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Building institutional capacity framework for resilience to disinformation in Bulgaria

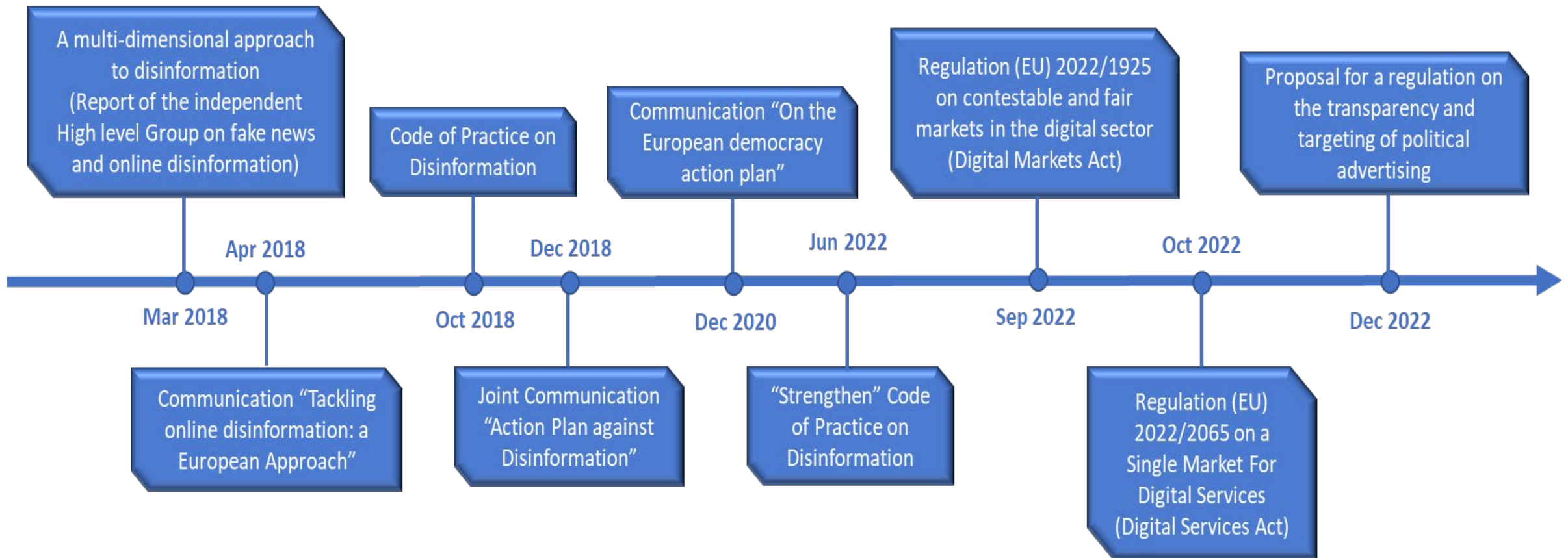
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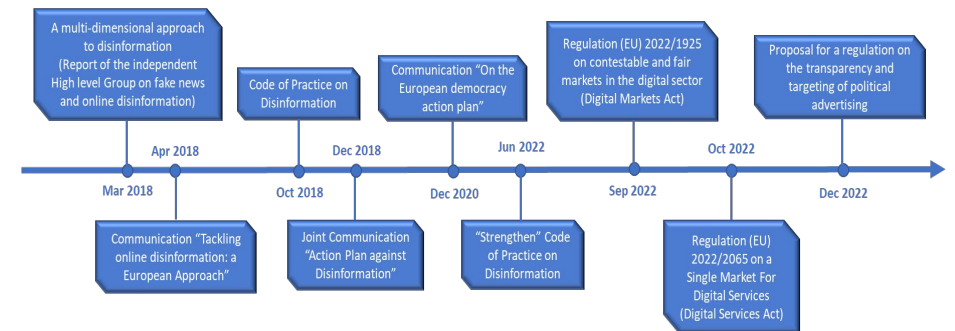
EU Framework on disinformation



EU framework on disinformation

EU approach: implementation of legal and financial instruments in interconnected domains:

- transparent and accountable online ecosystem,
- secure electoral processes,
- media literacy,
- quality journalism,
- strategic communication;



Co-regulatory framework:

- self-committed obligations and liability of online platforms (Code of Practice on Disinformation), important part of which embedded in the legally binding norms of Digital Service Act (DSA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA);
- DSA envisages also the creation of some elements of national institutional infrastructure, e.g. national Digital Service Coordinators and "trusted flaggers";

Government and civil society preparedness in Bulgaria

- Bulgarian citizens are one of the most vulnerable ones to Russian disinformation narratives in NATO and the EU;
- Disinformation continuously spread in both conventional and social media by informal networks of influence, including politicians, influencers, journalists, and tycoons, whose interests often overlap or become entangled with those of the Kremlin.
- Critical governance deficits, allowing for capturing of legislative and executive powers by foreign political and economic interests, facilitates media capture:
 - enforcement gap regarding the transparency of media ownership and funding, incl. the allocation of public money by government agencies;
 - EU sanctions on Kremlin-backed media applied only partially, also due to the lack of legislation, that provides the legal basis for the application of EU sanctions in the country;

Government and civil society preparedness in Bulgaria (cont)

- Responsibilities for countering disinformation not clearly allocated to any of the state authorities;
- No long-term political commitment / policy vision, which resulted in:
 - stop-and-go approach of government authorities in undertaking responsibility for countering disinformation and for building capacity in this domain;
 - lack of a serious and responsible political debate to counter disinformation, incl. what are the needs for building the basics of institutional and regulatory framework for resilience to malign information operations;

Government and civil society preparedness in Bulgaria (cont)

- Civil-society, media organisations (but not mainstream media), and private sector become leading forces in identification, monitoring and countering disinformation:
 - ad-hock self-regulation by some service providers (e.g. Bulsatcom)
 - self-coordinated /uncoordinated efforts of civil-society and media practitioners, incl. fact checkers and disinformation researchers;
 - high dependence on external funding (mostly EU and US) for most of the relevant efforts (limiting the opportunities for long-term planning and initiatives);
 - Inability to build institutional and regulatory framework.

What's next?

General and long-term vision:

- Building national resilience framework, i.e. coordinated and synergetic governance mechanisms, that can address and accommodate the evolving range of risks concerning the misuse of information, incl:
 - "off-line" infrastructure, e.g. institutions, regulations, financial instruments, educational curricula, textbooks, communication and computer networks, etc.;
 - digital infrastructure , e.g. online systems and solutions that allow for digital identity verification, data exchange, identification and verification of misinformation, monitoring and exposure of inauthentic behaviour in the online domain, etc.
- Leveraging Euro-Atlantic cooperation, incl. within NATO, to develop capacity and to building institutional and regulatory framework, based on best practices and practical experience.

What's next? (cont)

Immediate steps ahead:

- legislative changes to define countering foreign information manipulation and interference as a responsibility of a specific ministry, and as part of the portfolio of a vice-premier responsible for this domain;
- developing further institutional capacity for strategic communication of all public administrations, focusing on critical ministries and state agencies, e.g. economy, energy, interior, defence, foreign affairs, national security, etc.;
- creating institutional structure for exchange of information among state authorities, as well as with relevant international and foreign organisations;
- preparing the necessary national legislation (e.g. regarding Digital Services Coordinators under the DSA) in the field of foreign information manipulation and interference and application of EU sanctions;
- Integrating media literacy in the formal education system from primary school to university with particular attention to the training of the teachers, esp. for avoiding "cognitive capture" among them;



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