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R8 Addressing the Structural Issues Underlying the Tide of Disinformation

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Agenda item: 1. Resolutions

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Motion text

1   **What is Disinformation?**

2   Disinformation is false or misleading information spread intentionally in order
3   to advance political or ideological goals, make profit, or create harm. It is
4   different to misinformation, which is false information shared unintentionally.
5   This resolution focusses on disinformation as it entails a motive to deceive,
6   therefore perpetrators are more culpable for its consequences. Further, tackling
7   disinformation reduces opportunities for misinformation to spread.

8   **Why Should It Be Reduced?**

9   *Damage to Democracy*

10   Disinformation undermines the democratic process by undermining access to
11   truthful and reliable information. For example, the outcome of the UK's 2016
12   referendum on EU membership is thought to have been influenced by false and
13   misleading information spread intentionally through traditional and social
14   media.

15   *Undermining Trust*

16   Disinformation both propagates general societal distrust and thrives when social
17   distrust is high, creating a vicious circle. This was illustrated during the
18   COVID-19 pandemic, when disinformation about the virus led to distrust in health
19   messaging from governments and health organisations, reducing vaccine uptake and
20   health protective behaviour.

21   *Impact on Marginalised Groups*

22 Disinformation frequently entails the repetition of prejudiced and hateful
23 narratives and tropes designed to reinforce existing power hierarchies that
24 propagate racism, misogyny, xenophobia and transphobia. Further, marginalisation
25 leads to institutional distrust which increases vulnerability to disinformation.
26 For example, a disproportionate number of COVID-19 deaths among minority ethnic
27 groups throughout Europe was compounded by the proliferation of disinformation
28 in these communities' media ecosystems.

29 *Warfare*

30 Disinformation forms part of information warfare: the use, control and
31 manipulation of information to advance a belligerents' goals in a military
32 conflict. For example, false narratives about the war were actively spread by
33 Russian state-controlled media and social media as part of the 2022 invasion of
34 Ukraine.

35 *Environmental Impact*

36 Disinformation has deeply worrying implications for the vital transition away
37 from fossil fuel dependency and unsustainable growth capitalism. Evidence shows
38 that oil and gas companies have long been aware of the risks their industry
39 poses to the climate, yet they have spread false information to instil doubt
40 about it, enabling them to continue business as usual.

41 For the health of our societies, our communities and our planet, it is essential
42 that we act to reduce, regulate and build resilience to disinformation. Our
43 calls are broken into three areas of action: traditional media, social media and
44 resilient societies.

45 **1. Traditional Media**

46 Limited ownership and control of traditional media creates the motive and
47 opportunity for a powerful minority to spread disinformation to consolidate
48 their power and grow their profit. To reduce disinformation, it is vital that
49 traditional media ownership is diverse and independent, and that free speech and
50 high quality journalism that holds power to account is not only preserved, but
51 incentivised.

52 **FYEG calls for:**

53 • Recognition that media organisations are part of the infrastructure of
54   democracy and should be run for the benefit of society, not for limited
55   private and personal gain

- Legislation to dismantle and prevent media monopolies (for example, antitrust laws), so the power to create information and knowledge is not held by a powerful minority

- Greater protection and facilitation of high quality independent journalism

- The formation of independent oversight bodies (or something similar to suit the political and media ecosystems of different countries), separate from both the state and private interests, to monitor, call out and address disinformation

- The EU to stand by its commitment to free press, prioritising it as a central requirement to EU membership for both existing and candidate members

2. Social Media

The advent of social media and algorithmically-driven news feeds have provided new and powerful ways of disseminating disinformation, in a targeted fashion, to enormous audiences, at once-inconceivable speeds. As a consequence, disinformation has overwhelmed and infiltrated our lives, sowing distrust, undermining democracy and threatening the health of our planet.

FYEG calls for:

- Action to restrict social media companies' use of algorithms that prioritise engagement over content veracity and quality

- Recognition of the damage caused and dangers posed to democracy by analytics services that run social media disinformation campaigns for clients

- Collaboration with social media companies and governments to end social media disinformation campaigns, both by analytics companies and state actors

- Recognition of the potential for disinformation posed by developments in

83 large language model artificial intelligence, and advocate for the pace of
84 progress in this field to be consistent with safeguarding the ethical
85 implications inherent within it

86 **3. Fostering a society with greater resilience to disinformation**

87 Increased uncertainty, such as housing insecurity, the cost of living crisis and
88 the climate emergency, and decreased trust in institutions, fostered by
89 structural oppression and negligent governance, makes people more susceptible to
90 the easy answers provided by disinformation. Tackling disinformation is a social
91 issue; disinformation-resilient societies require trust to be restored in the
92 social contract.

93 **FYEG calls for:**

94 • Recognition that resilience to disinformation is a social issue, it is not
95   the responsibility of individuals alone to inoculate themselves against
96   disinformation

97 • Efforts to be taken to reduce uncertainty and insecurity in citizen's
98   lives to be part of disinformation interventions

99 • Efforts to be taken to build and maintain a genuine basis for trust
100   between individuals and the social institutions that govern and influence
101   their lives to be part of disinformation interventions

102 • Recognition that marginalised groups are both more often the targets of
103   disinformation and more vulnerable to the effects of disinformation, and
104   for addressing marginalisation and seeking the active participation of
105   marginalised groups to be part of any disinformation interventions

106 • The development of media literacy education to increase understanding of
107   what disinformation is, how it is spread, how to spot it, and how to talk
108   about it with others, with a particular focus on social media