



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

Commission for Citizenship, Governance,  
Institutional and External Affairs

Brussels, 10 September 2019

**CIVEX Commission study visit  
on "How to combat hate speech and disinformation – case studies"  
Świnoujście, Poland, 6 September 2019**

- The study visit was held at the invitation of Mr Olgierd Geblewicz, President of the West Pomerania region, Poland and member of the CoR.
- The visit took place at Świnoujście Radisson Blu Hotel, from 09:30 to 13:00.
- CoR members (12): Christophe ROUILLON (FR/PES), Randel LÄNTS, (EE/PES), Jaroslav HLINKA (SK/PES), Marco DUS (IT/PES), Arnoldas ABRAMAVIČIUS (LT/EPP), Jesús GAMALLO ALLER (ES/EPP), Olgierd GEBLEWICZ (PL/EPP), Sergejs MAKSIMOVŠ (LV/Renew Europe), Hardijs VENTS (LV/Renew Europe), David SIMMONDS (UK/ECR), Declan MCDONNELL (IE/EA), Andros KARAYIANNIS (CY/NI).
- Speakers: Ms Martyna Bildziukiewicz, East StratCom Task Force, EEAS, Ms Maja Mazurkiewicz, European Front NGO, Ms Anna Mierzyńska, independent expert. Ms Klaudia Gajocha and Mr Kornel Grabowski, Youth Council of West Pomerania.
- Other participants: About 40 members of the Youth Council of West Pomerania, representatives of the Secretariat for Youth of West Pomerania, local media and experts.

The Youth Council of West Pomerania is an organisation of young people (up to 35 years of age) aiming at developing committing attitude and active participation in social life. The Youth Council's activities include presenting the views of young people to the regional authorities; organizing youth events giving the chance to meet decision makers and experts; gathering information necessary to analyze the situation of the youth in the region; and others.

The Secretariat for Youth of West Pomerania is functioning as part of the regional administration of the West Pomeranian region. The Secretariat's main tasks include cooperation with and support to youth organisations, and governmental and non governmental organisations and insitutions engaged in youth policy, with the aim to encourage active participation of young

people in social life of local communities, enable youth to become involved in various projects, actions and voluntary activities, and promote youth exchange, workshops and trainings.



The event was opened by **Mr Olgierd Geblewicz** who welcomed the participants, introduced the topic of disinformation and mentioned some of the reasons for putting it high on the CoR agenda. He mentioned the CoR opinion on disinformation adopted by the CoR in February 2019 for which he had been a rapporteur, provided examples of recent cases of hate speech and disinformation and their negative impact on Polish society, and focused on the need to raise awareness of this growing phenomenon. He stressed the role of the media and civil society in countering disinformation, and pointed out to education as a primary tool in straightening resilience of people, in particular the youth, who were the most vulnerable and susceptible to manipulation part of society. In this regard, he shared the experience of its region by mentioning the workshops and trainings on the topic of disinformation organized by the Secretariat for Youth of West Pomerania, one of which had been held the previous day.

The discussion was opened by **Ms Martyna Bildziukiewicz** who presented the mission of East StratCom Task Force - a Unit within the European External Action Service which was established by the European Council in 2015 in response to pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns against the EU. She focused on the complexity of the process of disinformation, gave examples of different ways to manipulate truth and create fake news and stressed the need for strong institutional and administrative capacity to forecast, address and respond to disinformation activities. Disinformation should be regarded as a process and addressed by systematic efforts at all levels, involving public authorities, private actors (i.e. digital platforms), citizen and media, and oriented toward supporting media freedom and independent and data-oriented journalism, and building an informed and critically thinking society.

**Ms Maja Mazurkiewicz** contributed to the discussion by sharing the positive experience of European Front NGO in implementing the EU funded project "Keyboard warriors": a project based on an open and transparent group of volunteers who use social media to fight against false and manipulated

information. Currently, more than 1600 Internet users volunteered to be part of the project and engage in online activities against disinformation, at first place – by responding to fake news and hate speech via different Internet platforms and promoting selected topics related to the European Union. The aim of the project is to build a network of "keyboard warriors" against disinformation and to use the experience of this network for the creation of Europe-wide social media intelligence-gathering models and communications tool-kit for different social groups on how to counter online disinformation.

Following the interventions, CIVEX members had the opportunity to learn about good practices in addressing disinformation in the region of West Pomerania. **Ms Anna Mierzyńska** spoke about the workshops that were being organized for young people by civil society organizations in cooperation with the Secretariat for Youth of the West Pomerania region and provided interesting details about the last workshop that had been held the day before. She mentioned in particular the interactive online games that had been used to introduce the topic of disinformation and the different ways of fact-checking which proved to be a successful approach to engage students' attention and interest. She highlighted the need to include fact-checking learning into the school curriculum as today's young people were spending significant time of their life online, and teaching them how to check reliability of information and use the web wisely was the only way to address the negative impact of online disinformation and prevent manipulation.

Finally, **Ms Klaudia Gajocha and Mr Kornel Grabowski**, members of the Youth Council of West Pomerania, shared the lessons they had learnt at the workshop on disinformation held the previous day. They presented a short video about the workshop showing students' discussions and giving to the audience the opportunity to learn about young people's approaches and experiences in using online platforms and their ways of checking reliability of online information. The video demonstrated how curious and enthusiastic were the students about the topic and conveyed the message that young people's education and training on the issues of disinformation is of the utmost importance for building up an informed and critically thinking society.

The presentations led to a discussion and triggered a number of questions by CIVEX members. **Mr Lants** raised the issue of hate speech and far right narratives, in particular when coming from internal/national sources, and asked about good practices in addressing this kind of abuse of the freedom of expression. **Mr Abramavičius** shared his own experience of being a member of an informal group of online users comprising about 1600 members in Lithuania who were fighting disinformation, false news, propaganda and manipulation through an active and engaged participation in online platforms, discussions and information campaigns. **Mr Karayiannis** raised the issue of control on twitters and other online platforms, and pointed out to the negative impact of using social media to disseminate false information for political purposes. **Mr Rouillon** mentioned the financing that populist and nationalist parties were receiving from many different sources, including external ones, and highlighted the need to invest serious financial resources in the fight against disinformation. **Mr McDonnell** gave an example from his own country of not addressing false news in a particular situation for the reasons of preventing social and political tension, and asked whether taking no action against disinformation could be seen as appropriate in some situations. **Mr Simmonds** reiterated the growing importance of disinformation and the need to invest in awareness raising and education, and thanked Mr Geblewicz for the opportunity to exchange and enhance knowledge on how to address and fight successfully this social phenomenon.