

# Self-Assessment Reports on EU Code of Practice on Disinformation

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## News

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In October 2018, the industry agreed on a self-regulatory EU Code of Practice to address the spread of online disinformation and fake news. The signatories recognised the objectives outlined in the Commission Communication “Tackling online disinformation – a European approach” of April 2018. This was the first worldwide “private-public partnership” to fight disinformation. The Code of Practice is also one of the main pillars of the EU’s Action Plan against the phenomenon of disinformation and fake news.

The Code has been signed by the leading IT companies Facebook, Google, Twitter, Mozilla, and Microsoft as well as seven European trade associations. They commit themselves to deploy policies and processes in relation to the scrutiny of ad placements, political advertising and issue-based advertising, integrity of services and the empowerment of consumers, and the research community. An annual account report from each company/association forms the basis for measuring and monitoring the Code’s effectiveness.

These annual self-assessment reports were published on 29 October 2019. In addition, the Commission published a summary and brief analysis of the reports.

The Commission acknowledges that the signatories have made comprehensive efforts to fulfil their commitments over the last 12 months. The Code led to higher transparency regarding the platform’s policies against disinformation and the ability to monitor structured dialogues. However, further serious steps by individual signatories and the community as a whole are still necessary.

The Commission observes that the reported actions taken by the platforms vary significantly in terms of scope and speed. In general, actions to empower consumers and the research community lag behind the original commitments (as evidenced prior to the European Parliament elections in May 2019). Furthermore, there are differences across the Member States as regards the deployment of the respective policies for the various commitments included in the Code.

Although cooperation between the platforms and stakeholders (e.g., fact-checkers, researchers, and civil organisations) improved, the provision of data and search tools is still episodic and arbitrary and does not respond to the demands of researchers for independent scrutiny. More efforts are also needed to establish sound cooperation with truly independent organisations.

The Commission observed that the platforms provided information on EU-specific metrics regarding the implementation of the Code; however, these metrics mainly focus on the number of accounts taken down or

ads rejected. They do not enable a qualitative *insight into the actual impact of the self-regulatory measures and mechanisms for independent scrutiny*.

Lastly, the Commission notes that other IT platforms and advertising companies/services operating in the EU have not joined the Code.

The self-assessment reports are the starting point for a comprehensive assessment of the Code's effectiveness, which will be carried out by the Commission itself. The assessment is expected for the first half of 2020. The Commission will additionally take the following into account:

- Input from the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Services (ERGA), as foreseen in the Action Plan against Disinformation.
- An evaluation from a third-party organisation selected by the signatories, as foreseen under the Code of Practice.
- An assessment from an independent consultant engaged by the Commission and expected in early 2020.
- A Commission report on the European Parliament elections.

On the basis of this comprehensive assessment, the Commission will decide whether the self-regulatory approach via the Code of Practice on disinformation is satisfactory or whether further regulatory measures should be taken.

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