



**Description**

*Provide a short description of the event and its activities.*

**Programme of the Youth Lab:**Words of welcome and introductory remarks:

-Paul Schmidt – Secretary General of the Austrian Society for European Politics (ÖGfE)

-Adina Hoffmann-Reumüller – Representation of the European Commission in Austria

Words of welcome and explanation of the agenda and the goals of the RADAR-Youth Lab:

Christoph Breinschmid – Moderator (Lecturer at FH Krems and FH Burgenland)

Theoretical input on disinformation and fake news plus Q&A:

-Dietmar Pichler (Disinformation Resilience Network)

Dietmar Pichler talked about the vulnerability of democratic societies to disinformation. He shed light on the different types of false information (disinformation, misinformation, conspiracy theories, myths and propaganda) and the different variations of fake news (fabricated content, misleading content, impostor content, false content, manipulated content). Furthermore, he informed the participants about the impacts of disinformation on European democratic societies, illustrated by various examples. At the end of his lecture he answered several questions of the participants, ranging from why the EU member states' approaches to regulate disinformation are so different to how to make debunking more efficient.

Morning session: Work in 4 small groups

The participants had to answer 4 clusters of questions about disinformation and its impact on democratic processes, using different methods in order to answer each question.

1: In your opinion, how can one identify disinformation (campaigns) and distinguish fake news from trustworthy information? Do you already have negative experiences with disinformation or fake news? If yes, can you give us a concrete example? What ways to find out of your own (information) bubble and reconnect with others in order to mitigate polarization and reinstall mutual understanding?

Method: brainwriting

2: Who are the main internal (= inside the EU) and external (= outside the EU) actors spreading disinformation in Austria/the EU/your country of residence? Who are the main actors that fight the spread of disinformation?

Method: working in columns

3: Which role does the EU play in the fight against disinformation in general? Are you aware of any initiatives against disinformation on the European level or the National level of your country of residence? Which measures against disinformation work well and where is still need for improvement?

Method: mindmapping

4: Do you think the 2024 elections to the European Parliament will be the target of disinformation campaigns? What could be the main message or narrative as well as the aim of disinformation campaigns in the run-up to the 2024 elections to the European Parliament? What can the EU and its member states do in order to protect the upcoming elections to the European Parliament from disinformation campaigns?

Methods: starbursting & formulating policy recommendations

Afternoon session: Plenary

-4 presentations of the results assembled in the small groups

-gathering and structuring the key takeaways from the work done in the small groups

-collective formulation of policy-relevant recommendations

-selection of two Youth Ambassadors among the participants that will take part in the Brussels concluding events and present the recommendations drafted collectively by the participants of the

Youth Lab to EU policy-makers

**Main messages from the Youth Lab:**

6 policy recommendations were the final outcome of the Youth Lab. They were formulated together by the participants and afterwards they were refined by the two Youth Ambassadors.

1: Education and Training: Schools and general public

In the context of political education at schools, there should be a special focus on the complex of fake news, mis- and disinformation and how they negatively affect and undermine our democratic institutions. Furthermore, the media literacy of pupils should be strengthened, e.g. by offering media literacy workshops at schools. As a result, the voting age could be set down to 16 years EU-wide.

Education and training on disinformation should not only be available to pupils – also the general public should be provided with disinformation workshops or forums, but also more specialized formats like e.g. hackatons, trainings on digital forensics and algorithmic bias, social network analysis etc.

Furthermore, the EU Cyber Academy´s mandate could be expanded to cover also disinformation content. (Mandatory) awareness training on the impact of fake news and disinformation should also cover social media influencers.

2: European elections 2024: More transparency, awareness campaigns and promotional campaigns

A simplification of the often highly professional and rather complex language of the EU is needed in order to make it more transparent and accessible for its citizens. More transparency would lead to an enhanced interest (and trust) of citizens in the EU's work.

In the run-up to the European elections in 2024, awareness campaigns should be launched informing the public about the problem of fake news, mis- and disinformation and its potential negative impact on the upcoming elections. Together with these awareness campaigns on disinformation, also promotional campaigns for the European elections themselves should be launched, with the aim to inform citizens about their right to vote and the EU in general.

3: Reliable database and linked pop-ups

A central internet database providing reliable sources for journalists, educational institutions and the general public should be created (e.g. by the European Digital Media Observatory/EDMO). Furthermore, pop-ups should be linked to social media contents dealing with sensible topics that are often targeted by disinformation campaigns, thus leading to reliable information on these topics and therefore verifying or falsifying the content. The reliable, fact-based and objective information that is linked to sensible and contested social media contents should be provided by experts from well-respected NGOs, universities and Thinktanks.

4: (Social) Media: Regulations, more resources for fact-checking, protection of press freedom/Control of political influence

In order to fight the spread of disinformation on social media channels, social media regulations as well as social media content moderators are necessary. There should be more transparency with regard to how algorithms work and perhaps also an attempt to regulate such algorithms. Furthermore, the capacity of media and NGOs to allocate more resources to fact-checking as well as the offshoring of debunking activities to local entities should be enhanced.

Especially in the run-up to the European elections 2024, it should be disclosed how political parties are using (social) media in the pre-election period. As a means to achieve this, all funding of political advertisements could be made transparent. This would ensure that the public knows who supports a political party.

5: Partnerships to mitigate the spread of disinformation in EU-accession candidates

In order to mitigate the spread and the influence of disinformation campaigns spreading negative myths about the EU, partnerships with foreign countries that are heavily influenced by propaganda or fake news – especially with EU accession countries – should be established. The aim would be to regain control over (EU) narratives in partnership and especially accession countries via Fora, public debates etc.

**6: Refining the Digital Services Act (DSA) and controlling its implementation/ Strengthening and harmonization of regulations at EU-level/ Measuring efficiency of existing measures and further improvements**

The competences of the DSA should be enhanced and refined, its efficiency increased and its implementation controlled. Furthermore, other already existing policies, laws and regulations at EU-level should be strengthened as well as harmonized, e.g. the DSA, the AIA (Artificial Intelligence Act), the Commission proposal on online political advertising. Also, the competences of the EU in the area of disinformation in general should be defined and clarified. Finally, in order to measure the efficiency of combating disinformation campaigns, it needs empirical research, e.g. monitoring the effects of introduced policies and regulations, analyzing and improving the efficiency of the EU workflow.

**Information on participants:**

The Youth Lab gathered **26 registered participants** (12 female / 14 male) from **9 EU-countries** (Austria, Hungary, Germany, Poland, France, Greece, Italy, Slovakia & Slovenia). Participants registered via an online registration form, where they had to specify how and in which contexts they had already gained insights into the topic – the influence of disinformation on democratic processes. Furthermore, they were asked to send their CV via mail to complete the application process. They were asked to sign an attendance sheet at arrival.

ÖGfE addressed and invited especially universities, colleges of higher education, youth organisations, ERASMUS + student networks etc. to send participants to join the event.

The Youth Lab was held in **English** and **in situ** at the House of the European Union in Vienna.

**Reporting and dissemination:**

During the event several photos were taken and published on the ÖGfE's social media channels and the ÖGfE's website: <https://www.oegfe.at/radar/radar-youth-lab-fake-news-how-dangerous-is-it-for-the-european-democracy-13-11-2023/>

**Surveys:**

At the end of the Youth Lab the participants were asked to fill out the **Feedback Collection Form**.

Following the Youth Lab 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).