



Presidency of Malta
Council of Europe
May - November 2025
Présidence de Malte
Conseil de l'Europe
Mai - Novembre 2025



High-Level Conference on Building Democratic Resilience to Disinformation

*Organised by
the Council of Europe and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tourism of Malta*

*under the auspices of the
Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe*

17 September 2025, Malta

Main Takeaways

1. As highlighted by the 2025 Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe calling for a **New Democratic Pact** for Europe, disinformation poses a significant threat to the foundations of democratic societies, challenging public trust, electoral integrity, pluralism, and fundamental rights. The growing sophistication and scale of information manipulation, often driven by hostile actors and amplified by digital platforms, undermines the ability of citizens to receive diverse and reliable information and make informed decisions. It ultimately erodes trust in democratic institutions. The **Reykjavik Principles for Democracy**, adopted by the Heads of States and Government of Council of Europe member States in May 2023 stress the duty of states to counter the manipulation of history and disinformation that undermines democracy.
2. Disinformation has the greatest impact where democratic institutions are weak. Efforts to build resilience and counter this phenomenon must strengthen both information integrity and institutional and societal resilience. Addressing the information environment alone is insufficient; this must be paired with trustworthy and transparent institutions to make societies more robust against manipulation.
3. To be resilient to disinformation, people need to know who and what sources they can trust. Trust in government, media, and other democratic institutions is paramount. Therefore, strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law provides a strong line of defence against disinformation. Where the separation of powers, free and fair elections, judicial independence, independent and empowered anti-corruption authorities, accountable administration, free and pluralistic media, and a robust civic space ensure functionality and public trust, disinformation loses its reach and impact.
4. Disinformation and information manipulation campaigns are often coordinated across countries. Evidence shows the pervasive nature of attempts by actors such as the Russian Federation to influence elections and undermine democracy in European countries, in the framework of hybrid warfare. International cooperation is a key to coordinate human-rights oriented policy and legal responses, share practices and experiences, and provide mutual assistance in implementation and enforcement when needed. The Council of Europe provides a forum for inter-state dialogue and cooperation, including for the negotiation of international legal instruments that support the capacity of member states to counter disinformation and foreign



manipulation of information effectively in a human-rights and rule of law framework. Strengthening the resilience of democratic societies against disinformation complements efforts to counter disinformation by strengthening democracy and the rule of law.

5. Addressing disinformation must be seen as part of a wider strategy to strengthen democracy and promote people's right to freedom of expression and information. Freedom of expression protects access to reliable information as a public good that must be protected in a democracy. Any proposed measures that restrict freedom of expression must always remain within the tight boundaries of legality, necessity and proportionality that are set by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.
6. Building resilience requires a transparent and pluralistic media environment, in which journalism can operate safely and independently; it is a pre-requisite for information integrity and is necessary to reinforce trust in media. It is therefore crucial that states enhance their efforts to create an enabling environment for independent media, including public service media, and quality journalism.
7. Strong mechanisms for self-regulation of media and media organisation are also essential to build reliability and trust. Efforts to improve the quality of journalism, independent fact-checking and the visibility of reliable information are of particular importance. These need to be supported by robust legal frameworks to protect editorial independence, foster transparency and pluralism, and promote the discoverability and prominence of public interest content and reliable information on platforms.
8. Cultural policies play a key role in strengthening resilience to disinformation. Cultural actions can expose societies to diverse narratives and stories, that deliberately contrasts conflicting perspectives, training audiences to navigate ambiguity rather than fear it. Divisive issues can be addressed through the arts in nuanced, sophisticated ways in emotionally engaging, non-partisan settings. Creative reinterpretations of conspiracy theories through satire, speculative fiction, and myth-busting media art can make them objects of reflection rather than belief.
9. The education systems should be designed to foster critical thinking and the citizenship competences and skills necessary for an age where democratic debate and democratic processes are increasingly impacted by platforms and social networks. History teaching in particular helps build resilience to disinformation if it teaches not just facts but how history is constructed—evidence-based, complex, and open to debate. Rote learning is insufficient; students must practise critical questioning and see multiple perspectives. Deep understanding of social, economic and political processes, acquired through a reinforced humanities education, is essential.
10. Comprehensive and dynamic media literacy strategies and policies are one of the key avenues for building resilience and fighting disinformation. Citizens face disinformation differently depending on their gender, age and digital literacy. There is thus a need for specific policies on children, youth and senior citizens to build



resilience across generations Youth, though highly exposed, can drive innovative solutions and should be included in decision-making, while seniors are especially vulnerable in certain areas requiring targeted literacy and awareness efforts to protect their wellbeing. Specific attention should be paid to measures addressing the increased and intersectional risk faced by women and girls, as well as individuals and groups in situations of vulnerability or at risk of discrimination.

11. Robust and efficient national strategies for strengthening resilience to disinformation are needed. Such strategies need to work across all sectors, and to be based on the “whole of society” approach. There should be a specific agency or a Task force, coordinating between all ministries and levels of government. The design and implementation of such strategies should be based on a multisector and multistakeholder approach, in which the roles of parliaments, government agencies, independent regulatory authorities, private sector and different actors of civil society, including academia, civil society organisations are identified. The Council of Europe has developed policy recommendations in all areas which are vital for building societal resilience to disinformation: democracy, human rights, media freedom, culture, education, history teaching, youth – and the member states are encouraged to use them in preparing their strategies.
12. International cooperation, peer exchanges, and learning from each other should be important parts of the national strategies, in addition to the specific policies and legislation. In this respect, RESIST, the new Council of Europe project funded by the EEA and Norway Grants, is expected to make an essential contribution to building democratic resilience in Europe.