust. Both state and non-state actors use disinformation, propaganda, and cyber-based influence operations to destabilize societies and undermine institutions. The goal is to stir polarization and divisions within the EU.
- Liberal democracies, such as the Member States of the European Union, are particularly vulnerable to FIMI threats. As trust in facts diminishes, citizens struggle to distinguish between truth and falsehood, which makes it harder to participate in the political process based on factual information.
- FIMI especially poses a threat to electoral processes. In December 2024, Romania's Constitutional Court annulled the first round of the presidential election following credible reports of massive foreign interference. Intelligence assessments indicated that a state-sponsored actor - allegedly Russia - conducted a coordinated disinformation campaign on social media, particularly TikTok, to promote far-right candidate Călin Georgescu.[1]
- In addition to TikTok, Facebook was also identified as a key channel for the spread of disinformation. Research by Reset Tech and the Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory for Digital Media (BROD)[2] found that a network of Facebook pages linked to Romania's far-right AUR party ran targeted, misleading campaigns in support of Georgescu, in violation of Meta's own political advertising guidelines.[3]
- During Germany's 2025 federal elections, the country faced significant foreign interference, particularly from Russian state-linked actors. German security services identified coordinated disinformation campaigns, including the dissemination of fake videos alleging ballot manipulation, aimed at undermining public trust in the electoral process.[4]

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[1] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/06/romanian-court-annuls-first-round-of-presidential-election
[2] https://edmo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/BROD-Report-–-Undermining-democracy.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[3] https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-12-09/covert-facebook-network-found-to-be-targeting-romanian-voters?utm_source=chatgpt.com&embedded-checkout=true
[4] https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-warns-russian-disinformation-targeting-election-2025-02-21/

- In 2024, the European External Action Service (EEAS) identified Ukraine as the main target of Russian FIMI attacks.[5] France, Germany and Moldova were also heavily targeted by FIMI.[6]
- 86% of Europeans agree that the rapid spread of disinformation is a major problem for democracy and 81% believe that foreign interference in our democratic systems is a serious problem that needs to be addressed.[7]
- Existing measures, such as the EU's Digital Services Act and NATO's counter-strategy against hybrid threats, are important steps, but more coordinated efforts are needed to effectively address FIMI. Media literacy and independent fact-checking mechanisms are crucial to strengthening societal resilience against disinformation.
- The rise of Artificial Intelligence, specifically generative AI, makes it easier and less costly for thread actors to carry out FIMI attacks and can make it harder to detect them.[8] It is to be expected that FIMI threads will increase in light of technological advancements.

Acknowledging:

- In 2024, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, proposed the European Democracy Shield.[9] She instructed Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection, Michael McGrath, to step up the fight against FIMI.
- There is a multitude of efforts to counter FIMI in the European Union, including: the European Democracy Shield (EDS), the Digital Services Act (DSA), the StratCom Task Forces of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the FIMI Information Sharing and Analysis Centre (ISAC), the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), the EEAS EUvsDisinfo platform and broader initiatives supporting fact-checking, independent journalism, and digital literacy.
- During Moldova's 2024 presidential election and EU membership referendum, the country faced extensive Russian interference, including disinformation campaigns, vote-buying schemes, and cyberattacks. In response, Moldovan authorities implemented measures such as enhancing coordination among security services, conducting media literacy workshops[10], and collaborating with international partners like the United States and the European Union to counter these threats.[11]
- The European External Action Service investigates cases of FIMI and publishes yearly reports. From 2022 to 2023 it doubled its capacity for detection and analysis and covered 750 cases[12] and in 2024 it detected 505 FIMI incidents.[13] It is, however, to be expected that the real number of FIMI cases is much higher.
- Despite the multitude of efforts, cooperation and capacity gaps persist that leave Europe vulnerable to evolving FIMI threats.
- The efforts in fighting FIMI remain fragmented between EU institutions, national governments, and civil society, making responses slower and less effective. Member

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[5] 3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats - A Framework for Networked Defence, March 2025, p. 9.

[6] 3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats - A Framework for Networked Defence, March 2025, p. 9.

[7] https://commission.europa.eu/priorities-2024-2029/democracy-and-our-values_en

[8] 3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats - A Framework for Networked Defence, March 2025, p. 9.

[9] https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14587-European-Democracy-Shield_en

[10] https://freedomhouse.org/programs/regional-programs/europeeurasia-programs/moldova-media-m-program

[11] https://pism.pl/publications/russian-interference-nearly-overwhelmed-moldovan-presidential-election-referendum-vote

[12] 2nd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats - A Framework for Networked Defence, January 2024, p. 9.

[13] 3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats - A Framework for Networked Defence, March 2025, p. 9.

States and stakeholders require a central point of contact to coordinate the efforts against FIMI.
- The general public is not enough aware of the specific dangers of FIMI and not sensitive enough to manipulated online content.
- There is a lack of long-term strategic planning to integrate resilience efforts across sectors, leading to inefficiencies and a reactive rather than proactive approach.

YEPP calls on

- The EU and its Member States to recognize the fight against Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) as a strategic priority in protecting European democracy and strengthening the resilience of its institutions.
- The EU and its Member States to allocate increased financial resources to countering FIMI within their budgets and the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union, ensuring sustained and effective action against FIMI.
- The European Commission to establish the European Democracy Shield Command Center (EDSCC) to coordinate all efforts at the European level in combating FIMI, including the work of the European External Action Service (EEAS).
- The European Commission to instruct the EDSCC to serve as the primary contact point for Member States and stakeholders for FIMI matters.
- The European Commission to instruct the EDSCC to maintain a comprehensive database tracking counter-FIMI initiatives and recorded incidents across the European Union.
- The European Commission and the Member States to establish Local Democracy Shield Hubs in each Member State to enhance public awareness and promote digital and media literacy, support independent fact-checking measures ensuring a more informed and resilient European society.
- The European Commission and its Member States to offer voluntary participation to EU accession candidate countries in order to strengthen shared resilience and promote best practices in defending democratic processes.