False media narratives jeopardize the European Green Deal implementation and the clean transition

QUOTA CLIMAT

A member of the

CAD Climate Action Against Disinformation

QuotaClimat is a French NGO dedicated to fighting against climate disinformation in the media and online platforms. QuotaClimat is a member of the Climate Action Against Disinformation Coalition (CAAD) worldwide.

"Climate disinformation and misinformation refer to deceptive content that **undermines** the reality and impacts of climate change, **misrepresents** scientific data to erode trust in climate science and solutions, or **falsely claims** support for climate goals while actually contributing to climate warming." (CAAD, 2024)

Delivering the European Green Deal (EGD) should lead the way to investment, innovation and green jobs, making the EU the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The upcoming policy cycle is critical to **securing EGD resilience** and the achievement of sectoral and climate objectives in a fair, cost effective and innovative way.

This strategic outlook is however increasingly put at risk by the use of **international and malign disinformation tactics** aimed at **sowing doubt and shifting strategic focus away** from vested interests non-aligned with the EU's path to climate neutrality.

Through **disinformation, deception and doublespeak**, **climate delayism is thriving** in mainstream and social media channels, thereby thwarting climate action and devitalizing EU's institutional ability to secure EGD implementation with transformational green growth prospects :

1. **Exposing EU green businesses and energy security strategies**: Disinformation hinders EU industrial competitiveness and jeopardizes the existence of a level playing field for European companies (i.a. Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism), by creating a misleading narrative that green policies are economically detrimental (e.g. 2035 zero emission target for cars), with the risk of deterring investment and innovation in EU's businesses and technologies.

2. **Rising skepticism about the effectiveness of EGD policies**: Disinformation entails the risk of distorting public perceptions of the effectiveness and equity of climate policy measures. Polarizing narratives may erode public trust in EU governance capacity and obstruct the effectiveness of social support measures such as the Social Climate Fund.

Along with other short- and long-term critical risks (economic uncertainty, conflict, extreme weather events, cyber insecurity,...), such underlying dynamics constitute fertile ground for deceptive narratives on climate change, its impacts and its solutions.

With increasing activity on climate policy in the next EU policy cycle, climate disinformation narratives are expected to surge on social media, but also mass media channels such as mainstream political press, TV news, legacy local papers, and other traditional forms of media[1]. If **legacy media remains the most trusted information channel by EU citizens, its role in the disinformation ecosystem is insufficiently scrutinized by regulatory authorities**. This policy gap must be taken seriously: since they reach a general public and their information is normalised and rationalized, legacy media can be perceived as the ultimate end-goal of the polarization machine.

Given the urgency and severity of environmental crises and opinion polarisation, self-regulation is insufficient. If the growing commitment of journalists is to be welcomed, we have to admit that voluntary measures have had mixed success in tackling the problem[2]. **Political and regulatory interventions in full respect of media freedoms are essential**. In this respect, the EU has begun for the last term to put in place tools to combat it. The EU has implemented the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) to promote media independence, the Digital Services Act (DSA) to limit disinformation on major platforms, and a strengthened but voluntary Code of Practice on disinformation, which overlooks traditional media and climate disinformation.

In its March 2024 Communication on managing climate risks, **the Commission has committed to further combating climate disinformation[3]. The EU must now focus on this fight to foster public acceptance and effective implementation of climate policies**. At a time when the G20 has recently launched the Global Initiative for Information Integrity on climate change, **the EU must establish itself as the world leader on this issue[4]**.

With disinformation and climate change identified by the World Economic Forum as the main global threats in the years ahead, the pivotal role of the media in shaping public discourse on climate policy must be explicitly acknowledged as a strategic pillar to the delivering of the EGD[5].

Therefore, QuotaClimat highlights the following priorities:

1. **Monitor and identify deceptive information on EGD policies as a strategic prerequisite for delivering the EGD, with a targeted policy agenda and a coordinated approach between concerned DGs (DG CLIMA, DG GROW, DG CNECT,...).**

2. **Strengthen European and national broadcasting regulators' mandate and associated resources to monitor and regulate climate disinformation in full respect of media freedoms.**

3. **Reinforce international collaboration on this strategic international issue.**

1. European Digital Media Observatory, 2024, EU-related disinformation peaks in April
2. European Federation of Journalists, 2022, Charter for a better account of the ecological emergency in the media
3. European Commission, 2024, Commission's Communication on managing climate risks, p. 13
4. Speech by the Minister of the Secretariat of Social Communication of the Presidency of the Republic, Paulo Pimenta, during an event on Information Integrity - São Paulo, 05/01/2024
5. World Economic Forum, 2024, Global Risk Report

Action plan

1. Strengthen the role of European and broadcasting independent regulation authorities

- Empower the future guidelines of the European Board for Media Services (EBMS) created by the EMFA with prerogatives in environmental matters to **enforce ethical rules on disinformation** while harmonizing practices among Member States.

- Based on the Finnish and Norwegian examples, the inclusion at the end of online articles of a button for **reporting a factual error** should be discussed with national authorities in the EBMS.

- **In the event of quantitative shortcomings identified by an independent authority, set "quotas" by establishing temporary rules** for production, programming, and broadcasting on ecological issues during electoral periods. These temporary rules should be complemented by the establishment of fact-checking cells, especially on environmental issues, during electoral periods.

2. Ensure stringent evolution of regulatory frameworks on advertisement in the media

- The Audiovisual Media Services Directive adopted in 2018 provides for **a ban on advertising encouraging behaviour that is harmful to health**. Following the example of the Netherlands, ensure that the European Commission recognises that **advertising on fossil fuels is covered** by this ban, in order to guarantee a level playing field in the internal market in all Member States.

- Strengthen consumer information by generalising the implementation of public messaging and labelling (e.g., carbon score) to promote more virtuous consumption patterns.

3. Identify and tackle fake news on EGD policies and the scientific consensus on the climate emergency in the media

- With a view to revising the DSA in 2027, include in Article 34 combating environmental disinformation among the systemic risks generated by platforms (alongside online hate and violence or fundamental rights for instance) and take necessary measures to mitigate this risk (increased visibility of reliable information sources, moderation obligations).

- Prevent the targeting of individuals and communities by content identified as climate change-related disinformation.

- **Build a European Observatory on media coverage of environmental information**. Attached to the EBMS, it will produce data to ensure an annual, public, and objective monitoring of the progression of media coverage on ecological issues. Such observatories already exist in France and soon in Belgium.

4. Bolster media literacy, particularly regarding environmental information

- Raise awareness among users and share best practices in handling environmental information. The EBMS will already share good practices on media literacy: we should ensure that environmental issues are part of their scope of action.

- **Support journalists training** on environmental issues while ensuring their independence by making the establishment of a code of ethics mandatory at national level.

- Make the EU the standard-bearer for the subject in the international negotiations and future international agreements to which it is party, e.g. under the COP29.

5. Enact comprehensive EU legislation to ensure the protection of journalists covering the climate crisis, recognising them as whistleblowers, to safeguard their vital role in informing the public

6. Improve relations between the media and European institutions

- Provide journalists and other fact-checkers with an initiation to the existing tools to verify information on EGD policies (legislative train schedule, legislative observatory, European Parliament Research centre).

- Under the aegis of the European Commission, **develop an AI-based fact-checking tool to centralise verified data for journalists**.

Signatories

IFJ International Federation of Journalists

EFJ European Federation of Journalists

MEDIADIVERSITY INSTITUTE

WACC Europe communication for all

SEAS AT RISK

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