



EMA Policy against Disinformation

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Introduction

Freedom of expression is a core value of the European Union enshrined in the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the constitutions of the Member States.¹ Today's societies depend on the ability of individuals to access a variety of verifiable information so that they can form their own views on different issues. Thus, individuals can participate in an informed way in public discourse, and express their opinion and will freely and fairly. Nevertheless, the deliberate, large-scale, and systematic spreading of disinformation has become a major challenge.

The Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association, hereafter called "EMA" or the "Association", is an international non-profit making association (AISBL) with its registered seat in Brussels, Belgium. EMA's vision is to be changemakers and "to strive to impact the world at large, by addressing important issues that affect our global society". Disinformation is one of those important issues that affect our global society, and goes against the Association's values and missions, specifically the promotion of cooperation and mobility, the creation of an environment conducive to enhance lifelong learning and mobility, and the provision of a platform to develop future leaders. As changemakers it is our desire and interest to establish best practices to combat the spread of disinformation.

Disinformation is understood as verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm². In the context of the Association, public harm includes threats to the internal democratic processes (elections and voting processes) as well as to public goods such as EMA's members' health, environment or security. Disinformation does not include inadvertent errors, satire and parody, or clearly identified partisan news and commentary³.

Disinformation is an evolving threat, which requires continuous efforts to address the relevant actors, vectors, tools, methods, prioritised targets and impact.⁴ The Association realizes that the actors behind disinformation may be internal or external. Nevertheless, EMA's purview of this matter resides purely internally, and as such, this document is applicable to all EMA members, from the date of its adoption by the Management Board (MB). This Policy against Disinformation contains the following articles.

¹ Action Plan against Disinformation, JOIN(2018) 36

² Communication on tackling on-line disinformation, COM(2018) 236

³ *ibid*

⁴ Action Plan against Disinformation, JOIN(2018) 36

1. EMA does NOT tolerate disinformation from any of its members, or its partners, in any form, on any topic, toward the Association, its members or any other third party.

Purpose

1. This Policy establishes the framework for the Association to:
 - a. Manage disinformation situations affecting the Association;
 - b. Combat and stem the proliferation of disinformation.

Scope

2. This Policy applies directly to all members and active volunteers, and indirectly to partners of the association.

Definitions

3. For the effect and purpose of this policy, the following terms have been defined as:
 - a. Disciplinary action(s): sanctions levied upon an EMA member or partner involved in a disinformation situation, to be determined in a case-by-case scenario, and in accordance with the Disinformation Management Plan. Such actions might include, but are not limited to, diminishment of the Association's assistance in personal projects, diminishment of rights and of participation in Association matters, termination of membership (as per Article 9 of EMA's Statutes) or partnership, among others.
 - b. EMA member(s) or member(s): any natural person as defined by Articles 6 through 8 of the EMA Statutes and Article 1 of EMA's internal regulations.
 - c. EMA partner(s) or partner: any third party with whom the Association has entered into a bi- or multilateral agreement for any specific purpose.
 - d. EMA project member(s) or project member(s): any EMA member or active volunteer participating in an EMA project (i.e. a project that is using EMA brand, logo, assistance, resources, information or organized by or under EMA name, etc.).
 - e. Information Security Policy or ISP: policy document that delineates the set of rules enacted by EMA to ensure that all users and/or IT networks within our purview abide by the prescriptions regarding the security of data stored digitally within the Association.
 - f. Disinformation Management Plan or DMP: internal document drafted to address the operational side of combatting disinformation.
 - g. Disinformation Response Committee or DRC: working group consisting of Management Board (MB) members and EMA Units' volunteers that convene in a case-by-case scenario to address disinformation pieces or campaigns related to EMA, according to the rules established in the Disinformation Management Plan.

Content and Priority

4. The Association takes a comprehensive approach to combatting disinformation. This approach includes:
 - a. This Policy;
 - b. Disinformation Management Plan (DMP).

Responsibilities

5. EMA will establish a Disinformation Response Committee (DRC) for rapidly addressing disinformation pieces or campaigns related to EMA, by publicly sharing the corresponding accurate information, when applicable and in line with its Information Security Policy.
6. EMA will conduct a fair review of disinformation situations and contact those members engaged in such practices with a request for an explanation, and, if justified, for a retraction of the disinformation pieces or campaigns, as to the first step of action within a decided timeframe, prior to considering commensurate disciplinary actions.
7. With focus on EMA's internal elections for President and Vice-President, and in conjunction with the internal regulations and policies regulating such democratic processes, no disinformation will be allowed in the candidates' campaigns or in the period immediately prior to the elections. Candidates and/or campaigns utilizing such tactics will result in immediate disqualification and ineligibility to run for office, or any other MB position, in the current elections and for a period of four consecutive years, in addition to being considered for commensurate disciplinary actions.
8. Disinformation identified in projects by locally-based EMA project members, should immediately be notified to the Disinformation Response Committee, as a first instance (and to the MB, only if necessary) who will then proceed to address it. DRC efforts to address such a situation will also attempt to safeguard the integrity and continuity of the project.
9. If the cause or source of a disinformation situation is uncovered, during the review process, as being due to a lack of or mistake in communication(s) within the Association, the DRC will notify the MB who will further investigate, review and modify the internal processes, as needed, in order avoid and decrease the possibility of such a situation happening again.

Implementation

10. EMA will draft a Disinformation Management Plan in the next 9 months, following the approval of this policy, which will contain the operational details of the articles presented in this Policy. The document will be reviewed at least twice a year by the MB or the Disinformation Response Committee.