

ACT WELCOMES COMMISSION COMMUNICATION ON TACKLING ONLINE DISINFORMATION AS A STEP TOWARDS GREATER EDITORIAL RESPONSIBILITY ONLINE

BRUSSELS, 26 April 2018. The Association of Commercial Television in Europe (ACT) welcomes the Commission's Communication on tackling online disinformation. The Communication is a welcome first step towards addressing the major challenges disinformation raises and its root causes. Notably by addressing regulatory asymmetries between the fully regulated and editorially responsible broadcast environment and that of unregulated online environments.

The Commission recognises the crucial role of platforms and particularly social media play in this and has rightly placed them at the heart of the Communication. The volume and rapid spread of disinformation online has rightly been identified as a threat to democratic dialogue and process. Left unchecked, it leaves citizens, and particularly younger audiences exposed to online as a primary source of information, at risk of receiving and sometimes unwittingly conveying false or twisted narratives.

One simple principle: the public should expect and receive the same level of protection no matter what medium they access or are provided news from. This is the basis for preserving public trust in news.

As noted in the Communication, the Eurobarometer on fake news and online disinformation (March 2018) had the following to say about trust in media: *"Respondents perceive traditional media as the most trusted source of news: radio (70%), television (66%) and printed newspapers and news magazines (63%)."* They also concluded that the least trusted sources of news are video hosting websites (27%) and online social networks (26%).

Broadcast news is a trusted and reliable source of information because of the model Europe has developed. Europe needs to preserve this model and extend it to new environments. Fabricated news undermines real and responsible reporting. Reporting that rests on factually based assertions and seeks integrity by reflecting the various sides of an issue. This type of reporting helps the public to form opinions in a healthy and constructive matter. Disinformation conversely seeks to segregate, split, and splinter public opinion, ultimately leading to the destruction of opinion or anyone who would seek to genuinely inform it.

We are encouraged that European and national policy-makers are seeking greater measures to curb the significance and omnipresence of disinformation on social and video sharing networks. Commercial broadcasters will continue providing quality journalism, identification of fake news by investing in fact checking mechanisms, verification tools for authenticity of news content and most importantly for high quality. They will also continue investing in media literacy initiatives for users and training programmes for journalists which were also recognised by the Commission as a crucial element to reinforce the resilience of our societies against disinformation.

The Communication published today is the fruit of the EC High Level Expert Group report *"A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation"*. Many ACT members were involved in its elaboration. ACT member companies finance, produce, promote and distribute high quality news at regional, national and European level using the highest levels of editorial responsibility.

ACT Member, HLEG participant and **Mediaset representative Gina Nieri, Executive Board Member at Mediaset S.p.A. and Board Member at Mediaset España**, commented: *"I gladly welcome the EC's Communication "Tackling online disinformation": a pro-active approach which complements HLEG findings. The EC acknowledges the "need to rebalance the relation between media and online platforms" and calls for a "swift approval of the EU copyright reforms" – another fundamental pillar towards a fair and pro-competitive market in the delivery of AV content online. With the GDPR, the EU has set a global benchmark for the protection of privacy online; Europe is now ready to address the core of the "European safe harbor" in the 2000/31/EC Directive."*

Similarly, ACT Member, HLEG participant, and **Sky plc representative Sarah Whitehead, Head of Home News and Deputy Head of Newsgathering at Sky News**, commented: *"I welcome the Communication on online disinformation which begins to address the spread of fake news on social media. Fake news is eroding trust in our media and undermining public discourse – the EU and European governments need to find effective solutions to this serious problem. As one of Europe's largest media companies Sky was pleased to play our part in Commissioner Gabriel's High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and we look forward to working with her to continue this vital work."*

ACT Member, HLEG participant, and **RTL Group representative Sonja Schwetje, Editor-in-Chief of the German news channel n-tv**, commented: *"One of the key learnings of the past years has to be: don't leave the news to the algorithms of the social networks! Algorithms are very powerful to maximise 'user engagement' on digital platforms. However, this also includes promoting conspiracy theories, ever more extreme viewpoints and pure disinformation. We welcome that the European Commission is addressing these fundamental problems in the business models of the digital platforms. In order to fight all forms of online disinformation RTL Group invests strongly in professional journalism. Newsroom Guidelines, journalistic training and verification tools and know-how are essential to our daily work."*

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ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION OF COMMERCIAL TELEVISION IN EUROPE (ACT)

The ACT represents the interests of leading commercial broadcasters in Europe. The ACT member companies finance, produce, promote and distribute content and services benefiting millions of Europeans across all platforms. At ACT we believe that the healthy and sustainable commercial broadcasting sector has an important role to play in Europe's economy, society and cultures.



For further enquiries please consult our website www.acte.be and/or contact Masa Lampret, Communications and EU Affairs Manager, ACT – ml@acte.be.

You may also wish to consult our [response](#) to the European Commission's public consultation on online disinformation.