

# III.c.D.B Report - international conference on social media regulations M25

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Final version

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## Executive summary

Task 3 “Support and coordination of fact-checking activities in Europe”, which is coordinated by Pagella Politica, foresees the organisation of two international conferences/seminars to bring together European fact-checkers and other relevant stakeholders. The second of these seminars took place on April 29, 2022 in Milan. This report provides a brief description of the agenda, the participants and the effect on the community.

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# 1. Introduction

Task 3 “Support and coordination of fact-checking activities in Europe” is coordinated by Pagella Politica and implemented in collaboration with Athens Technology Center (ATC) and its subcontractor Deutsche Welle (DW). The task objective is to facilitate independent and collaborative fact-checking activities among the members of the EDMO fact-checking community. It is structured into three subtasks: (a) mapping of fact-checking activities in Europe, (b) creation of searchable directories aggregating fact-checks and media literacy material from external repositories, and (c) fostering of joint fact-checking activities and exchange of best practices. Subtask c), coordinated by Pagella Politica, foresees among other things the organisation of two international conferences/seminars to bring together European fact-checkers and other relevant stakeholders. This report gives an overview of the second conference that took place in Milan on April 29, 2022.

## 2. Concept Note and Agenda of the event

In order to give space to the different topics the fact-checking community is confronted with in its day-to-day activity, the second full-day conference held in Milan was titled *Fact-checking and European Answers to the Disinformation Crisis: Cooperation, Policy, Media literacy*. The conference was announced to the EDMO community under the following concept note and agenda:

*The EDMO’s fact-checking network was established in the summer of 2021 and in less than one year of activity proved its relevance in tackling disinformation at the European level through many different tools and activities – at the beginning mostly about the pandemic and now about the war in Ukraine. But the whole European fact-checking environment is undergoing a fast evolution, with a strong involvement in discussions about European policies with platforms and institutions, the birth and implementation of the EDMO national and regional hubs, and a number of activities carried out at central and national level about media literacy and political fact-checking. This event is the occasion to share what has been done until now, to foster an even stricter partnership among the different players of the fact-checking community and other interested parties, and to reflect about the next steps ahead.*

**Friday, 29 april 2022**  
**time 9.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. CET**  
**Venue: Swiss Chamber, Via Palestro 2-4, 20121 Milano (MI)**

## Agenda

Time	Duration	Subject	Speakers
09.30	10'	Welcome & Agenda	Giovanni Zagni, Pagella Politica
09.40	45'	Briefs and Investigations: Recent work from Covid-19 to the war in Ukraine	Tommaso Canetta, Pagella Politica
10.25	10'	Q&A	
10.35	15'	Coffee break	
10.50	45'	Disinformation in the voting booth: Lessons from around Europe	Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gustavo Sampaio, Poligrafo</li> <li>● Tania Roettger, Correctiv</li> <li>● Sami Acef, AFP</li> </ul> Moderator: Laura Loguercio
11.35	10'	Q&A	
11.45	45'	Online platforms regulations to halt the spread of disinformation	Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Elda Brogi, EUI</li> <li>● Carlos Hernández-Echevarría, Maldita.es</li> <li>● Alberto Rabbachin, Commissione Ue</li> </ul> Moderator: Paula Gori
12.30	10'	Q&A	
12.40	75'	Lunch break	

13.55	45'	<b>Fact-checking and Media literacy: Case studies</b>	<b>Speakers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gabriele Giampieri, Pagella Politica/Facta News</li> <li>● Sølve Kuraas Karlsen, Faktisk</li> <li>● Lorenzo Marini, Verificat</li> </ul> <b>Moderator: Camilla Vagnozzi</b>
14.40	10'	<b>Q&amp;A</b>	
14.50	15'	<b>Coffee break</b>	
15.05	40'	<b>EDMO National Hubs: Local activities, regulation at member states level and censorship issues</b>	<b>Speakers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Thomas Hedin (NORDIS)</li> <li>● Gianni Riotta (IDMO)</li> <li>● Kirsty Park (IRELAND HUB)</li> <li>● Julia Conemans (BENEDMO)</li> </ul> <b>Moderator: Lauri Tierala</b>
15.45	10'	<b>Q&amp;A</b>	
15.55	5'	<b>Quick break</b>	
16.00	40'	<b>EDMO National Hubs: Local activities, regulation at member states level and censorship issues</b>	<b>Speakers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clara González Tosat (IBERIFIER)</li> <li>● Adriana Dergam (CEDMO)</li> <li>● Jocelyne Zablitz (DE FACTO)</li> <li>● Trisha Meyer (BELUX)</li> </ul> <b>Moderator: Lisa Ginsborg</b>
16.40	10'	<b>Q&amp;A</b>	
16.50	10'	<b>Closing remarks</b>	<b>Giovanni Zagni, Pagella Politica</b>
17.00		<b>END</b>	

62 community members from all Europe participated in person in the event, of which twelve gave their input also as speakers. Additionally, four presentations were held from remote. For the in-person participants the expenses for travel and accommodation were covered by Pagella Politica. Before starting with the agenda points Giovanni Zagni, Director of Pagella Politica and Facta, gave a warm welcome and outlook of the event to the guests.



He sensibilized for ongoing challenges in the fact-checking world such as disinformation around political events, social media regulation and the importance of media literacy – all areas being tackled also by the EDMO community. After an overview of the different EDMO activities, presented by Tommaso Canetta, Deputy Director of Pagella Politica and coordinator of the fact-checking network, the rest of the event was organised in panels consisting of 4-5 speakers. A respective summary of the different sessions, lasting forty five minutes each, is reported in the next paragraphs.

## 2.1 Presentation of EDMO's collaborative publications

Tommaso Canetta, who in the frame of the project is coordinator of the fact-checking contents created by EDMO and its community, gave an overview of the project and its diverse activities.

At the time of the event, the network consisted of 26 organisations coming from 26 EU countries plus Norway. He reported that, since the beginning of June 2021 (M13 of the project), 10 fact-checking briefs were published, one every month. They inform about general trends and national cases of disinformation based on input from the community members regarding their respective countries. Not surprisingly, at the time of the conference the highest amount of false information was circulating around topics related to the pandemic; since March 2022, related to the war in Ukraine.

Due to the largely unforeseen war between Russia and Ukraine, and the related fast moving disinformation, a dedicated task force was created by EDMO. Tommaso Canetta explained that weekly briefs were being implemented to inform about the main disinformation trends around the war, as well as special investigations and recommendations on how to deal with that kind of information also taking into account the well-being and security of the fact-checkers and journalists involved (e.g. cybersecurity, secondary trauma).

It was noted that the regularly published collaborative investigations represent a very much appreciated and collaborative product of the EDMO network. By April 29, a total of 16 investigations had been published and elaborated by different teams of the EDMO community. This format went live in September 2021, M16 of the project. As a lesson learned to counter disinformation, Tommaso gave insights discovered in collaboration with the network of exemplary situations in Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal and Ireland: *“An educated and informed population that trusts the authorities, a political class united in supporting the vaccine, and a mass media system that*



*provides correct information and does not give space to no-vax, are key factors for having a high percentage of people vaccinated. Although disinformation exists in countries with these characteristics, perhaps also reaching considerable volumes, it remains confined to the small spaces of the echo chambers of social media, without being able to reach and convince the general public.”* He also pointed out, as a collaborative finding of the preceding weeks, that while the medium remained the same, there was a quick shift from the spread of pandemic-related false news to disinformation around the war. Consequently also the recipients of misleading information appear to remain the same.



After a lively Q&A session and a coffee break the conference continued with its first panel.

## 2.2 Disinformation in the voting booth

The panel titled *Disinformation in the voting booth: Lessons from around Europe* was moderated by Laura Loguercio, a staff member and fact-checker from Pagella Politica.

As speakers, Tania Roettger from Correctiv (Germany), Gustavo Sampaio from Polígrafo (Portugal) and Sami Acef from AFP (France) contributed.

In this debate, the experts shared experiences which their fact-checking organisation encountered during election periods in their respective countries. Tania Roettger from Germany elaborated on recent elections in 2021, during which disinformation about two of the main candidates was spread. A timeline presented to the audience showed how one competitor took over in the polls every time after false news related to the other candidate circulated. Correctiv confirmed that social media accounts “were set up specifically to distribute memes and fakes against a certain party”.

Gustavo Sampaio from Polígrafo shared his experience regarding recent elections in Portugal. Ami Sacef representing AFP from France reported about the ongoing election campaign for the elections in 2022. To ensure its readers the access to true and verified information AFP covered claims of all major parties and candidates taking into consideration “TV and radio interviews; Candidates presence on social media as well as suggestions from readers.” The ever present challenge presenting itself to fact-checkers of political claims, about how to keep a fair balance in their published articles, was mentioned and discussed during the panel.



After a short Q&A the discussion was concluded and the event continued to the next panel, which had its focus on the regulation of social media.

## 2.3 Online platform regulations

The panel titled *Online platform regulations to halt the spread of disinformation* was moderated by Paula Gori, Secretary General of EUI (Italy). Those who took part as speakers were Elda Brogi from EUI (Italy), Carlos Hernández-Echevarría from Maldita (Spain) and Alberto Rabbachin from the European Commission (Belgium), who joined remotely.



The main discussion during this debate evolved around the Code of Practice on Disinformation, which was signed by the major tech and social media companies between 2018 and 2020. The related Digital Service Act also played an important role during the panel, since a final political agreement was reached only one week before the event. These efforts by the European Commission and the EDMO community itself show the strong commitment and motivation for a change regarding the important role social media platforms and tech companies are playing in the spread

of disinformation. The importance of a balance between freedom of expression and the right of the public to truthful information was underlined. The awareness of the risk of exponentially undermining the truth by giving an unfiltered guarantee for the freedom of expression led to the urgency of these European legislative initiatives, which seem to be accepted by the most powerful online platforms. The panel concluded that social media and tech companies need to take responsibility for their major impact, even if unintentional, on the spread of disinformation. Due to the change of media consumption in our times the freedom of speech goes together with a duty for responsibility, as expressed by Carlos Hernández-Echevarría. The speakers agreed that, among other things, the collaboration of fact-checking organisations with online platforms and regulating institutions is key for finding solutions to turn the Code of Practice and Digital Service Act into a policy ensuring consumer safe usage and exposure to social media websites.

## 2.4 Fact-Checking and Media Literacy

The panel titled *Fact-checking and Media literacy: Case studies* was moderated by Camilla Vagnozzi, Managing editor of the Italian debunking project Facta.news (a sister project of Pagella Politica). Gabriele Giampieri for Pagella Politica (Italy), Lorenzo Marini from Verificat (Spain) and Sølve Kuraas Karlsen from Faktisk (Norway) took part as speakers.

This panel showed the importance and impact of media literacy nowadays in order to teach different groups of society how to safely consume different media outlets minimizing the risk of falling for false news and disinformation of any kind. Faktisk, a valued member of the EDMO network, presented its widespread activities of media literacy in Norway. Lorenzo Marini talked about the involvement of Verificat in the Media Literacy project GenZ which “is an international project co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme aimed at fostering the reflective discovery and assessment of information, the understanding of information, the critical evaluation of sources”. Another Erasmus+ media literacy project run by fact-checkers and universities is SPOTTED, presented by Gabriele Giampieri. The outcome of the project provides “Digital information literacy tools for European School Teachers” to create awareness of disinformation in the younger generation and to fight it already in an early stage. This panel showed that bringing knowledge and tools of media literacy in the regular curriculum of European schools is just one of the main objectives of the fact-checking community. The ever-changing dynamics regarding media consumption makes the need for new competences in digital literacy necessary stronger. Due to some time

constraints, the Q&A session of this panel had to be skipped in order to avoid further delays.

## 2.5 EDMO national hubs

Two panels representing the national EDMO hubs took place in the afternoon and were moderated by Lauri Tierala (EUI) and Elena Maggi (EUI). As speakers in the first panel contributed Thomas Hedin (NORDIS), Gianni Riotta (IDMO), Kirsty Park (IRELAND HUB) and Julia Conemans (BENEDMO). The second panel presented as speaker Clara González Tosat (IBERIFIER), Adriana Dergam (CEDMO), Jocelyne Zablitz (DE FACTO) and Trisha Meyer (BELUX) giving insights regarding the activities on national level. Under the title *EDMO National Hubs: Local activities, regulation at member states level and censorship issues*, the respective national consortia and their collaboration with EDMO were presented.

Gianni Riotta (Executive Vice Chairman of the Council for the United States and Italy; Founder and director of Luiss University Data Lab; Director of the School of Journalism of Luiss University), who joined in remotely, started the first panel by presenting current activities of IDMO the Italian national hub of EDMO, consisting of eight partners based in Italy. The Nordic national hub representing eight partners based in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland was represented by Thomas Hedin, the editor-in-chief of TjekDet. It was shown that, among other things, the Nordic hub is very much involved in disinformation regarding the war due to their regional proximity. Kirsty Park, a Researcher at the DCU Institute of Future Media, gave insights into the engagement of the Ireland hub consisting of four partners, supporting “the implementation of the European Digital Media Observatory’s Core Service Platform and to develop a multidisciplinary community of Irish stakeholders committed to countering disinformation.” Julia Coneman, Program Manager for BENEDMO at The Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision, presented the Dutch and Belgian consortium, consisting of nine fact-checking and media partners collaborating against disinformation regarding elections, the war and others. All four partners of this panel did not report about governmental regulation or censorship issues in their respective countries.

The second panel, presenting the remaining different national EDMO hubs, was the last one for the day and included the consortium IBERIFIER, CEDMO, DE FACTO and BELUX. Clara Gonzalez Tosat, a researcher Universidad de Navarra, who unfortunately was not able to join in person at the last minute, represented the IBERIFIER hub. The partnership consists of three Spanish and one Portuguese organisation who are working together against misinformation – which is especially in Spain a very big

concern according to what the population itself states in opinion polls. The consortium of the eight CEDMO partners based in Eastern Europe was presented by its project manager Adriana Dergam, who pointed out the “Effectiveness of both pre-emptive (‘prebunking’) and reactive (‘debunking’) interventions to reduce the effects of misinformation.”

The four partners of the French national hub DE FACTO were represented by Jocelyne Zablit, Coordinator for AFP fact-checking projects in Europe. The partnership of researchers, fact-checkers and educators, according to the speaker, is very active offering fact-checking, media literacy, tutorials and events “to help the public and researchers be better equipped to fight the spread of misinformation and disinformation.”



### 3. Conclusions

Giovanni Zagni concluded the event, which attracted more than 60 participants from all over Europe, summarising the different areas and topics which were discussed and demonstrating the wide field in which fact-checkers take active part to combat any kind of disinformation. A lot of different strings are being pulled to encourage and reach the population from different perspectives. This was also shown in the lively Q&A sessions and the networking moments like coffee and lunch breaks. However, it was also concluded that the fact-checking community needs to find a way to expand more towards the outside and to find new audiences, to be more visible and to gain increasing popularity, in order to avoid the risk that all the efforts done are reaching only a small part of the general public. Both events organised by Pagella Politica in the context of EDMO showed the common ambitions and objectives in the community to change the perspective of media consumption creating a safe environment for all the diverse audiences (in terms of age, media literacy, income, education etc.) exposed to disinformation. It can be safely concluded that these events boosted the creation of an enriched and better connected network of fact-checkers in Europe, who are increasingly able to collaborate more effectively towards their common goals. Those goals are especially important given the different crises we sadly experienced globally over the last few years. Therefore it is crucial to keep the network connected and active also in the future.