

## THE TRUTH IS DEAD! FAKE NEWS FLOODS EUROPEAN UNION

*Post-truth, adj.*

1. Occurring after or resulting from a disclosure of the truth. rare.  
2. orig. U.S. Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

The term 'post-truth' came to prominence in 2016, when it was the OED's Word of the Year in the wake of the U.S. presidential election and the Brexit referendum. It has since then become a popular term to describe our current political climate, and is especially applicable to the rise of authoritarian populist parties all over Europe,

such as the Five Star Movement (IT), Front National (FR), Alternative für Deutschland (DE), UKIP (UK), the Dutch Freedom Party, and, most recently the Forum for Democracy (NL). Post-truth surfaces most clearly in current-day populism, but the phenomenon stretches well beyond politics. It encompasses a devaluation of facts that can go as far as a denial of the validity of facts altogether, with people believing in things simply because they 'feel' right. In other words, it means that people no longer share the same sense of reality, with disastrous consequences, from a drop in vaccination to the denial of climate change. Accompanying phenomena

such as fake news, alternative facts, and disinformation only exacerbate the problem of post-truth. By spreading false or misleading information (or even by calling anything that does not suit one's political preferences 'fake news') sub-standard media outlets, social media, and populists stop us from discussing and adequately addressing problems simply by denying their existence.



Fig. 1 Donald Trump giving the finger  
Dominick Reuter / Reuters



Fig. 3 Snowball proves global warming is Hoax  
CNN

"Disinformation - or fake news - consists of verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm." (europa.eu)

The European Commission (EC) has ordered a commission to outline a detailed action plan to address the problem of disinformation within the borders of the EU.

The process gained more attention as the problem of fake news was stressed by the president of the EC, Jean-Claude Juncker, in a 2017 letter to the commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society, Maria Gabriel, in which he writes: "The EC needs to look into the challenges the online platform creates for our democracies as regards the spreading of fake information and initiate a reflection on what would be needed at EU level to protect our citizens".

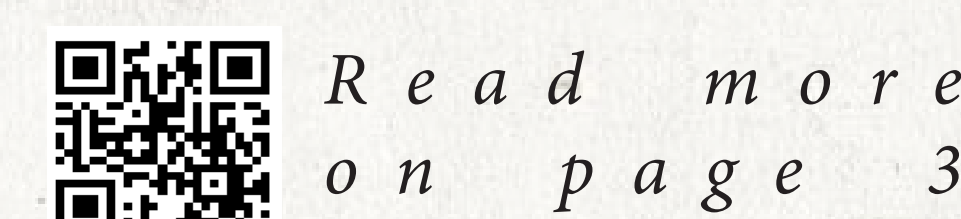
A public consultation which resulted in 2986 replies made clear that many EU citizens (50,1%) are encountering fake news monthly or weekly. 31,8% even experience fake news daily. The four principles that guide the action taken by the EC are: 1. Improve transparency regarding the way information is produced or sponsored; 2. diversity of information; 3. credibility of information; 4. inclusive solutions with broad stakeholder involvement.

## DECEPTION DESTROYS NETHERLANDS

In 2016 there was a referendum in the Netherlands about an association treaty between the EU and Ukraine. Several political parties and other political organisations actively opposed this treaty, often by using false arguments and spreading misinformation. During this campaign they often claimed that the treaty would be the first step for Ukraine to join the EU, which it overtly was not.

The Netherlands also witnessed another form of fake news. On the 19th of January, three months before the referendum, a video message from the Ukrainian army went viral. In it, six masked men threatened the Dutch voters with actions if the outcome of the referendum should be negative. Not much later, the authorities confirmed that the video was fake and prob-

ably made by Russia-oriented separatists to influence the elections and discredit Ukraine.



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Fig. 4 Even newspapers not safe! "Fake News" / Fredrick Burr Oppen

## DROG DRAINS THE SWAMP

DROG is a social enterprise founded in the Netherlands in 2016, against the backdrop of the referendum about Ukraine. In collaboration with journalists and academics, and supported by the Dutch stimulation fund for journalism, founders Jon Roozenbeek and Ruurd Oosterwoud created a platform to counter fake news and disinformation. This took the shape of a game in which players become the writers of fake content. In this way, the game functions as a vaccine: after understanding and experiencing it in fictitious sur-

roundings, players would become more resistant to fake news in real life. In this way, DROG provided an accessible, practical solution to an abstract problem. The game has also been translated to English, and DROG has since grown as a think-tank and educational organisation, giving workshops all across Europe. Their core idea remains the same, however: to help people recognise fake news themselves, with a strong emphasis on autonomy. Even though they think governmental organisations play a role to protect democracy by educat-

ing citizens about fake news and fighting it at the source, any form of censorship would be just as detrimental to society. Finally, promising research has been conducted about the game's effectivity. This means that, up to and including 2018, the 50.000 people who played the game have become a little more resistant against fake news and disinformation.

PLAY THE GAME

Want to know where we get our news? Check our SOURCE



## SHAKESPEARE SLANDERS HERO

"They love his grace but lightly / That fill his ears with such dissentionous rumours. / Because I cannot flatter and speak fair, / Smile in men's faces, smooth, deceive, and cog, / Duck with French nods and apish courtesy, / I must be held a rancorous enemy. / Cannot a plain man live and think no harm, / But thus his simple truth must be abus'd / By silken, sly, insinuating Jacks?" (Richard III, 1.3.55-57)

In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the villainous Duke of Gloucester achieves

the throne by getting rid of any competitors through skillful deception and manipulation.

Shakespeare's works have often been taken as historical facts, but audiences may have been deceived as well: the play is full of errors of fact, geography, and chronology. While questioning the disastrous consequences of political misinformation and rumours, and of leadership indifferent to the truth, Shakespeare himself is also misrepresenting history for his own purposes: the play was essentially a piece of political propaganda against the House of York.



Fig. 2 Richard III / Sir John Gilbert