

**European Democratic Students "Skills Training" 2021**  
**"FAKE NEWS, DISINFORMATION AND ITS PROPAGANDA IN OSCE PA"**  
**23 September 2021**

- As it is known, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly **bases its main activities on three dimensions**, enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 by the States participating in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which are 1) **political affairs and security**, 2) **economic affairs, science, technology and environment**, 3) **democracy, human rights and humanitarian questions** and the basic concept that outlines and animates the methods of approaching issues in a general perspective, which is the one of interacting in international area by **promoting the implementation of policies concerning Cooperation and Security in the States of the OSCE Region**.
- As to the issue of **fake news**, I think it is appropriate to focus on the concept of **Security**. In order to ensure information security, **Governments of OSCE States are encouraged to legislate in an inclusive manner, with the involvement of all actors in the information area**, addressing all information tools, including tv and radio broadcasting, print media, publications, and last but not least social networks.
- In order to fight **fake news** and its spread, for an international body of this magnitude (I want to remind you that it is composed of 57 states, from three different continents, and its activities affects over **a billion people**) **it is clear that the approach to this issue can only be transnational, respecting the prerogatives of each state, but continuously monitoring the different processes**.
- I say this because the topic of disinformation, which means the phenomenon of **Fake news, has no borders**, and has particular characteristics capable of producing harmful effects, in the social sphere, political-military, economic and environmental undermining the cooperation and so the security between the states themselves.
- The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has always been the promoter of recommendations and pays particular attention to the challenge of "fake

news", which cannot be considered as a new phenomenon on the rise in the area of security and cooperation. The exploitation of fake news as a strategic political tool for indefinite purposes, or for propaganda purposes, even controlled by the states, must be openly fought because it represents a serious danger to transnational political balances and to the affirmation of democracy and its fundamental values.

It is clear that the first question that the OSCE PA has therefore asked itself, in terms of cooperation and security, is how to protect ourselves from this phenomenon of Fake News, or how to fight it?

- The question is very serious and complex. In this regard, the OSCE PA has brought this issue to the foreground in all the 3 dimensions that I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, but with an evident implicit limit, that is the moral responsibility and the legal obligation not to compromise in **the most absolute way the freedom of expression and the freedom of the media.**
- We could also speak about a **danger to media pluralism** in general, but also state-owned media which could easily be **used to promote state propaganda**, and this is naturally against all the international agreements on freedom of the media.
- It must therefore be said that the danger of "**state propaganda**" and "disinformation" could represent the most dangerous phenomenon ever, as it could be subverting a political equilibrium, limiting freedom of expression and of the media, and in any case to compromising a society oriented to democracy by limiting the truth.
- I believe we are all convinced that the production of disinformation and fake news has become a global plague, and it is well established that its so-called "**viral**" aspect that makes the difference is caused by its **whirlwind rise through new media such as social networks** which cause very harmful side effects, sometimes irreversible precisely due to the speed of information dissemination.
- In order to fight the spread of fake news, we must **therefore find the right balance between these two fundamental freedoms: freedom of expression and freedom of the media.** The fight against disinformation is very difficult, because the solution cannot be based on limiting or censoring the information or its own manipulation. Such an orientation would drag the OSCE PA into a vortex of other potential problems, namely that of having to become "**arbiter**" of the various interpretations and thereby generate

tensions. **The organization must continue to have a role of guardian of the freedoms and rights and of democracy in the context of Cooperation and Security.**

- Supporting these principles, I would like to highlight the importance of **the Joint Declaration signed in Wien in 2017 by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression of the United Nations, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organization of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information**, as this declaration represents for politics, and for all the political leaders of OSCE States, **the only valid tool to promote a free, independent and diversified communication and media environment, to guarantee media and print diversity, to protect and try to support public and independent broadcasters, to promote transparency, and especially to develop programs on media literacy and education in schools, promote the most rigorous regulatory guidelines and finally also set up control bodies.**
- The four international organizations, who signed the Joint Declaration of Wien in 2017, tried with the above recommendation to give an answer to the “fake news” phenomenon, especially online and on social networks. Furthermore, in the Declaration, the term “fake news” is enclosed in quotation marks because there is the trend to avoid the term itself when we talk about disinformation, instead it is used in a completely different context when politics refers to media calling them fake news.
- **In this statement it seems clear that the answer must be oriented primarily towards media pluralism and information literacy, rather than placing technical and regulatory censorship to combat disinformation.**
- In this context, the policymakers of the OSCE region have the task to translate these proposals and **declarations into legislative terms, relying on the activity of parliamentary diplomacy itself, which has a predominant role in this sense. Through Parliamentary diplomacy, parliamentarians are indeed able to interact with Governments with great timing and take appropriate decisions to implement all these concepts, by developing inclusive awareness-raising strategies, educational tools in collaboration with civil society, in order to increase resistance to the spread of disinformation.**

- **We can therefore say that the joint declaration of Wien of 2017 is the most important document issued so far on the theme of "freedom of expression and contrasting" fake news ", disinformation and its propaganda".**
- As to the effects of disinformation on this pandemic, we can say that, given how information and disinformation has spread, unfortunately **the info-epidemic** has succeeded in spreading more and more where the trust of the authorities has been very weak, undermining all forms of cooperation, seriously endangering social cohesion, and finally the trust in the institutions. All of this has spread in opposition to the recommendations and instructions given by the scientific community and by competent authorities of each country, generating panic and hysteria.
- Before concluding, please allow me a brief focus on youth and disinformation. There are two directions of thought: the first is that young people lock themselves in the world of the net, which becomes too often the only medium capable of giving voice to their information needs, especially on social media. The second is an antithesis, and it's that in order to defend themselves from the disinformation on social media, they carry out further research, both on the source and on the news itself and this makes them even more aware of the reality of the world of information and of how to fight disinformation. Young people have this capacity, and it is on this last point that we must insist and always put them in a position to increase their curiosity and the search for truth.

**I conclude by saying this;** the OSCE PA has the obligation to reach shared and concerted positions on key points to disseminate recommendations on the development of correct, authentic and verified information, collaborating with all member states, creating a favorable environment and ways of accessing quality information, in which the facts are checked, ethics is observed, and the contents are reliable.

**Information is a public good, we must protect those who offer transparency and truth, so I want to reiterate once again that the recipe must be oriented on media pluralism and promoting information literacy, without limiting the two fundamental freedoms enshrined in the joint declaration signed in Wien, which are freedom of expression and freedom of the media, which no state in any political condition must renounce, to fight disinformation and fake news.**

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