



9th ASEF Editors' Roundtable (ASEFERT9)

15-16 October 2018, Brussels

**Exploring the Battlefronts of 'Fake News':
A Tripartite Approach to the Fight Against Misinformation**

BACKGROUND NOTE

Both Asia and Europe are suffering from the scourge of 'fake news'. There has always been 'fake news' or disinformation throughout history. This was taken to new heights by dictators such as Hitler and Stalin. But more recently the rise of social media has led to new concerns with the role of Facebook, Google, LinkedIn and Twitter in spreading "fake news" receiving wide coverage. The scandal surrounding Cambridge Analytica also highlighted the lack of control over personal data gathered by social media companies. Western governments have pointed to major Russian disinformation operations in Ukraine and interference in the 2016 US presidential elections.

In Europe there is mounting concern about 'fake news' and disinformation. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the UK Parliament have all commissioned reports.

The High Level Group's report can be found here: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>.

The European Parliament study can be found here: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/supporting-analyses>.

The UK parliament report can be found here: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/digital-culture-media-and-sport-committee/news/fake-news-report-published/>.

A common theme of the reports is that the volume of disinformation on the internet is growing so big that it is starting to crowd out real news and poses a genuine threat to democracy.

In Asia, the question of 'fake news' has been catalysed by the ease with which social media allows users to communicate. Misinformation and rumours spread faster now than ever before. This has led to a growing political and social crisis where those with an agenda can readily, cheaply and easily spread distorted facts and outright lies. These range from the trivia, such as cancer curing drugs and homoeopathy remedies spread on instant messaging apps in Thailand, to the politically destructive, such as commentary and libellous content found in the Facebook shares of users in the Philippines, to acts which cause loss of life and property such as 'fake news', disinformation and generalisations in Myanmar's Facebook community towards the Rohingya.

As governments across Asia move forward to combat the spread of 'fake news', questions arise about how to balance the line between curbing potentially destructive information and an infringement upon free speech.

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Singapore is the latest country in Asia that has been looking into "fake news" and social media. A Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods, which was set up by the Singapore Parliament this year, held several public hearings and, in September, completed a report with 22 recommendations. These recommendations aim at disrupting online falsehoods, nurturing an informed public, reinforcing social cohesion and trust, promoting fact checking and dealing with threats to national security and sovereignty. This report can be found here:

<https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/selectcommittee>.

In recognising the complexities of 'fake news', the Roundtable may consider the implications of the above-mentioned trends in both Asia and Europe, and discuss the recommendations of the mentioned reports while also coming up with their own proposals.

Among the issues to be discussed we might focus on:

Problems faced by editors and journalists by the avalanche of 'fake news'?

What countermeasures can be taken by the media?

What new legislation (if any) is required to control social media?

What is the responsibility of the social media platforms?

How to protect personal data?

Should there be a new code for political advertising on social media?

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