Launch of the New Horizon Europe Project FERMI

17 leading European organisations join forces to provide a digital solution for detecting and monitoring fake news

For Immediate Release

Millions of citizens across Europe use the internet and social media every day to read news and to look out for every type of information. Unfortunately, there are actors that exploit these instruments to spread disinformation and to manipulate public opinion, causing distrust in science and legitimate governments and often resulting in criminal actions such as riots and violence against governments or groups targeted by said disinformation. A well-known example is given by conspiracy theories spreading on social media during the COVID-19 emergency. In that regard, fake news and disinformation pose a serious threat both online and offline, often to minorities or marginalised groups. Whereas this is a well-known phenomenon, current solutions only spot fake news and raise awareness on their circulation.

To cope with this issue, 17 leading organisations from 11 European countries join forces in the Horizon Europe project [FERMI (Fake nEws Risk MItigator)](). The consortium met for the first time in Fürstenfeldbruck (DE) hosted by the coordinator, the University of Applied Sciences for Public Administration and Legal Affairs in Bavaria. Its members bring together long-standing expertise in the field of law enforcement, IT, and social sciences (universities and research centres focused on cyber-threats and law enforcement, big and small industries, technology leaders). This combination is essential for the envisioned solution that will provide both digital and non-digital capabilities to counter fake news and disinformation. Additionally, it will allow the FERMI's consortium to demonstrate the solution in three real life scenarios encompassing both right- and left-wing political extremism and health.

FERMI will exploit a holistic and cross-disciplinary methodology towards a framework that will thoroughly analyse disinformation and fake news (D&FN) and their sources, in combination with all the socioeconomic factors that may affect both the spreading of such incidents and their effects on multiple dimensions of society.

Comprising a set of innovative technological developments, FERMI will facilitate EU Police Authorities to detect and monitor the way that D&FN spread, both in terms of locations and within different segments of the society, and to put in place relevant security countermeasures. It will also produce and disseminate tailor-made training material designed for European Police Authorities, security professionals and stakeholders, as well as for EU citizens in the view to limit the spread and impact of D&FN and increasing digital trust. In doing so, FERMI will contribute to make the web safer by contrasting cyber-threats and their spillovers into real life. This line of action is essential to move towards a trustworthy and reliable digital world, which is fundamental for a fair and democratic future for the European Union. Thus, FERMI will generate knowledge and develop instruments to build an open, democratic, and sustainable society, one of the three pillars of Europe's digital future.

BIGS is mainly responsible for two key areas: First, a basic definition of fake news will be created, which will serve as a working basis for all partners. In this context, the causes, the emergence and the forms of politically motivated extremism as well as its effects on society will be examined. The aim is to determine effects of online propaganda on offline actions. In this respect, the degree of media literacy may tend to correspond to the degree of resilience in society. The means of information and news consumption is a first indicator for the assessment of media literacy. Factors such as the type of source, the "general" assessment of the medium, the level of trust (if feasible) and differentiation by age groups (demographics) play an important role. Based on secondary literature, an analysis of the media literacy of certain countries will be conducted, considering the factors mentioned above. This preliminary work allows behavioural profiles to be better differentiated and classified (FERMI Behaviour Profiler).

Second, by applying econometric methods, the effects of radicalization and extremism will be reflected in financial terms to quantify the costs of these negative effects (based on data availability in the respective country/region) for the society. This socioeconomic analysis considers different areas of economic measurement of the costs of extremism, which can lead, for example, to welfare losses through the loss of human life as well as through the physical

destruction or damage of (intellectual) property, assets or other means of production. The definition of the costs of extremism needs more differentiation. These types of economic costs are borne by the direct or indirect victims of extremism, can affect investment and real estate - as they can deter investors - directly affect policy decisions and institutional outputs, and even affect trade, mobility and tourism. This can lead to job losses - through relocation or expansion to other locations - and consequently a loss of productivity and wealth in a region. All these socioeconomic factors (based on data availability in the respective country/region) will be considered.

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