European Digital Media Observatory

Public Report

Reporting period: 1 June 2020 – 31 March 2021

Introduction

The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), launched in June 2020, is an independent observatory that brings together fact-checkers and researchers with expertise in the field of online disinformation, and is open to collaboration with media organisations and media literacy practitioners. It promotes scientific knowledge on online disinformation, advances the development of EU fact-checking services and supports media literacy programmes. EDMO also supports policy makers with policy research and analysis. The importance of EDMO's aim to identify and mitigate threats and risks to a healthy online information environment has become even more evident with the COVID-19 pandemic and the real and urgent threat posed to our societies by online disinformation.

EDMO is based on a consortium composed of the European University Institute (with both the School of Transnational Governance (STG) and the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF)), Athens Technology Center, Aarhus University (in particular DATALAB – Center for Digital Social Research) and Pagella Politica. The consortium is led by the European University Institute and in particular by the School of Transnational Governance.

This report introduces the activities carried out by EDMO during its first 10 months of operation. The activities of EDMO are based on five main tasks, namely and briefly:

1. Setting-up a secure online collaborative platform for fact-checkers and researchers supporting the analysis of disinformation campaigns and a web portal providing public information to raise awareness about disinformation;
2. Creating a governance body which ensures public trust regarding the work of the platform and establishing a framework to provide secure access to data of online platforms for research purposes
3. Supporting and facilitating coordination of independent fact-checking activities in Europe, including the mapping of those activities and the creation of searchable directories aggregating fact-checks and media literacy material from external repositories;
4. Supporting and facilitating the coordination of academic research activities on disinformation in Europe and creating a repository with relevant peer-reviewed scientific literature;
5. Providing policy analysis and methodological support to public authorities in the monitoring of the policies put in place by online platforms to limit the spread and the impact of disinformation.

This report is structured around the five tasks and refers to the first 10 months of activities of EDMO (June 2020 – March 2021).

Task 1

1. Executive Summary

Task I of EDMO deals with the set-up and operations of a secure online platform supporting the detection and analysis of disinformation campaigns and of a web portal providing public information to raise awareness about disinformation.

In the context of this task, Athens Technology Center (ATC) is responsible for setting-up and operating Truly Media as the secure online platform to support its users in detecting and analysing disinformation campaigns, as well as enhancing Truly Media with new functionalities, tools, and services for fact-checking and academic research activities.

Task I also deals with setting up and maintaining EDMO's web portal and with training and outreach. The training and outreach activities of EDMO are led and implemented by the School of Transnational Governance, in collaboration with the partners of the EDMO consortium. A variety of activities take place under this umbrella, including the development and implementation of EDMO's communication strategy, EDMO's quarterly e-newsletter, EDMO's training offer, as well as participating in events and organising EDMO public events, including the First Annual Countering Online Disinformation Conference (EDMO Week).

2. Activities

2.1 Operation and enhancement with new functionalities of the EDMO platform

This activity involves the set up and operation of EDMO's digital collaborative platform that will bring together fact-checkers in a common environment, allow them to communicate and share valuable information, and access a set of tools, services, and resources to facilitate the detection and analysis of misinformation incidents.

The EDMO platform is based on Truly Media, which is hosted on the Cloud, protected by in-depth security and encryption. It allows for monitoring and recording access for audit and control purposes. Moreover, the platform already provides access to resources, tools, and services supporting the detection and analysis of disinformation campaigns, while additional related functionalities and tools are being developed and integrated constantly.

In the context of this activity, ATC will enhance the platform with new features and functionalities to support fact-checkers and academic researchers in detecting and analysing disinformation.

ATC has been working to enhance the functionalities of the platform, add new features, and integrate third party verification tools and services. An overview of the tools, services, resources, and features that have been added and developed up to the time of writing the present report follows.

Access to new statistical data sources

Additional external statistical data sources were added within the platform. Through the 'Explore' functionality under the 'Statistical Data' tab users can browse through all the national statistical offices of:

- EU member states,
- EFTA countries,
- EU candidate countries,
- EU potential countries,
- Non-EU countries (Japan, UK, USA, Australia).

The platform provides the following details for each data source (if publicly available): a) Name of office/authority, b) Country, c) Address, d) Phone/Fax number, and e) email address. In cases where this is possible by each provider's web configurations, by clicking on the name of the data source, the user is directed to the respective website and its search query is automatically transferred to the external source, opening it in a new web browser tab.

In this way, users can automatically send multiple search queries to different data providers, e.g. search for 'number of Covid-19 vaccinations' both in the statistical offices of the UK, the USA, Australia, Belgium and France from within the platform.

Tools and services for fact-checking and academic research activities

At the time of writing this report ATC has already integrated or is in the process of integrating the following third-party verification tools:

- Pipl: [Pipl](#) is a provider of identity information services for professional investigation and identity verification applications. Truly Media, in the context of EDMO, consumes Pipl's API to allow users to send a query directly through the platform and retrieve relevant results inside Truly Media. Users can search with a name, email, or social media profile from within the Verification page of each item.
- SpyOnWeb: [SpyOnWeb.com](#) collects information from public sources and allows users to search by a URL, IP address, Pub- tag, or UA- tag. SpyOnWeb is used by fact-checkers and general investigators to identify hidden connections between different websites that may indicate that two or more seemingly unrelated websites are operated by the same person or organisation.
- Co-Inform Twitter plugin: [Co-inform](#) is an EU-funded H2020 project with the objective to create tools to foster critical thinking and digital literacy for a better-informed society. Co-inform is integrated as a plugin within Truly Media in order to let fact-checkers share their thoughts on specific collected items via Twitter. Whenever someone using Truly Media flags an item in a collection as Verified, Fake or Unclear and exports this to Co-Inform it will be labelled as such when it appears through the Co-Inform extension.
- Sensity: [Sensity](#) is a visual threat and intelligence company. Its detection API combines advances in computer vision and video forensics to provide customers with accurate and scalable deepfake detection capabilities. The Sensity Detection API runs a selection of automated authenticity tests on images and videos. The tests are designed to detect AI-based media manipulation and synthesis techniques. Currently, the Sensity Detection API supports the following forms of media analysis:
  - Face Manipulation, which is available for images and videos, detects a class of deepfake manipulation that takes a real video of a person and alters or swaps their face with that of another person.
  - GAN Generated Faces, which is available for images, detects synthetically- generated images of faces, such as the photorealistic StyleGAN, as they may appear on social media profiles, accounts of financial services online or dating apps.

A new functionality has been added under the 'Explore' function of the platform. The 'News Timeline' provides an overview of how a particular story, rumour, or breaking news event has unfolded online in the timeframe of one week. We currently investigate the following sources to construct the timeline: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, 4chan's pol channel, and RSS feeds (a mix of 21 news sources like the New York Times, BBC, Al Jazeera, the Washington Post, etc). Once a user enters a search query in the Explore tab, a timeline is constructed showing content containing the search terms in order of appearance (oldest first) going back one week from the date the user conducted the search. Through the News Timeline, users are able to investigate

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the path a particular breaking news item or rumour travelled, from the day it first appeared online. The News Timeline does not enable users to visualise each and every mention of the investigated story online, but it rather provides the 'key points' of a story's journey through the main social media platforms, mainstream news sources, and more fringe platforms (currently 4chan's politically incorrect channel). It provides useful insights for users, especially in cases of a breaking event or rumour, as it allows them to investigate who posted first about this, in which platform, who were the main spreaders, and possibly how the story changed from platform to platform, source to source over time.

Moreover, the platform now offers the possibility to the EDMO community of fact-checkers and researchers to monitor online content based on a set of keywords. This refers to aggregating content from social media and other sources (blogs, RSS feeds) and storing it for further analysis. An analysis pipeline has been created with libraries which perform Natural Language Processing (NLP) in English (sentiment extraction, entity recognition). These libraries have been trained with annotated content to improve accuracy and performance. By extracting named entities from the aggregated content (persons, organisations, locations) the system is able to detect trends and alert users for newly appearing or trending content. ATC will continue working on this functionality to add more services to support platform users in detecting and analysing disinformation campaigns by offering trends and insights on the monitored content.

With the integration of a powerful HTML editor to the platform, EDMO users can compile an article or report that can be published on EDMO's web portal. Final approval before publishing takes place through the relevant role-holder from inside EDMO's web portal.

In addition to the above, ATC has designed a light, mobile responsive version of EDMO's platform to satisfy even the smallest screen resolutions of mobile devices. Whenever a user is accessing the platform via a mobile device, they are automatically redirected to the mobile version. In the mobile version users have access to all the main functionalities of the application on the go, excluding a few features that demand large space or increased performance.

ATC will continue to develop new functionalities and integrate the platform tools, services and resources for fact-checkers and academic researchers throughout EDMO's duration, while existing features might be further enhanced in terms of usability, depending on the feedback and input received by platform users.

EDMO's platform will enable the community of European fact-checkers and researchers dealing with disinformation to work together through a common environment, collaborate on the spot,

jointly produce and publish fact-checks and investigations, and access a set of resources, tools, and services to support their work of detecting and analysing disinformation campaigns. Access to EDMO's infrastructure will boost the reflexes of European media organisations and of the academic research community against disinformation and it will enhance collaboration across organisations, borders, and disciplines, leading to a more coordinated and aligned response to the disinformation phenomenon across Europe.

2.2 Creation of the EDMO web portal

This activity involves the design and release of EDMO's web portal to the public. The portal provides access to fact-checking and educational resources, while material in support of awareness-raising campaigns will be listed and made directly accessible through the web portal.

An initial version of the web portal for the general public has been built and was launched at the beginning of the project (2 June 2020) under the domain www.edmo.eu.

The underlying platform of the web portal is WordPress, which is a free and open-source content management system (CMS) that allows easily organising, managing and publishing content, with a variety of customisations. WordPress is distributed under the terms of the GNU General Public License ('GPL'), an open development model. The web portal is hosted on the Hetzner cloud server. The server guarantees the 24/7 operation of the portal as it is capable of handling high load and operates on a 50Mbps connection to the Internet. Backups of the system take place daily in order for the system to be able to recover in case of a failure. The web portal is mobile responsive.

The statistics regarding the visitors of the website are constantly recorded and stored, using the Google Analytics toolkit so that partners can have access to the history logs and be able to extract useful information about the web portal's operation and traffic.

In its initial version, EDMO is presented along with its four main focus areas: Fact-checking, Research, Media literacy, and Policy. A dedicated webpage has been developed for each area of focus, where the activities undertaken by EDMO are presented in more detail. On the homepage of the portal a 'Who We Are' section is also available with brief information about the project's partners, contact information, and a subscription link for receiving quarterly newsletters by EDMO, (provided at the footer of the web portal). Since its inception, the EDMO web portal has been further enriched with new sections and has evolved in parallel with the implementation of the EDMO activities.

EDMO's web portal visitors can currently navigate through the following webpages:

- **Homepage** ('Who We Are', 'Our Focus', 'Join Us', 'Our News & Events'), where visitors can find information about the EDMO partners, the four main activities that it will focus on, what EDMO can do for interested parties as well as latest news and events.

- **About EDMO** with the following sub pages:
  - *EDMO at a glance*, where visitors can find information about EDMO's mission, who leads this effort and EDMO activities;
  - *Meet Our Team*, where visitors can find the team members of EDMO (picture, name, role in the project, organisation and short cv are provided);
  - *Governance*, where visitors can find the members that compose the governance body of EDMO, i.e. Executive Board, Advisory Board, Secretary-General (picture, name, role and short cv are provided). On this page a direct link to the 'Charter of the Governance Body of the European Digital Media Observatory' is also provided.
- **Repositories** with the following subpage:
  - *Fact-checking Activities*, where the first iteration of the Fact-checking Activities Map can be accessed publicly.
- **News and Events** with the following subpages:
  - *News*, where posts about EDMO activities and news are published (with relevant image)
  - *Events*, where posts about EDMO events are published (with relevant image)
  - *Trainings*, where visitors can find information about the training activities of EDMO, and training surveys.
- **Publications**, where visitors can download EDMO Reports and read online EDMO newsletters.
- **Join our community,** where interested organisations can submit an application to join EDMO's fact-checking community. The Join our community section will be updated to include a similar application to join EDMO's research community.

In addition, the footer of the web portal contains a 'Contact' section providing an email address and a direct link to EDMO's Twitter account. It also contains the acknowledgement of EU funding as well as direct links to the 'Data Protection Policy' and 'Cookie Declaration' pages.

The web portal is designed and implemented by ATC in cooperation with EUI-STG, who also provides the necessary content and information about other partners when relevant.

EDMO's web portal will continue to be updated as new content is made available in the course of EDMO's activities. New webpages will be added in the coming months, while the existing webpages will be revised when necessary with new content. ATC is in constant communication with EUI-STG and the other partners to ensure that the website content is updated, and that all requested changes in the layout of the web portal are implemented, while the news and events section is always up-to-date with the latest EDMO activities.

By the time of drafting this report, a total of 3,133 users visited the web portal, while the web portal had a total of 10,493 page views since February 2021. About 41.4% of visitors reach the web portal directly, 26.7% reach the web portal from organic search sites, 21.9% come from referrals and 10%, from social media and other sites. Regarding content on the EDMO web portal, 'more generic' items like 'Homepage', 'Meet Our Team', 'EDMO at a Glance' and the events' post 'EDMO Workshop – Artificial Intelligence and fact-checking: promises and perils' have been very popular over this period. Regarding the geographical distribution of EDMO's audience, it is interesting to note that it has achieved a wide reach, with website visitors coming from almost all over the world. The top three countries with the most visitors during this period were Italy, Belgium and Spain. All the aforementioned numbers show that the web portal's performance and visibility is very good. EDMO activities have managed to attract significant interest. Our goal is to further expand the Observatory's outreach and engagement among relevant stakeholders in the coming months.

2.3 Incident Report Management-Customer support

This activity deals with the daily operation of the physical infrastructure and software for EDMO's collaborative platform and web portal, as well as the necessary service management activities and tasks that ensure that the platform and its functionalities, including the web portal, are available at all times and that, in case of failure, full functionality of the platform will be restored within specified time frames.

Both EDMO's platform and portal are constantly available from the beginning of the contract period. Moreover, appropriate measures and activities were implemented by ATC to ensure the constant availability and operation of the platform and the portal. Moreover, via the platform, users are able to directly contact ATC's technical support team with any problems they might experience through the Feedback button located on each user's profile area. Users may also contact the technical support team by sending an email to support@truly.media.com or support@edmo.eu. A dedicated support team working in shifts receives support requests and

initiates the incident report management process. The activity is on-going throughout the duration of EDMO's platform and portal operation.

## 2.4 Training and outreach activities

The training and outreach activities are coordinated by EUI STG, in collaboration with the partners of the EDMO consortium. To date a variety of activities have taken place under this umbrella, including the development and implementation of EDMO's communication strategy, the launch of a quarterly e-newsletter, the development of EDMO's training offer, as well as the Observatory's participation in external events, and the organization of public events, such as the First Annual Countering Online Disinformation Conference (EDMO Week). See description of each specific activity below:

- **Communications strategy**

As lead partner of the project, the School of Transnational Governance is responsible for communications and outreach activities, which include the set-up of the EDMO brand identity and the development and implementation of the communications and media relations strategy.

Brand identity and communications strategy

In preparation for the launch of EDMO, the brand identity and an encompassing communication and outreach strategy were developed. Work on brand identity included the creation of a logo and corresponding brand guidelines, which provide instructions on the correct use of the logo, fonts, colours and other brand-related visual elements.
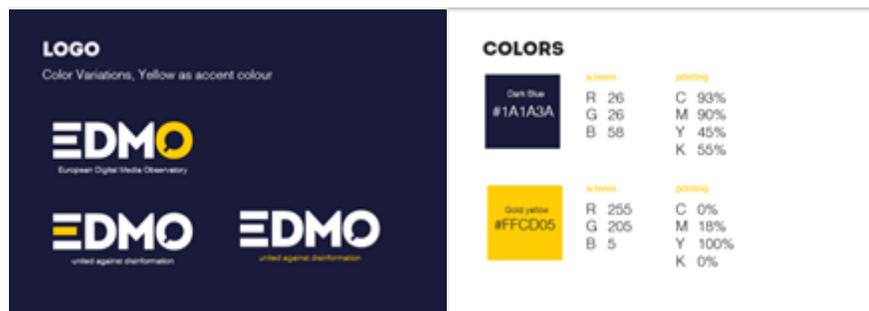
The comprehensive EDMO communication strategy sets out the project's communication objectives, key messages, a stakeholder analysis and an overview of communication channels. It also provides recommendations and an action plan regarding the further development of the brand's visual identity, the measurement of success and the creation of additional PR content. Last but not least, the strategy gives a detailed overview of the allocation of the budget.

The strategy laid the foundation for the neutral and independent positioning in public debate that EDMO adopted from the outset. Against a backdrop of the high public interest in online disinformation, EDMO has been aware of its opinion-forming role and reflects this in dealing with the media, and also on its main public communication channels, namely the website and the EDMO Twitter account.

Press and Media relations

Since its launch, EDMO has enjoyed significant media attention, with national and international news outlets regularly reporting on the project. The take-off of EDMO alone has received extensive coverage on media channels such as Eunews, Euractiv, RaiRadio1 and on Italy's public broadcast channel, RAI, which ran a dedicated TV report in its programme 'Punto Europa', marking one of the highlights of the project's kick-off.

For communication with the broader public, EDMO relies on its main digital communication channels, the web portal and Twitter account. However, for particularly relevant news, press releases are sent via the EUI-STG press and media contact database, which currently contains approximately 2500 media contacts.

Social Media

EDMO's main social media channel is Twitter. The account was set up in preparation for the launch of the project in late May 2020. Since that date, the account has generated considerable interest, which is reflected in the 1,466 followers at the time of this writing (21 April 2021).

During the 10 months since its inception, @EDMO_EUI posted 60 tweets that earned 486 retweets, 861 likes, 109 link clicks and 8,698 profile visits.

In terms of content, the EDMO Twitter account posts about the Observatory's main activities, its mission and purpose, and also about specific events and trainings, as well as services it offers to main audiences, e.g. the research, fact-checking and media literacy communities. EDMO has so far refrained from actively retweeting news and information from other accounts on online disinformation (see communications strategy above).

The @EDMO_EUI interacts with other accounts, such as the consortium partners or accounts of the European Commission:

EDMO also features a YouTube channel, which, in the future will host streaming of online events and conferences, tutorials and other media material for its community. In this context, it is worth mentioning a video interview with Madeleine De Cock Buning (Chair of the EDMO Advisory Board) and Miguel Poiares Maduro (Chair of the EDMO Board) talking to Roeland Scholtalbers (EDMO Spokesperson) about EDMO's mission and activities, which was widely distributed on the Observatory's communication channels.

- **Quarterly Newsletter**

A newsletter is the perfect tool to keep key stakeholders in the loop about developments in the Observatory. The newsletter, published on a quarterly basis, is currently in its third edition. The newsletters feature the latest news, events and opportunities of the project, aiming to provide an update on EDMO activities and to invite the community to engage.

The newsletter template was designed by EUI STG in line with EDMO's visual identity and was approved by EDMO's Executive Board. The EUI STG coordinates the workflow for the publication of the quarterly newsletter. It has set up an editorial board responsible for drafting the newsletter and requesting content input from all partners. Each edition of the newsletter is now published on the EDMO website and shared through social media (Twitter), and will also be sent to the contact lists composed of subscribers to the service on the portal. There were 478 subscribers in early January 2021.

In October 2020 EDMO published its first quarterly newsletter ([link](#)). For this specific edition, a video-interview of the Chairs of the Executive and Advisory Board was produced, explaining EDMO's mission and vision ([link](#)). The second edition of the EDMO newsletter was produced in January 2021 ([link](#)), and included the first online survey on training needs for stakeholders working on understanding and countering online disinformation (see below). EDMO will continue to publish the newsletter and share it with relevant contacts and stakeholders as visibility continues to grow and activities take full shape.

- **Training and Online Survey**

EDMO aims to regularly provide one day residential or online training modules on understanding and tackling online disinformation. The Observatory's multi-and cross-disciplinary training approach is aimed at responding to the most pressing training needs and recent trends in tacking online disinformation. Its training offer will adapt to the constantly changing nature of the online disinformation phenomenon and respond to the needs of various actors in the information and media field, combining academic knowledge with hands-on and solutions-oriented modules.

In order to help identify the most relevant topics for the different training sessions, EDMO conducts regular online surveys for stakeholders working on tackling online disinformation. Surveys are launched on the webpage every six months. The first online survey took place on 1 February 2021 and remained open for 10 days. It was also promoted in the EDMO newsletter.

The survey asked users to select the topic(s) they would like EDMO to provide training on, choosing from a list of possible options, and also included the possibility of suggesting other topics for potential trainings. Also based on the results of the online survey, the first catalogue of trainings was developed by EUI STG and will be further enhanced and rolled out over the next few months.

EDMO's first training module, 'The ABC of Fact-checking', is scheduled to take place online for two half days on 11-12 May 2021 (see programme link). The training is organised in collaboration with Agence France-Presse and includes contributions by Grégoire Lemarchand (AFP), Sami Acef (AFP), Nina Lamparski (AFP), Rasmus Klein Nielsen (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford) and Giovanni Zagni, Lisa Ginsborg and Paula Gori from EDMO. The first training module aims to introduce some of the key tools for fact-checking, while setting the scene for the broader context of the role of fact-checkers in the European digital media ecosystem. The training will offer an insight into the techniques, opportunities, and challenges of fact-checking. Participants will be introduced to ways of optimising the use of search engines, as well as tools and techniques fact-checkers use to cut through noise when analysing social media. The trainers will also cover the basics of visual investigation through reverse image search, the Invid-WeVerify toolbox, and engage participants in geolocation exercises. The training is specifically aimed at individuals with little to no knowledge of fact-checking who have an interest in learning more about the field, including at journalists, researchers, civil society, and policy-makers. The first edition of the ABC of fact-checking training is limited to twenty participants, but further editions will be considered in case of high interest.

● **EDMO Week preparation**

The aim of the Annual Conference is to bring together participants representing platform users, the research community, media literacy experts, government and industry to share ideas and discuss new trends/issues. It also aims to showcase EDMO's activities to date and to present EDMO's future plans in collaboration with soon-to-be established national hubs. Given the ongoing travel limitations due to COVID-19, the first Annual Countering Online Disinformation Conference will take place online between 7-11 June 2021, and under the umbrella name of 'EDMO Week'. The programme aims to reflect an innovative approach, inclusiveness, multi and inter-disciplinary method, geographical and sector balance, policy, hands-on and academic experience. The programme aims to focus on 5 macro areas/topics (one to be covered each day), namely: The need for a multi-stakeholder platform; Fact-checking and journalism; Towards a new Code of Practice on Disinformation; Research; and the local element – Media and Information Literacy and the EDMO hubs. The draft programme envisages the participation of

EDMO representatives, external stakeholders and high-level representatives of the European Commission, including EC Vice President Věra Jourová. Using a virtual event platform to allow a more interactive and innovative event for participants, will also allow greater opportunities for interaction among different stakeholders, with a view to further promoting their future collaboration with EDMO.

- **EDMO Workshop on AI and Fact-Checking**

The EDMO online workshop on 'Artificial Intelligence and fact-checking: promises and perils' was organised by EUI STG and took place on 17 February 2021 (see programme link). The focus of the workshop was to bring together private companies that are developing AI-based fact checking tools with fact checkers, journalists, academics and policy makers to discuss these questions, and share experiences of good practices, limits and risks encountered in their work. The workshop sought to discuss *inter alia* the following questions: What initiatives are currently underway among niche AI start-ups to counter disinformation and, more broadly, in the private sector? How do these relate to AI-powered tools devised or used by some fact-checkers? What are the benefits and risks of using automatic fact-checking tools and AI to detect disinformation? Can AI lead the way in mapping the vectors and dissemination dynamics of disinformation? How will this impact current journalistic practices? The workshop was structured around three roundtables. The first roundtable, on 'Commercial tools and products using AI for fact-checking: the answer from the private sector', included the participation of large and small companies working in the field (Diogo Malafaya and Leonor Sá, Skribo; Jose Miguel Cansado, Constella Intelligence; Lyric Jain, Logically; Guy De Pauw, Textgain) and was moderated by Maja Cappello, European Audiovisual Observatory and the EDMO Advisory Board. The second roundtable discussed the experiences and challenges faced by fact-checkers and journalists using AI-powered fact-checking (speakers: Jochen Spangenberg, Deutsche Welle and EDMO Advisory Board; Andrew Dudfield, Full-Fact; Viktoras Daukšas, Debunk EU; Francesco Saverio Nucci, Fandango; Emily Bazelon, The New York Times Magazine; Tommaso Canetta, Pagella Politica and EDMO). The last roundtable was devoted to a discussion of the limits and risks of using AI for fact-checking, including questions of effectiveness and legality of AI-driven disinformation detection and moderation (speakers: Kalina Bontcheva, University of Sheffield; Christopher Guess, Duke University; Alberto Rabacchin, European Commission; Andrea Simoncini, University of Florence; Miguel Poiares Maduro, School of Transnational Governance, EUI and EDMO Executive Board). The workshop received registrations from 80 participants in addition to the speakers listed above. A report of the event is currently being prepared by EUI STG.

- **Participation in external events, consultations, interviews**

Members of EDMO's governance body and staff participate and represent EDMO in public events related to online disinformation on a regular basis. Further information may be found on the EDMO website (link). Stakeholders and organisations working in the field of online disinformation reach out to EDMO on a regular basis, and relevant EDMO staff and partners are involved in relevant meetings. Members of EDMO's governance bodies were also involved in the EC online multi-stakeholder meetings on the Guidance for the strengthening of the Code of Practice on Disinformation.

- **Survey and Report on COVID-19 and fact-checking**

In January 2021 EDMO launched a survey among fact-checkers with a specific focus on disinformation and the Covid19 vaccine and vaccination campaigns. The survey was addressed to fact-checking organisations and players and enquired about a number of aspects, including their work and strategies to fight disinformation about COVID-19 vaccines and the disinformation narratives about the COVID-19 vaccine and the vaccination campaign they were witnessing in their respective countries. The survey was taken by 17 respondents covering 17 Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain) plus the United Kingdom and non-EU Balkan countries. The majority of the respondents were either fact-checking organisations or fact-checking teams within media organisations, complemented by a tech company using both AI and human analysts for fact-checking and a platform publishing fact-checks commissioned by a science communications agency. The results of the survey were published by EDMO in a report which is available on the EDMO website (link). The survey found that almost all fact-checkers in Europe have been dedicating part of their work to fighting disinformation around the COVID-19 vaccine and vaccination campaigns, and several of them have started new projects specifically dedicated to disinformation on the vaccines, demonstrating both the scale of the problem and the importance attached to tackling it among the fact-checking community. The report provides an overview of fact-checking activities, strategies and how they relate to initiatives by government and/or public health institutions in their countries and by online platforms. It also provides a useful catalogue of the major disinformation narratives about the COVID-19 vaccine and the vaccination campaign that are present in Europe.

Further attention should be devoted by future surveys to the topic of disinformation on the COVID-19 vaccine and vaccination campaigns to focus on the actors, vectors and patterns of

dissemination of such disinformation on one hand, and to questions of impact and effectiveness of fact-checkers' work in this field, on the other. In addition, a survey to map the initiatives of the public authorities to fight against disinformation on the COVID-19 vaccine and to create a comprehensive overview of their initiatives could also be launched among the National Regulatory Authorities in collaboration with ERGA.

A. Task 2

1. Executive Summary

The EDMO Governance Body ensures public trust regarding the work of EDMO, defines the EDMO strategy, sets the EDMO research agenda and establishes a framework to provide secure access to online platforms' data for research purposes.

The Governance Body, as outlined below, is composed of two boards: the Executive Board (EB), whose members represent the various pillars of activities of EDMO, and the Advisory Board, composed of a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder group of experts in the field of online disinformation and media. Both boards play a very active role in the overall development and implementation of EDMO's mission and are called on a regular basis to make decisions both at micro and macro-levels. Because of its key role, the Governance Body also makes recommendations and decisions on additional activities that EDMO might be involved in.

2. Activities

The EDMO Governance Body and Charter

Just after its establishment, EDMO set-up its governance body. The latter is composed of relevant stakeholders in the field (academics, fact-checkers, media practitioners and organisations, media literacy experts, IT tool developers, etc.). The composition of the Board ensures a balanced geographical coverage of the EU. The independent governance body is composed of two different Boards, namely: i) Advisory Board; ii) Executive Board.

The Advisory Board experts represent various stakeholders working on policy and governance issues of EDMO. The board is chaired by Prof. Madeleine de Cock Buning of the School of Transnational Governance at EUI. The European Commission participates on the board only as an observer and does not influence decisions. To consider the priorities in establishing the EDMO platform and its activities, the Advisory Board met five times in the first 10 months. A joint session with the Executive Board was also organised on those occasions.

The Executive Board is composed of the leaders of the different tasks of EDMO, also representing the members of the EDMO consortium. It is an operational group that is mainly focused on the development of the specific activities, at micro-level and beyond. This board is chaired by Prof. Miguel Poiares Maduro of the School of Transnational Governance at the EUI.

The Board meets on a monthly basis and on the occasion of the joint sessions with the Advisory Board.

Details on the composition of both boards can be accessed at the following link: https://edmo.eu/governance/. Board responsibilities are carried-out as a joint effort. The first works on providing guidance on strategy, guidelines and principles and the second works on putting them in place and implementing them. In order to ensure harmony, coordination and implementation of tasks, Paula Gori acts as Secretary General of the overall independent body.

Because of its executive role, the Executive Board reports and seeks the input of the Advisory Board on the different steps achieved as well as on any issue that may come up during the implementation of the overall strategy. Communication between the two boards is key to make sure that policies and their applications are successful, in light of the objectives of the Observatory. Members of the Executive Board collaborate at two main levels: with the Advisory Board and with the team members of the task they represent. This is ensured thanks to the Secretary-General as well as within the overall project management, overseen by EUI.

The EDMO Governance Body adopted a Governance Charter, which is accessible here. The latter is composed of a preamble and two sections that refer respectively to the Executive and to the Advisory Board. The goals of EDMO are attached to the Charter as an Annex. The Governance Charter also includes a definition of Conflict of Interest as well as a procedure on how to proceed in case of a conflict of interest. Members of the Board send their potential conflicts of interest to the Secretary-General and share any future potential conflicts if and when they occur. Among its activities, the Governance Body is working on the EDMO scientific focus.

Rules and procedures to access the EDMO secure online collaborative platform for fact-checkers

EDMO opened an Online Secure Collaborative Platform for Fact-checkers, a similar platform will be opened for researchers. The Governance Body finalised both the admissions criteria and procedure and the online form through which fact-checkers can apply.

Admission criteria are the following:

● Focus on the European Union. Any fact-checking organisation willing to become a user of the platform has to be established in the EU and have a demonstrable focus on the EU and/or its Member States in all or at least a significant part of its activities. Being a member of the EU

national hubs on disinformation will be considered a sufficient demonstration of compliance with this criterion.

● Competence. Applicants will have to demonstrate competence in fact-checking and to show active projects, having published at least 15 fact-checking articles in the three months prior to application. Being signatories of the Code of Principles of the International Fact-checking Network will be considered a sufficient demonstration of compliance with this criterion.

● Transparency. Applicants will have to disclose and avoid any potential conflict of interest, including work, consulting activities, share-owning or funding from any company or organisation in the social media/digital media sphere. Applicants must disclose their organisational affiliations and proprietary structure and be free of influence or control by political parties or movements.

● Ethics. Applicants must comply with the applicable rules of ethics in their area of expertise.

Information on the selection procedure and assessment committees can be found here.

Rules and procedures to access data of online platforms

The EDMO Governance Body is tasked, among others, to:(i) negotiate, in articulation with the European Commission, access to relevant data from online platforms;(ii) define rules and procedures to ensure that access to public and non-public data of online platforms will be organised in such a way as to guarantee the respect of national and European laws for privacy and data protection; (iii) design, in accordance with data providers, a process to define relevant datasets that data providers should make available to the research community, based on identified research needs.

EDMO has started its dialogue with online platforms and has developed two new initiatives to improve access for researchers to data held by digital platforms. One is aimed at building confidence around platforms sharing more data with EU researchers over the long term, while the other is aimed at supporting EU researchers in accessing the data that platforms make available today.

Initiative 1 - running a process to develop a Code of Conduct under Article 40 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for researchers' access to platform data.

There is a need to work through GDPR-specific requirements in detail to give all parties the confidence that they are correctly managing their obligations in respect of research data. The drafters of the GDPR envisaged these kinds of scenarios and created a provision in Article 40 for the development of sectoral Codes of Conduct. EDMO is proposing the establishment of a working group to develop a Code of Conduct for 'Access to Data Held by Digital Platforms for the Purposes of Social Scientific Research.' The goal of this group is to produce a legally robust Code of Conduct that companies and researchers can use, but it can also make an important contribution by producing interim output and guidance even before a final version of a code has been agreed. A call for comments on an Article 40 GDPR Working Group on Access to Data Held by Digital Platforms for the Purposes of Social Scientific Research was opened on the EDMO website in November-December 2020 (link). EDMO received a large number of comments. As a follow-up, a Working Group comprising 10-15 members from academia, industry, civil society, and relevant legal fields, with its chair selected by EDMO's Advisory Board is being established and fundraising activities among foundations have started.

Initiative 2 - Access to Currently Available Platform Data for Research

One of EDMO's objectives is to help members of its community access data for research purposes, including data that is under the control of digital platforms. In the absence of regulatory requirements imposing a common approach, digital platforms have been free to develop their own policies and technical mechanisms for researchers' access to the data they hold. Where researchers gain access, this generally happens through direct approaches to and engagement with the platforms. Platforms may offer scaled access methods that are largely self-serving, e.g., via an API under a standard set of terms and conditions, or they may make specific datasets available and enter into customised agreements with researchers for the use of these datasets. EDMO's second initiative is aimed at supporting researchers when they navigate this landscape.

EDMO

Task 3

1. Executive Summary

Task 3 is coordinated by Pagella Politica (PP) and implemented in collaboration with Athens Technology Center (ATC) and its subcontractor Deutsche Welle (DW). The task consists of supporting and coordinating independent fact-checking activities in Europe, including (a) the mapping of fact-checking activities in Europe, (b) the creation of searchable directories aggregating fact-checks and media literacy material from external repositories and (c) the fostering of joint fact-checking activities and exchange of best practices.

2. Activities

2.1 Cooperative fact-checking content

EDMO will soon start its onboarding procedures to welcome European fact-checkers as users of its project infrastructure. As the coordinator of fact-checking activities in EDMO, once fact-checkers start to make use of the service, Pagella Politica will coordinate their efforts to carry out joint and collaborative investigations.

The preparatory work towards this objective has consisted in the building of a digital community of fact-checkers to join EDMO and actively take part in collaborative investigative work. More particularly, several preliminary steps have been taken towards the creation of such a community. These include:

- 'EDMO - a conversation with fact-checkers', an event held on 9 October 2020 to present the EU's actions on disinformation and fact-checking, as well as to introduce the European Digital Media Observatory to the international fact-checking community. The event garnered widespread participation from members of the European community of disinformation stakeholders in general, as well from the fact-checking community in particular. Overall, 45 organisations took part, of which 36 were fact-checking organisations, 22 of which are European.
- the presentation of EDMO to members of the previously EC-funded project SOMA (Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis) at several SOMA events. The SOMA project (2018-2021) has built a community of 100 disinformation stakeholders - several of which are fact-checkers - that have worked together and, coordinated by Pagella Politica, produced 20 collaborative investigative analyses during the project's lifetime. As the project has now reached its end, promotion of EDMO among its

members represents an important occasion for deepening the work undertaken by SOMA to reach a larger community of stakeholders.

- the launch of an EDMO Survey for fact-checkers on Covid-19 vaccines and disinformation in January 2021 (see above).
- The finalisation of admission criteria, form and process for fact-checkers' onboarding to the Online Secure Platform. Related materials include: (a) a short text presenting the aims of the platform and a call to action for fact-checkers to be published on EDMO's website; (b) the admission form to be filled in by applicants; (c) the workflow to be put in place by the consortium in order to assess applications. Given the importance of the process and the need to elaborate sound, transparent, rigorous and inclusive criteria, rules and procedures for onboarding have been determined through a constant dialogue among EDMO partners and the Advisory and the Executive Boards (see above).

The start of the EDMO onboarding campaign is imminent; informal conversations among Pagella Politica and fellow fact-checking organisations have already been taking place already and several of them appear to be interested in joining EDMO.

2.2 Organisation of 2 conferences/seminars between European fact-checkers and stakeholders

Two conferences/seminars have been organised with the purpose of bringing together the European fact-checking community and other relevant stakeholders. One conference focused on social media regulations, the other revolved around national debunking studies and media literacy.

The first conference will take place, as a side session, on 8 June in the context of the EDMO week (7-11 June).

Title: 'Stronger together: Why cooperation among fact-checkers is essential'.

Concept note: Why do we need cooperation among fact-checkers? First, because we can better understand and address cross-national disinformation if fact-checkers work together in international networks. Secondly because politicians often exploit the lack of knowledge in their national audiences about what is happening in other countries. Moreover, because an

ecosystem of small fact-checking organisations has all the means necessary to fight the powerful common enemy of disinformation, especially if state-driven or spread by big media outlets.

During this event all these aspects and more will be discussed by journalists and fact-checkers in a practical approach, giving examples of international and bilateral cooperation. From the previous experience of the SOMA project to the future possibilities of EDMO, from the intense but yet non-organised cooperation among European fact-checkers today to an easier and more structured future, the entire discussion is aimed to offer ideas and propose solutions for the next years of cooperative fact-checking in the EU.

Speakers: Giovanni Zagni, Tommaso Canetta, Carlo Canepa and Laura Loguercio (Pagella Politica/EDMO); Clara Jiménez Cruz (Maldita); Alice Echtermann (Correctiv); Thanos Sitistas (Ellinika Hoaxes); Eva Wackenreuther (Fakt ist Fakt/AFP).

Tommaso Canetta (Pagella Politica/EDMO) will introduce the panel, and Laura Loguercio (Pagella Politica/EDMO) will briefly relate three examples of collaborative investigations under the SOMA project. A panel discussion among representatives of four European fact-checking organisations will then start, moderated by Carlo Canepa (Pagella Politica/EDMO). Clara Jiménez Cruz, (Maldita), Alice Echtermann (Correctiv), Thanos Sitistas (Ellinika Hoaxes) and Eva Wackenreuther (Fakt ist Fakt/AFP) will illustrate cases in which their respective organisations cooperated with other fact-checking organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting the challenges, opportunities and achievements brought about by the collaboration. The floor will then be opened to the public for discussion which will be wrapped up by Giovanni Zagni, director of Pagella Politica/Facta and coordinator of the fact-checking activities of EDMO.

2.3 Mapping fact-checking activities in Europe

Europe's investigative journalists and open source intelligence (OSINT) experts work tirelessly to dissect false claims or manipulated photos and videos (which are omnipresent on the web these days – and quite dangerous). These people provide crucial groundwork for a functioning democratic media landscape, and their job would benefit from more recognition, exposure, and networking. In the framework of this task, a comprehensive documentation of fact-checking organisations/initiatives/projects in the European Union and the United Kingdom was created by Deutsche Welle (DW) in the form of an interactive 'map' on the EDMO website.

After consultations with the EDMO project partners and coordinators, DW established what the 'map' should look like. It was decided to eventually research and build:

- an actual **map** (responsive, interactive, zoomable, shareable) that serves as an eyecatcher and offers an overview of the EDMO site
- a **table** (responsive, searchable, sortable, shareable) that provides extended information on projects/organisations
- a collection of **text** boxes (responsive, searchable, shareable) that provide short portraits of the mapped activities
- **optional visualisations** (responsive, shareable) that provide further insights (e.g., a timeline documenting the launch of fact-checking organisations in the EU)

In order to achieve our goal, the following (tried and tested) formats and web tools were used:

- collaborative, 'living' **spreadsheets** (in our case: Google sheets) that can be turned into .CSV files;
- a web-based **data visualisation tool** (in our case: Datawrapper) that can convert long rows of names and numbers and locations into more accessible, compelling forms of information;
- **embeddable** and **shareable** maps and charts, i.e.: data/data visualisations that can be swiftly published on the EDMO website (or elsewhere) via code snippets and are easily shareable on social media channels (like Twitter or LinkedIn).

To come up with the information/data needed, an **extensive internet research** was carried-out. This has so far included:

- using all sorts of search engines (and search parameters from the open web);
- diving into several important social media platforms (particularly Facebook and LinkedIn);
- designing/dispatching a comprehensive online-questionnaire (sent out to fact-checking organisations to gather information directly);
- communicating with a large number of stakeholders, primarily via email (long-term correspondence).

The first iteration of the 'map' was released in March 2021 on the EDMO website and can be accessed here. It includes a comprehensive map and a comprehensive table.

The implementation process also included some dissemination work. For instance, we have been talking about the map and how we are building it on social media. There is also a public email address (mapping@edmo.eu) that stakeholders interested in our work can use to provide suggestions and/or data for our project

In the coming months, the most important task will be, first of all, to keep the EDMO map live, spread the word about it, add relevant organisations, and fill the gaps in the table as soon as more information becomes available. Secondly, we aim to extend the map by adding useful additional data visualisations and short portraits of fact-checking initiatives (editorial section). Thirdly, there are rough plans to try and recycle some parts of the map and/or gain more insights from it externally, e.g. in a designated data journalism piece.

The EDMO mapping project has had a visible positive impact so far:

- Even before publication of the first map, a number of individuals and organisations have been in touch to request that they be included.
- After the publication, there has been nothing but positive feedback. Several thousand people have seen it on social media, dozens have shared it. Commenters have called the map 'useful' and 'relevant'.
- Fact checkers keep writing to the EDMO mapping address to provide information about their activities.
- The map – which has already seen minor updates and bug fixes – seems to have become evergreen content on social media. For instance, on International Fact Checking Day (April 2nd 2021) the EDMO Twitter account shared it again, generating a solid 20 retweets and 30 likes.
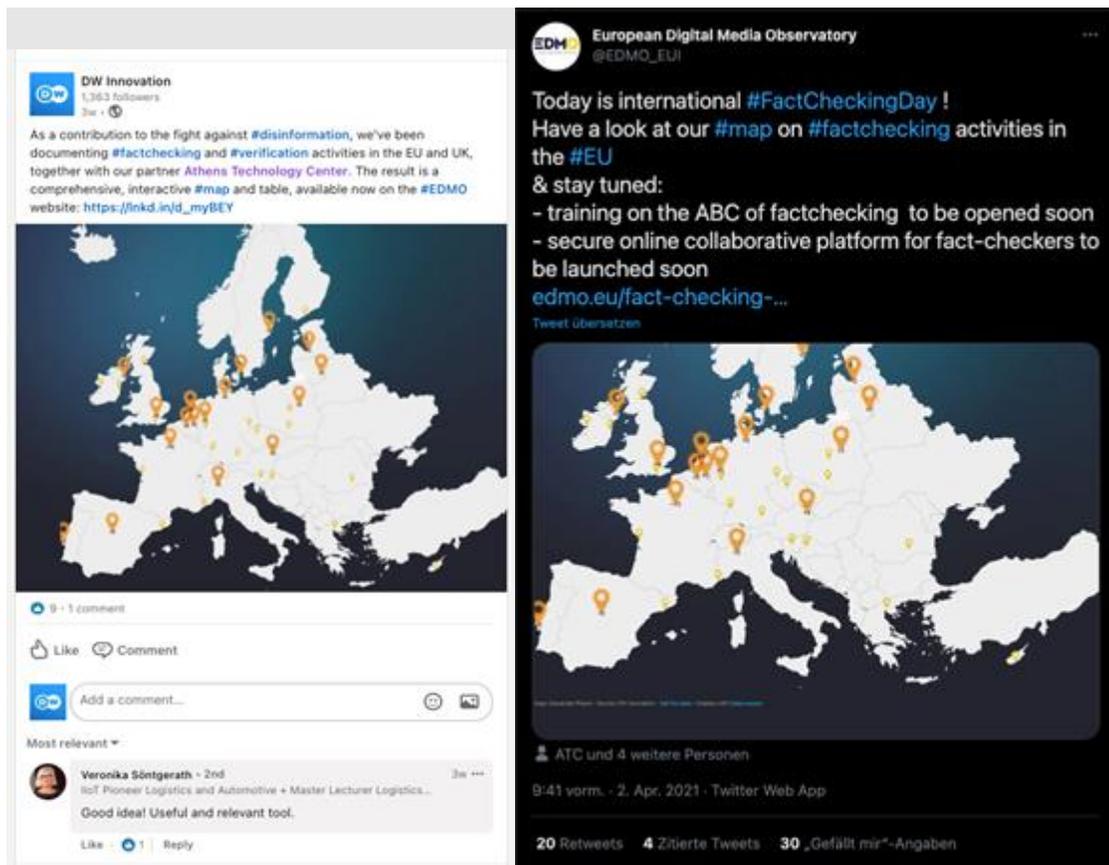
2.4 Connecting external repositories of relevant online fact-checks and media literacy material

In the framework of this activity, ATC will provide search capabilities aggregating content from external repositories of relevant online fact-checks and media literacy material. In order to create such directories, ATC, with the help of Deutsche Welle, will carry out an extensive examination of existing material to be included in the directories and constantly keep the directories up-to-date. The directory of fact-checks will be accessible through EDMO's platform, while the directory of media literacy material will be accessible through EDMO's web portal.

During the first 10 months of EDMO, ATC has extended the already available functionality inside Truly Media. A first set of fact-checking sources has been selected and content from those sources has been aggregated and presented on the platform. The search tool allows users to enter a keyword and explore fact-checks from a variety of sources inside the platform. The user can see the title, a short preview of each fact-check, the source of the fact-check, and the date of publication. By clicking on each fact-check the user is then directed to the website where each fact-check is published. The eTranslate CEF Building Block has been integrated into the repository allowing translation from and to the official European languages.

The repository of fact-checks is a dynamic repository that retrieves fact-checking content from different sources based on the user's search terms. Due to Intellectual Property considerations, we ingest content from fact-checking sources that provide an RSS feed; while ATC does not index the complete fact-check, as mentioned above, the user can see the title, a short preview of each fact-check, the source of the fact-check, the date of publication and the URL). This has some effect in terms of usability. It means that the repository of fact-checks contains no static content and, as such, the user cannot browse through the contents of the repository in general without entering a search term to retrieve relevant results. The content is, in other words, dynamic and depends on the specific search terms a user enters.

Most of the sources are International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) signatories, while we also aggregate content from sources that deal with hoaxes and rumours. More weight has been given in indexing European sources, but sources from non-EU countries are also included, as misinformation is a global phenomenon crossing national borders. Finally, most of the sources offer content in English, but content in other languages (such as French, Hindi, Greek) is also available. The repository of fact-checks will allow EDMO platform users to easily and quickly search for and identify previously fact-checked claims. Since often the same false claims circulate in different countries, it is a common phenomenon for a false claim that has been debunked in the past to circulate again in a different country or context. Access to such a repository of fact-checks will speed up the fact-checking process and raise awareness about misinformation attempts and fact-checking efforts in other countries.

Regarding the media literacy repository that will be available through EDMO's website, ATC is working with EUI to collect relevant material and resources on media literacy and make them available through a searchable repository on EDMO's web portal. The sources of both repositories will continue to be enhanced throughout the course of EDMO. Regarding the repository of fact-checks, for sources that do not provide RSS feeds, ATC needs to examine alternative IPR compliant ways of indexing their content. Both repositories will positively impact

and strengthen anti-disinformation responses and efforts, as they provide the European community with access to a) a repository of fact-checks aggregating content from a wide variety of sources across Europe and worldwide and b) a repository with media literacy resources and material from different sources that media literacy professionals can re-use and draw inspiration from to enhance their own resources.

- **EDMO Media Literacy activities**

EDMO hopes to use its position as a platform bringing together a multidisciplinary community to encourage closer and more effective collaboration between the various national, civil society and industry initiatives that tackle media literacy across Europe.

As it has become clear during several meetings of the EDMO Media Literacy Advisory Group, media literacy in Europe is a complex, multi-faceted field involving a wide variety of stakeholders. Therefore, to ensure that EDMO makes a valuable contribution to the state of media literacy in Europe, we are conducting a mapping and analysis exercise to thoroughly investigate existing European media literacy policies and initiatives and to provide a roadmap for EDMO's activities in the field. This roadmap report will seek to clarify the problems that Europe faces in terms of media literacy in relation to combatting disinformation, map what has been done so far, ascertain which policies and initiatives are working and which are not and identify any particular areas of concern. This will allow us to understand the best ways to complement and connect existing initiatives in this area, and to establish the best way to have impact, as well as how to measure this.

EDMO will then build a repository of media literacy initiatives and materials, using criteria developed during the research process. This repository could include national policies, civil society initiatives, and projects from tech companies and the news industry. The research also will be used to identify use cases for the repository as a resource, what the best mode of delivery is and how to assess its effectiveness. Examples of potential use cases for a repository of media literacy projects include:

- Providing a showcase to offer inspiration to media practitioners
- Allowing policy makers to identify gaps in media literacy provision
- Informing educators and citizens who do not know where to find this information (EDMO national/multinational hubs could provide a 'bridge' between EDMO and the public)
- Meeting the needs of the research community in this area
- Connecting different existing initiatives to build a community of media literacy practitioners

To make this an inclusive process, we are conducting interviews and focus groups with experts and collaborating with other key players throughout the process. Once the report is complete we will hold a stakeholder workshop to discuss and invite feedback.

We have already participated in a meeting of the Media Literacy Expert Group for the European Commission and will present EDMO more in depth during the group's next meeting. We have joined EPRA's new Media Literacy Taskforce. On top of offering an overview of the field and ideas regarding the most effective role that EDMO can play, these groups also provide a network of contacts across the continent and raise EDMO's visibility.

Task 4

1. Executive Summary

Task 4, the support and coordination of academic research activities on disinformation in Europe, is carried out by the research team at DATALAB - Center for Digital Social Research, Aarhus University (Denmark). This task aims to provide an overview of relevant literature on disinformation and important institutions and organisations, enhance access to such research, and facilitate greater interdisciplinary cooperation between researchers studying disinformation. These goals manifest themselves in multiple activities related to online disinformation. The first part of the task is a comprehensive mapping of European academic activities and publications studying disinformation from the perspective of multiple disciplines. From this mapping, together with the network DATALAB has within the field of disinformation, the most relevant academic institutions and organisations within Europe will be identified and in turn engaged with in the task (List of relevant academic institutions and organisations). The purpose here is to make these institutions and organisations proxies in promoting activities of the DSI (Digital Single Infrastructure) and coordinating regional and national projects. The third and fourth element of the task is the establishment of two repositories. The first repository contains relevant scientific articles studying disinformation at scale, while the second repository contains relevant policy papers and other relevant content. These repositories are established based on the initial literature search (IV.D.A) but will be expanded throughout the project by 1) repeating the search to include the newest research within the field, 2) engaging with relevant institutions and organisations studying disinformation (identified in the above-mentioned list) and 3) collaborating with the national and multinational hubs established as part of the second phase of the EDMO-project to include non-English literature. These activities will result in the two final deliverables: the final repositories of 1) relevant scientific articles and 2) relevant policy papers and other content.

2. Activities

2.1 Mapping of relevant academic activities in the EU

In the first activity, we identify European academic activities that study disinformation at scale, intending to collect information on where and within which academic fields the research is done.

The mapping of relevant academic activities involves an extensive and critical literature review. We used a search engine giving access to 10.113 collections including Scopus and Web of Science wherefrom we identified English-language, academic publications from 2015 and onwards, focusing on online disinformation in the EU and its Member States. The keywords used to extract these information contained 1) words related to disinformation and 2) country names of current or former members. The period from 2015 onwards covers important political events related to the spread of misinformation such as the Ukraine crisis, the Brexit campaign, and the Donald Trump 2016 presidential campaign. It is also related to the establishment of the IFCN at the Poynter Institute as the first international collaboration between fact-checking organisations in 2015, marking an important event in the fight against disinformation. To narrow the search, we excluded: editorials, commentaries, non-academic publications, papers that did not contain both keywords related to disinformation and EU Member States and publications that were not to scale, such as smaller survey studies and lab studies.

The search yielded 2,021 articles that are, at present, being categorised based on author affiliation, base (which university), area of interest, and field of research. Preliminary results show that a variety of countries are represented in the resulting articles including a broad range of countries and researchers located in Europe. Additionally, multiple research fields are identified, resulting in a collection of academic publications that study disinformation from different disciplinary viewpoints. The research fields represented are, for example, Computer Science, Social and Behavioural Sciences, Cognitive and Evolutionary Psychology, Communication and Media Studies, Economy, Health Care Studies and Information Science. Of these, Computer Science is the most frequently occurring research field. With the extensive literature review as our strategy, we have achieved a comprehensive, critical, and accurate overview of the current state of academic research on the subject of disinformation that can iteratively be updated and expanded

The literature review is both the first and most foundational activity in Task 4. What is first needed to complete the activity involves finishing the manual coding of author affiliation, base, area of interest, and field of research. The results will be published and will build the base for available repositories of research and public articles. As work proceeds, engagement with researchers in the network will add to the repositories. And, as academic work studying disinformation is also continually being published at a fast pace the literature repositories will be updated throughout the project and will be expanded constantly. Currently, the literature included in the literature search is exclusively in English. However, within the second phase of EDMO, national and multinational hubs of fact-checkers and researchers will be established,

which can help expand the literature search to include non-English literature, e.g., by translating keywords used in the literature review.

The thorough investigation of relevant literature has established an overview of who is involved in academic activities concerning disinformation as well as where such research is made. This will hopefully be a factor in furthering interdisciplinary collaborations between researchers studying disinformation, something that has been highlighted as an important priority in reducing the spread of disinformation (Walter, Sørensen, Bechmann, 2020, p. 30 f.). The work done within this activity contributes to the objective of EDMO in creating and supporting a multidisciplinary community. Together with the remaining activities of Task 4 and the other tasks in EDMO, it can further deepen our understanding of disinformation and help in the search for a solution to the problem.

Task 5

1. Executive Summary

The aim of EDMO's Task 5 is to support policy activities in order to tackle the disinformation phenomenon, including the monitoring of the implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation by the relevant public authorities. The task is led by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) at the European University Institute. The main objectives of the task are: (i) supporting policy activities to tackle the disinformation phenomenon, including providing key elements for continuous monitoring and independent assessment of policies implemented by Signatories to limit the impact of online disinformation; (ii) coordinating with national public authorities in charge of monitoring the Signatories' policies to limit the impact of disinformation, including the monitoring of the implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation. In particular, the above outlined objectives require cooperation with established EU observatories to report on relevant trends in the online media ecosystem; support to public authorities (including ERGA, the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services) to collaborate on monitoring the impact of the Code; and the provision of recommendations to policymakers on national and EU levels regarding potential improvements to a broad regulatory framework.In the first 10 months of its activities, EDMO Task 5 has established contact with relevant observatories and organisations (including ERGA), provided a periodically updated description of EDMO's efforts to support and coordinate policy activities, prepared a report that focused on the description and analysis of some relevant emerging research topics (analysing the concept of 'trustworthiness' in the context of the Code of Practice on Disinformation) and another preliminary report on the standards for platforms' reporting on the Code (with a focus on Key Performance Indicators – KPIs).

Activities

2.1   Contact with relevant observatories and ERGA

Following the launch of EDMO, the CMPF has established contact with relevant stakeholders and ERGA in order to strengthen cooperation and to successfully report on relevant trends in the online media ecosystem. The activity included two online workshops: i) informal (21 September 2020) with a representative of ERGA (Lubos Kuklis), a representative of civil society (Matthias Spielkamp, AlgorithmWatch), and a representative of academia (prof. Krisztina Rozgonyi, University of Vienna);

ii) multistakeholder (28 October 2020) with representatives of public authorities, online platforms (signatories of the Code), civil society, academia, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and journalistic organisations. These events have conveyed the presentation of the work, structure and aim of EDMO's Task 5 (Policy) to interested stakeholders; made available knowledge and experience exchange with other organisations involved in the monitoring of the Code's implementation; as well as clarified the needs, expectations and usability of the methodology that EDMO aims to develop for the assessment of the Code. For the future, the CMPF plans to continue approaching observatories that have not yet been contacted by the team, thereby strengthening its network of partners. The attempts so far have contributed to the creation of a robust network of stakeholders; and they have allowed the CMPF to increase the knowledge of EDMO (and especially Task 5) activities in the community of possible stakeholders, thereby enabling the Observatory to support a wide range of public authorities in the monitoring of the implementation of the Code.

2.2 Description and analysis of relevant emerging research topics

Task 5 of EDMO aims at following relevant national and international trends around the online disinformation phenomenon and reporting them for relevant stakeholders and the policy community in order to further potential improvements to a broad regulatory framework. As part of this effort, the CMPF is working on a paper on the definitions of 'trustworthiness', which includes an overview of potential indicators to determine the trustworthiness of online content sources and recommendations for the utilisation of these indicators. The CMPF has been carrying out this activity from the very beginning of the implementation of the EDMO project as it is strongly related to other activities of Task 5. The research has focused on (i) clarifying the definitions and terminology used to describe (and operationalise) certain phenomena referred to in the Code of Practice and, in general, relevant to policy making in the field; (ii) extracting the standards promoted by different interventions on disinformation, ranging from hard law to soft-law and self-regulation, and on Member State and EU level; (iii) mapping the emerging disinformation challenges related to different platform services, media systems, demographics, etc. To disseminate information on relevant research topics, we organised an event in cooperation with the London School of Economics (LSE) on 28 January 2021, in order to foster a policy debate and to prompt a discussion around possible criteria to define public interest and trustworthy providers, focused on processes of news and content creation rather than on quality ranking for single pieces of content. The speakers of the event were Damian Tambini and Eleonora Mazzoli of LSE, as well as Elda Brogi and Konrad Bleyer-Simon from the CMPF.

As the project progresses, a study on the European (ECtHR and CJEU's) case law on disinformation is being developed. As a matter of fact, the Preamble of the 2018 Code of Practice of Disinformation mentions such case law as part of the legal framework the Code should not contrast with. However, no comprehensive research on the disinformation case law of the European Courts has been developed so far in the literature. Furthermore, another ongoing project developed by CMPF discusses a theoretical and systematic framework for the analysis of disinformation and the assessment of the CoP, considering the normative standards and the conceptualizations of democracy that should be kept in mind when assessing the CoP's impact on disinformation, and the disinformation phenomenon as a whole.

2.3 Definition of the standards for platforms' reporting on the CoP

In order to provide key elements for continuous monitoring and independent assessment of policies implemented by online platform in line with the Code of Practice, an internal working paper was produced that looks at the definitions guiding the pillars of the Code of Practice on Disinformation. This working paper points out deficiencies in definitions and includes recommendations on the use and design of KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) to measure the implementation of the Code. A first preliminary list of proposals for KPIs to measure platforms' compliance and the Code's impact on the media environment in EU Member States was also prepared. The CMPF continues its research on definitions and works on refining KPIs, also considering the policy developments and the publication by the European Commission of the Guidance on Strengthening the Code of Practice on Disinformation. CMPF is working on assessing the Signatories' public reports to identify the strengths and shortcomings in such reporting activity and elaborate indicators accordingly. During the EDMO week, CMPF will organise a side event, called "Defining a methodology to assess the Code of Practice: challenges and proposals". The experts that contributed to the discussion were Eleonora Mazzoli (LSE), Paolo Cesarini (Teneo and formerly European Commission), Olaf Steenfadt (Reporters Without Borders), Francesco Sciacchitano (AGCOM, Italian Communications Regulatory Authority).

2.4 Collection and review of the data on the CoP in cooperation with ERGA

Considering the shifting focus of Task 5 from the analysis and assessment of the Code of Practice to the establishment of a permanent forum to find a standardised methodology for its assessment, the CMPF has devoted efforts to sharing ideas (also on potential KPIs) and to establishing a cooperation with ERGA. The contacts are with the subgroup on Media Plurality - Disinformation within ERGA.

Conclusion

EDMO was launched in June 2020 as an independent observatory that brings together fact-checkers, media literacy experts, and academic researchers to understand and analyse disinformation, in collaboration with media organisations, online platforms and media literacy practitioners. EDMO aims to act as a multistakeholder platform to support the work of a multidisciplinary community with expertise in the field of online disinformation. As such, EDMO offers a body of facts, evidence and tools that gathers stakeholders and acts in the interest of society, with the aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of disinformation relevant actors, vectors, tools, methods, dissemination dynamics, targets, and impact on society.

During the first ten months since its establishment, EDMO has been working on setting up such tools and activities, including its governance structure and its main public communication channels. While much of the groundwork to EDMO's role as a multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary platform has been laid during these first months, and some of the tools are already publicly available including the secure collaborative platform for fact-checkers and the first online repository, many more will continue to be rolled out over the next few months. Among its activities, EDMO will continue to organise workshops and conferences, deliver training initiatives, conduct policy analysis, create repositories with relevant materials such as fact-checked items, media literacy initiatives and scientific articles, offer collaborative tools for fact-checkers and researchers. EDMO will also continue in the work it has started towards facilitating the creation of a framework to access data of online platforms for research purposes, and in establishing itself as a reference point of facts, evidence and tools to tackle online disinformation in Europe.