Minutes of the Second Meeting of the High-Level Expert Group on Fake News[1], 7 February 2018
Avenue de Beaulieu, 25, Brussels, Belgium

Morning Session: 9:00- 10:30

1. Purpose of the meeting

The meeting was the second session of the High-Level Group of Experts (HLEG) following up on the HLEG's first meeting held in Brussels on 15 January 2018. The HLEG was convened by the European Commission to advise on the challenges posed by fake news and the spread of disinformation online and to recommend potential policy initiatives. The HLEG consists of 39 experts representing online platforms, press and broadcast media, other news organisations, civil society organisations and academia. The individual members were selected by the EC pursuant to a call for applications.

The focus of the second meeting was on the review of draft papers produced by the five Subgroups established during the HLEG's first meeting, namely:

- Subgroup 1 (**SG1**): Scope of the problem in the light of fundamental principles

- Subgroup 2 (**SG2**): Roles and responsibilities of online platforms.

- Subgroup 3a (**SG3a**): Roles and responsibilities of news media organisations/press

- Subgroup 3b (**SG3b**): Roles and responsibilities of broadcast media

- Subgroup 4 (**SG4**): Roles and responsibilities of civil society organizations

In particular, the objective of the meeting was to facilitate cross-fertilisation among the different subgroups; identify areas of consensus between stakeholders on the basis of the draft papers; and agree on the structure of and schedule for production and adoption of the HLEG's final report.

The meeting was not open to the public and was not broadcasted or webcasted.

2. Welcoming remarks of the Chair

The Chair of the HLEG, Professor dr. Madeleine de Cock Burning from Utrecht University, welcomed the members to the second meeting of the HLEG, and thanked them for the excellent and hard work undertaken in producing the draft Subgroup papers.

3. Attendance and adoption of the agenda and the minutes

The Chair noted that the following members of the HLEG were unable to attend the group's second meeting:

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[1] Published in the Register of Commission Expert Groups and Other Similar Entities, code number E03567.

- Stephen Turner
- Federico Fubini
- Marc Sundermann

In addition, the following members of the group were unable to attend and were substituted:

- Allen Richard, substituted by Emil Vandelen
- Nicklas Lundblad, substituted by Lie Junius
- Alexios Mantzarlis, substituted by Danile Funke
- Claire Wardle, substituted by Hossein Derakhshan
- Monique Goyens, substituted by Ursula Pachl

The agenda of the second HLEG meeting was adopted.

The minutes of the first HLEG meeting were approved and subsequently published in the Register of Commission Expert Group.

4. Discussion of work plan and structure of HLEG report

The Chair noted that a number of HLEG members had requested clarifications concerning the organisation, process and schedule for the group's work and the drafting and approval of the group's final report. The Chair clarified the process by presenting a work plan and structure for the HLEG's final report.

As regards the current state of play, the Chair noted that all of the Subgroups had submitted their draft papers and had received comments of "second readers" from outside their respective Subgroups. The Chair proposed that, going forward:

- Subgroups have until 12 February to finalise their papers and submit them to Chair;
- The Chair, with the Commission's assistance, produce a draft version of the HLEG report, for circulation to the group by the 21 February;
- The group review the draft HLEG report at the group's third meeting, on 23 February;
- Subgroups have until the 27 February to provide written comments on the draft report;
- A proposed final draft of the report be circulated by 2 March, for consideration by the Subgroups until the 5 March;
- Adoption of the Report by the HLEG at its meeting of 7 March.

The Chair noted that the draft HLEG report to be reviewed on 23 February may contain elements where consensus has been reached, but it is to be expected that views will remain divergent in various areas. Two additional weeks have been added to the process, originally scheduled to conclude on 23 February, which will afford the group more time to seek greater consensus and enable the group, it is hoped, to adopt the final HLEG report on 7 March.

In response to a comment from the floor, the Chair acknowledged that the proposed schedule was compressed, but noted that the HLEG's mandate runs until the end of 2018, and that the adoption of the report should not necessarily be viewed as the endpoint of group's efforts.

The Chair proposed a broad outline for the final HLEG report, as set forth in the meeting agenda, structured around the following broad headings:

    i.   Problem definition
    ii.   Measures already taken by stakeholders
    iii.   Key principles and general (short and long term) objectives
    iv.   Responses and actions
    v.   Conclusions: specific objectives (including concrete actions) for each stakeholder, based on roles and responsibilities, including possible actions to be taken up by the Commission.

The Chair opened the floor to discussion. A number of comments were made by members concerning, among other things, the importance of:

- defining the problem and the scope of the group's work;
- setting a timeline for recommended actions, including actions that can be taken in short term versus actions to be implemented over the longer term;
- monitoring and evaluating actions taken.

5. Subgroups' draft reports

At the Chair's invitation, the Subgroups each gave a brief overview of their respective draft reports. "Challengers" from the Subgroups also offered comments on the reports, highlighting in particular areas of divergence within their respective Subgroups.

6. Organisation of Breakout and Subgroup Sessions

The Chair explained that a series of breakout sessions had been organised, in the format presented in the table below, to bring together the various Subgroups to discuss recommendations and issues presented in their respective draft reports as well as the comments offered by the "second-readers."

The Chair explained that the general purpose of the break-out sessions was to deepen discussions and facilitate the "cross-fertilisation" of ideas among the Subgroups. The sessions would be moderated by the Commission, and discussions should focus in particular on identifying recommendations which enjoy consensus among the different stakeholder groups as well as areas where there is divergence.

The Chair stated that, following the break-out sessions, the Subgroups would meet separately to consider the positions taken in their draft papers in light of comments received from "second readers" and during the breakout sessions.

Breakout Sessions: 10:30 – 13:30

Breakout sessions bringing together the members of the different Subgroups took place in the following configurations:

1st Time Slot	2nd Time Slot	3rd Time Slot
Discussion table 1 **Subgroups:** ➢ SG3b (Broadcasters) ➢ SG3a (Press)	Discussion table 1 **Subgroups:** ➢ SG2 (Platforms) ➢ SG3b (Broadcasters)	Discussion table 1 **Subgroups:** ➢ SG2 (Platforms) ➢ SG3a (Press)
Discussion table 2 **Subgroups:** ➢ SG2 (Platforms) ➢ SG1 (Academia) ➢ SG4 (CSO)	Discussion table 2 **Subgroups:** ➢ SG4 (CSO) ➢ SG1 (Academia) ➢ SG3a (Press)	Discussion table 2 **Subgroups:** ➢ SG4 (CSO) ➢ SG1 (Academia) ➢ SG3b (Broadcasters)

Afternoon Session (Subgroups): 14:15 – 15:30)

The Subgroups reconvened to take stock of inputs received and to discuss finalisation of their analyses and recommendations. The chairs and rapporteurs of the subgroups reported bilaterally to the HLEG chair to share the positions of the subgroups and possible synergies among them.

Afternoon Session (Plenary): 16:45 – 18:00)

7. Reports from the Subgroups

At the invitation of the Chair, the Subgroups reported back to the group.

Subgroup 1

Subgroup 1 reported that the discussions reflected broad support for the work of Subgroup 1. Main items requiring further work include: developing a clearer definition of "disinformation"; greater precision in analysing the nature of the problem presented; and mapping of measures taken to date. As regards potential responses, Subgroup 1 considered that there was broad support for: measures by public authorities to create an enabling environment for freedom of expression in the evolving media ecosystem; new actions/commitments by platforms; greater investment in media literacy; and greater investment in research activities.

Subgroup 2

Subgroup 2 reported that a main takeaway of the discussions was that care should be taken not to fragment the Internet. Responses to the problem of disinformation should not give rise to a separate "European" Internet; they should be compatible with the global, interoperable nature of the Internet and should not endanger its stability or security. In addition, it is necessary to delve deeper into how responsibilities for tackling the problem of disinformation should be distributed among the various stakeholder groups. Regarding responses, further consideration should be given to, among other things, research needs and rating systems.

Subgroup 3a

Subgroup 3a reported that, based on the discussions, there are three areas that it plans to improve and/or expand in its report: 1) the concept of co-regulation versus regulation; 2) credibility indexes, possibly reconceived as "trust indicators," with an emphasis on transparency and accountability; and 3) transparency and accountability with respect to algorithms, in particular the data the press requires from platforms as well as insights on how algorithms work. As regards responses, Subgroup 3a considered that there was common ground on: the importance of media literacy, which, in the Subgroup's view, should not only educate readers but improve competencies in newsrooms; measures to improve the stability of the news media industry; and the principle of diluting disinformation by promoting quality content.

Subgroup 3b

Subgroup 3b found the discussions constructive and will revise its draft report, emphasising areas of consensus, such as the need for transparency of algorithms and what "transparency" means, including, for example, transparency regarding the findability of content as well as transparency in relation to sources and sponsorship of content. There was support from the platforms on the having the Commission facilitate a discussion on this topic. In addition, Subgroup 3a endorsed the platforms' proposal to examine the feasibility and impact of online right-of-reply models. Subgroup 3b also considered that the group should consider the "pipeline" issue of how to maintain momentum after the HLEG has finished its work and into the next Commission.

Subgroup 4

Subgroup 4 found the discussions constructive and its position paper will take on board comments received. The Subgroup intends to make more specific its recommendations on media literacy, in particular as regards funding mechanisms; reference to OECD PISA school rankings (Inclusion of media literacy as a criteria within the OECD school ranking system) and ministerial commitment at EU level; its proposal for a Commission sector inquiry on platforms; and its proposal for mechanism to ensure the continuity of actions taken on disinformation. It suggested that the Commission provide an update on its pending legislative initiatives on platforms. As for common ground, Subgroup considered that there was substantial consensus about the need for continuity, trust, the sanctity of the public space, and the information-gathering.

8. Comments and guidance from the Chair

The Chair thanked the members for the constructive spirit of the day's discussions.

Going forward, she reminded the Subgroups that their papers should address measures already in place to tackle the problem of disinformation and asked that recommendations be made as specific, actionable and "SMART" as possible.

Based on the day's discussions, the Chair proposed that discussions at the next meeting of the group focus on specific response actions, organised around five "umbrella" notions:

- Transparency
- Media literacy
- Empowerment of users and journalists
- Diversity & sustainability of media
- Process and evaluation

The Chair thanked the members for their efforts and adjourned the meeting.

9. Next steps

- Subgroups should report to the Chair and Secretariat with their respective final reports by close of business 12 February 2018.

- The next meeting of the HLEG will take place on 23 February 2018.

10. List of participants

A list of the members of the HLEG is attached as Annex I.

Annex I

Attendance list – Meeting of 07/02/2018

Last Name	First Name	Organisation	Country	2nd meeting attendance
De Cock Buning (**Chair**)	Madeleine	Utrecht University	NL	Present
Allan	Richard	Facebook	US	Absent Substituted by Emil Vandelen
Bargaoanu	Alina	University of Bucharest	RO	Present
Bechmann	Anja	Digital Footprints / Digital society	DK	Present
Berild lundblad	Nicklas	Google	US	Absent Substituted by Lie Junius
Curran	Noel	EBU	CH	Present
Dimitrov	Dimitar	Wikimedia	BG	Present
Dzsinich	Greg	Cyan	FR	Present
Frau-Meigs	Divina	Sorbonne Nouvelle University	FR	Present
Fubini	Federico	Journalist	IT	Absent
Gniffke	Kai	ARD	DE	Absent
Goyens	Monique	BEUC	BE	Absent Substituted by Ursula Pachl
Gutierrez velazquez	Ricardo	European Federation for Journalists	ES	Present
Jiménez cruz	Clara	Objetivo/ Maldita.es	ES	Present
Leclercq	Christophe	EurActiv	BE	Present
Lemarchand	Grégoire	European Federation for Journalists	FR	Present
Macdonald	Raegan	Mozilla Firefox	US	Present
Mantzarlis	Alexios	IFCN Poynter	US	Absent Substituted by Danile Funke

Markovski	Veni	Internet expert	BG	Present
Nielsen	Rasmus Kleis	Reuters Institute for Journalism Oxford	DK	Present
Nieri	Gina	Mediaset	IT	Present
Niklewicz	Konrad	Civic Institute	PL	Present
Polák	Juraj	RTVS	SK	Present
Pollicino	Oreste	Bocconi University	IT	Present
Raag	Ilmar	Media Executive	EE	Present
Rae	Stephen	Independent News and Media	IE	Present
Riotta	Giovanni	Journalist	IT	Present
Rozukalne	Anda	Riga Stradings University	LV	Present
Salo	Mikko	Faktabaari	FI	Present
Schwetje	Sonja	RTL Group	DE	Present
Steenfadt	Olaf	Reporters Sans Frontières	DE	Present
Stjärne	Hanna	Sveriges Television, represents Nordic Public Service Broadcasting	SE	Present
Sundermann	Marc	Bertelsmann	BE	Absent
Turk	Ziga	University of Ljubljana	SI	Present
Turner	Stephen	Twitter	US	Absent
Vaisbrodè	Neringa	Communication adviser	LT	Present
Van wijk	Wout	News Media Europe	BE	Present
Von Reppert-Bismarck	Juliana	Lie Detectors	DE	Present
Whitehead	Sarah	Sky News	UK	Present
Wardle	Claire	First Draft	US	Absent Substituted by Hossein Derakhshan