Fighting disinformation together

Disinformation related to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine

What is disinformation?

Disinformation is false or misleading information which is <u>intentionally</u> distributed. This distinguishes it from false or misleading information which emerges and is shared without an intent to deceive.

Non-state actors in Germany and abroad as well as foreign government actors use disinformation for various reasons. Distributors of disinformation **seek to deceive their audience and encourage them to spread false and misleading information further. If a foreign government spreads disinformation with the intent of exerting illegitimate influence on another country**, this constitutes a <u>hybrid threat</u>.

The intention is to create a general sense of uncertainty among the public, to influence public opinion, to disguise and distract from their own activities, to make it difficult or impossible to discuss contentious topics in a rational manner, to increase tensions in society and to undermine trust in government institutions and action.

What is the significance of disinformation related to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine?

For years, the Russian government has used its state media and supposedly neutral channels (which are in fact controlled or funded by the Russian government) **to spread disinformation and propaganda, including in Germany.** In early March 2022, the **EU issued sanctions against several Russian media outlets**, because these outlets are directly or indirectly controlled by the Russian government and **have played a major role in spreading propaganda supporting the military aggression against Ukraine. The Russian government is now making greater use of social media** to distribute disinformation and propaganda.

First of all, the **Russian government is trying to justify its war of aggression on Ukraine which violates international law**. Secondly, the Kremlin is working specifically to make it **more difficult** or impossible for the international community to respond to the war and for the **public to support Ukraine**.

What is Germany's Federal Government doing to fight disinformation?

The Federal Foreign Office and the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, as well as the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community and its executive agencies, are carefully monitoring information about the Russian

war of aggression against Ukraine for false and misleading content. The Federal Government is engaged in **proactive, fact-based communication tailored to the target group, to provide information on the current situation and the government response**. In addition to appropriate reactive measures such as correcting false information, the Federal Government is focusing on prevention and measures to **increase resilience of the entire state and society**.

Measures to increase public awareness of the issue of disinformation and to encourage a more critical approach to information and sources, particularly those in social media, are an integral part of this task, which is the responsibility of our entire society.

In addition, the Federal Government is providing further assistance, including in the form of emergency aid for media professionals who have fled Ukraine, Russia or Belarus (JX Fund) to support exile media which provide independent reporting on their home countries. This assistance is intended to provide journalists with financial support and the tools they urgently need for their work.

Along with this approach involving the entire society in the fight against disinformation, **cooperation between the federal, state and local levels, within the EU and with partner countries** is important for countering disinformation effectively. The Federal Government also **communicates regularly with providers of social media**, with the aim of promoting transparent rules that are strictly enforced by the providers.

What can you do?

Ask critical questions instead of simply sharing information

False or misleading news items or images are often shared by private individuals not because they want to cause harm, but because they are concerned. But such news items or images may help to spread uncertainty or create panic. The more emotional or dramatic the content, the more often it is shared. That is why it is so important to critically question news items and not forward them further. Don't share content without checking it first. Don't share any content that seems questionable.

Check sources and who sent the information

It is always helpful to check questionable content against at least two other sources. Current news is available from the public service news media and reputable daily and weekly newspapers and magazines.

The official websites of Germany's federal and state governments are also reliable sources of information. In the event of crises, such as Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, they offer special web pages with in-depth reporting.

www.bundesregierung.de | www.bmi.bund.de | www.germany4ukraine.de

Use fact-checking and read information

Many media outlets have fact-checking departments which examine the authenticity of photo and video material from conflict regions. The independent research institute Correctiv documents and analyses disinformation and fake news about the war in Ukraine currently in international circulation.

The Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) offers extensive information on its website about Russia's war on Ukraine as well.

www.bpb.de

www.bundesregierung.de