

# THE IMPAIRMENT of CITIZEN'S RIGHT TO INFORMATION BY "FAKE NEWS" PUBLICATION

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## Abstract

*In the context of an international society ever-evolving in the rapid development of information technology, there is a need to obtain information in a shorter time, which sometimes can lead to data being taken as real, without further verifying their trustworthiness.*

*The citizen's right to information, a fundamental one, indissolubly bound to the existence of a democratic society, has been applied in both international documents and the fundamental law. In order for the citizen to be able to make informed decisions and to participate to social life, they need information from various social fields. The need for information has become more and more acute as the surplus of information on the market has become increasingly obvious.*

*In this social context, the temptation of manipulating information, and more seriously that of breaking false news into the media market, which in the speed of everyday life, the citizen no longer has the time or the patience to check, appears more and more. The development of false information is facilitated by social media, by its barrier-free movement in the context of the information society.*

*From the point of view of the study, I intend to analyse the manner in which information manipulation and the so-called "fake news" impair the right to information, undermine democracy and which the limits, in this case, of freedom of expression, are or should be.*

**Keywords:** *right to information, freedom of expression, information, democracy, manipulation, fake news.*

## 1. General Considerations

The topic of fake news has been approached quite recently, so I shall mostly focus on journalistic resources rather than academic ones, and I shall try to harmonise the information with studies on the right to information and freedom of expression.

It is an already recognized truth that a social individual needs information and clarification; they need information from the most diverse fields and, of course, when information is not provided by institutions or business environments, one looks for information from other sources. The development of information technology has allowed individuals to get information from multiple sources, but scientific literature has insisted that the state must be the one to provide the information a citizen needs. Thus, "European citizens must be better informed (a task for which the Union itself must find means and methods, in case the media should be unable or unwilling to provide accurate and comprehensive information)"<sup>1</sup>.

The media has an overwhelming influence on society, on democracy or the lack thereof, depending on the government system. Its primary role is to provide information to the social community, to generate progress. In this context, one should also consider the fact that, under the current conditions, information becomes quickly degraded, we can even talk of the moral wear of information in the media ("information in a newspaper gets old quicker than information in a scientific paper"). The attention of professionals is needed here, so as not to provide information which is no longer actual and may create confusion in a society. In 1688, Jean de La Bruyère used to say: "A journalist goes to sleep thinking of a news that becomes old during the night, and he has to give it up in the morning as he wakes up"<sup>2</sup>.

However, what happens when the citizens' trust in official information decreases? Analysing the Edelman trust barometers<sup>3</sup>, we shall notice that the population's trust in governments, the business environment, the media and even NGOs has decreased in the latest years, depending on the social and

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<sup>1</sup> Koeck H.F. – "Der gegenwärtige Stand des Verfassungsprozesses der Europäischen Union", communication at the conference "Prezent și perspective ale statului și dreptului în contextul integrării europene", 10-12 November 2006, Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences, University of Craiova. Prof. PhD Dr. h. c. Heribert Franz Koeck is a professor of international public law and European law, Dr. Jur. (Vienna), M.C.L. (Ann Arbor), honorific professor of Pontificia Accademia Ecclesiastica (Rome), a corresponding member of Academia de Ciencias Morales y Políticas (Madrid), the Dean of the Faculty of Law of the Johannes Kepler University of Linz, Austria. <http://drept.ucv.ro/RSJ/images/articole/2008/RJ1/02Koeck.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Bârliba C. – "Informație și competență", Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1986, p. 21

<sup>3</sup> Edelman TRUST BAROMETER™ is the company's annual survey on trust and reliability, now in its 17<sup>th</sup> year. What has begun as a survey on 1300 persons in five countries, in 2001, has become a genuine measurement of trust in the entire world. The trust barometer is produced by the integrated division of research, analysis and measurement, Edelman Intelligence. <https://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/edelman-trust-barometer-archive/>

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economic periods concerned, followed by small increases, after the economic and financial crises of the last years.

The conclusion of the Edelman Trust Barometer, in 2014, was that “global trust in the media goes back to the 2010 levels; almost 80% of the countries report a lower trust on average, in the last year”.<sup>4</sup> The population’s rate of distrust in the government, business institutions, media and NGOs has kept on decreasing in 2015 as well. The average of distrust in these institutions, in 2014, was 33% of the surveyed persons and 48% in 2015.<sup>5</sup> Thus, distrust in the media is found in 60% of the states, with the results being approximately equal to 2014.

As for information sources, the Edelman Barometer of 2015 outlined an increased trust of population in online sources, compared to newspapers and television. The growing trend of trust in online sources is maintained on all three analysed levels: the first source of information on general information, the first source of information on breaking news and the most frequently used source to confirm/validate information.

In 2016, the Edelman Barometer<sup>6</sup> emphasizes a slight increase in the population’s trust in the government, business institutions, the media and non-governmental organisations, and online information sources still occupy the first position in the population’s preferences. “A change in the media landscape” is seen during 2012-2016, i.e. an increased trust in online information sources (search engines +3%, social media +7%, “only online” publications +5%).

The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer<sup>7</sup> shows a slightly decreasing trend in the population’s trust in the government, business institutions, the media and NGOs, compared to the previous years, with the media having the highest decrease, i.e. 5% (governments and the business environment -1%, NGOs -2%). Distrust in the media is seen in 82% of the analysed countries, and in 17 countries distrust reaches an all-time low, while the trust is lower than 48% in most countries.

The barometer shows that traditional media has the highest decline, -5%, and online information sources are increasing: search engines +3%, “only online” publications +5%. Social media, with -3%, is a surprise regarding the decrease of trust, compared to 2016. Another conclusion of the barometer was that official information sources are thought to be less reliable than information received from reliable persons (family, friends, etc.) and the so-called “information

from sources” is thought to be more reliable than official press releases/press statements.

The 2018 barometer<sup>8</sup>, suggestively titled “The Battle for Truth”, shows a crisis of trust at the global level, emphasizing that almost 7 out of 10 interviewed persons are worried about the use of fake news as “weapons”.

Such social behaviour has been emphasizes especially in terms of sources of information, so as to understand why propaganda, manipulation and the so-called fake news have managed to catch the audience’s attention.

In my opinion, an explanation would be that today’s social individuals urgently need information, as quickly as possible, and they are unwilling or even unable to check the information they receive. People have certain predefined sources of information, as shown by Edelman barometers, which they trust, and if information comes from sources they personally consider to be reliable, the more reliable the information becomes.

From a social and human point of view, each individual processes the information they have access to from the perspective of their education, their cultural level, as well as their individualism (filtering information according to their needs and beliefs).

There is a saying that “the tone makes the music”. Adapting the idea to the communication of information in the public space, we may notice that, sometimes, “a discourse may incite and convince just for its style and its intelligent structure, not because it would contain truth”<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. Alteration of Information: Censorship, Manipulation and Propaganda

Public perception, which has resulted in a decreased trust of citizens in the media, is that the role of media has transformed, from an objective communication channel, to a channel for conveying information to the benefit of groups of interest.

Altered, shrunk, falsified information from various points of view appears in the public space more and more often. The forms of “processing” information are various: censorship, manipulation, propaganda, disinformation, full falsification.

Information is mainly censored by suppressing some means of communication, by taking control of them and by affecting the essence and form of information, as desired by the censor. Censorship is a

<sup>4</sup> 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer global results, [http://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanInsights/2014-edelman-trust-barometer?qid=0682cc6b-2798-43d4-a9ca-fb0302ae0925&v=&b=&from\\_search=1](http://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanInsights/2014-edelman-trust-barometer?qid=0682cc6b-2798-43d4-a9ca-fb0302ae0925&v=&b=&from_search=1)

<sup>5</sup> 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer global results, [http://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanInsights/2015-edelman-trust-barometer-global-results?qid=abe04a31-1394-4f4c-9b0b-d1afaa10b0b0&v=&b=&from\\_search=1](http://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanInsights/2015-edelman-trust-barometer-global-results?qid=abe04a31-1394-4f4c-9b0b-d1afaa10b0b0&v=&b=&from_search=1)

<sup>6</sup> 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer global results, [http://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanInsights/2016-edelman-trust-barometer-global-results?qid=e3fcac3f-5c18-4d41-ae6b-6d24628262c2&v=&b=&from\\_search=1](http://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanInsights/2016-edelman-trust-barometer-global-results?qid=e3fcac3f-5c18-4d41-ae6b-6d24628262c2&v=&b=&from_search=1)

<sup>7</sup> 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer global results, <http://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanInsights/2017-edelman-trust-barometer-global-results-71035413>

<sup>8</sup> 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer global results, [http://cms.edelman.com/sites/default/files/2018-02/2018\\_Edelman\\_Trust\\_Barometer\\_Global\\_Report\\_FEB.pdf](http://cms.edelman.com/sites/default/files/2018-02/2018_Edelman_Trust_Barometer_Global_Report_FEB.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Koeck H.F. – op. cit.

form of limiting the right to information and freedom of expression, if applied by authorities, in order to preserve power. However, we may talk of some forms of censorship, not in the bad meaning, but in the sense of protecting the freedoms and rights of other people (an example would be the adoption, by the National Council of Audiovisual, of certain sanctions when the information provided to the public infringes prohibitive rules, such as information of no interest to the public, information affecting private life, etc.).

As for manipulation, it is considered that it actually does not matter what you say, but who you are targeting<sup>10</sup>. We are not discussing the distinction between political and economic manipulation, but the fact that the distortion of genuine information comes to influence the citizen's freedom to make the right decisions, in any field of his life. I consider that the multiple possibilities to disseminate information, which are used today, may result in the spreading of such information, even when it is not fully compliant with the truth. Online content manipulation is harder to detect and fight, which is why it affects more free debate and the access to accurate information, in an environment that is by excellence thought of as free.

In the early days of the press, when the coverage was not so large as now, manipulation occurred, with a focus on political issues, as the journalists or the managers of the concerned publication presented their own views. The evolution of the so-called "penny press" in the 1830s<sup>11</sup> resulted in a wider coverage, in a higher number of readers, as well as a repositioning in terms of editorial content, moving to the sensational area, which led to a different kind of distortion of information.

Propaganda as a form to influence information has a dual situation, like censorship. Propaganda in a positive sense and propaganda in a pejorative sense. Rémy Rieffel<sup>12</sup> outlines that, when it appeared, the term "propaganda" has "no pejorative connotations" (it only meant promoting religious ideas); however, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it acquired negative connotations ("the action of convincing public opinion, by using all available means of persuasion"). In Rieffel's opinion<sup>13</sup>, persuasion has "stronger" valences (political persuasion, whereby authorities want to maintain the advantage of power and disseminate the ideologies they propagate) and "milder" forms (sociological propaganda, "the complex of procedures by which a certain lifestyle and certain specific values are spread in a society").

As for the falsification of information, the journalist David Uberti<sup>14</sup> speaks of what he names one of the "most memorable fakes in American history", i.e. the fact that, in 1835, the New York Sun published a six-part series titled "Great Astronomical Discoveries Lately Made", talking of the alleged discovery of life on the Moon ("Moon Story"). Of course, the article did not include genuine information, but they cashed in that penny from the readers, drawing upon the target public's thirst for sensation. Though several journalists and writers subsequently criticized the false content of articles regarding the "Moon story" public reaction was not very strong, probably given the lack of actual information.

Other false information was published by the New York Herald in 1874, regarding the fact that animals in the Central Park Zoo had gone free in the streets of Manhattan, resulting in damages and victims. The article was accompanied by a footnote stating "The story above is pure invention. Not a single word is true". However, many readers may not have noticed it.

We can notice that these examples of fake stories were disseminated by publications with great success among the audience, and the following question comes naturally: "what makes journalists publish fake news?" I consider that one of the reasons is the quest for sensation, for publicity or audience. Especially nowadays, paid advertisements/publicity have significant influence on content, and the media is conditioned by audience (radio/tv), by views, shares or likes (online). Financial influence on the disseminated information is strongly seen here.

Another reason I see is the delivery of editorial policies following the wishes of the financier of the source of news or editorial coordinators. Thus, the Romanian public area<sup>15</sup> has lately witnessed statements from political people who admitted to having financed certain press trusts or publications, so that they might control the published information<sup>16</sup>.

Several assumptions come to mind here as well: only information favourable to the financier is published (it is genuine, but it has the potential to manipulate public opinion), actual information on the financier, which is not favourable, is not published (a form of censorship, likely to limit the citizen's right to information, especially when talking about information on decision makers), the information is fake, but it refers to competitors of the finances (completely fake news, disinforming public opinion and damaging a competitor), actual information on a competitor, not favourable to the latter, which is persistently

<sup>10</sup> "In manipulation it almost never counts what you say, but, rather how you say it". Noam Chomsky, American linguist and professor.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen A.R. – "Relatarea obiectivă în media, între religie și panaceu", *Journal Journalism și comunicare*, issue 3/2003, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Rieffel R. – "Sociologia mass media", Editura Polirom, Iași, 2008, p. 62

<sup>13</sup> Rieffel R. – op. cit., p. 59-60

<sup>14</sup> Uberti D. – "The real history of fake news", *Columbia Journalism Review*, [https://www.cjr.org/special\\_report/fake\\_news\\_history.php?link](https://www.cjr.org/special_report/fake_news_history.php?link)

<sup>15</sup> Roșca Stănescu R. – "Ziariști cumpărați la bucată. Sau în vrac / ANALIZĂ", [https://www.stiripesurse.ro/ziari-ti-cumpara-i-la-bucata-sau-in-vrac-analiza\\_1241106.html](https://www.stiripesurse.ro/ziari-ti-cumpara-i-la-bucata-sau-in-vrac-analiza_1241106.html)

<sup>16</sup> Hendrik A. – "Elena Udrea: Există situații în care UNII jurnaliști au fost PLĂTIȚI în campaniile electorale", <http://evz.ro/elena-udrea-jurnalisti-platiti.html>

disseminated (so as to create an impression of guilt of the competitor among public opinion), etc.

Another cause determining the publication of fake news is manipulation at a high, state, international level, with the international press focusing on the fake news disseminated in the United States during the 2016 electoral campaign, the ones on the Crimean War, as well as older ones, on the political situations in Cuba or Venezuela. Studies undertaken by Freedom House<sup>17</sup> have outlined an alarming increase in the number of governments manipulating their citizens by means of online information sources.

The 2017 Freedom House report on online freedom, “Manipulating Social Media to Undermine Democracy”<sup>18</sup>, outlines how governments manipulate information shared on the social media and how disturbances in the supply of internet services increase. Even when the online environment has remained generally free, information has been altered by fake news, manipulation, propaganda, the use of technical algorithms to increase the visibility of the concerned content, aggressive harassment of journalists, etc. (the example of the US was provided). Thus, the report identified five other trends which are considered to have had a significant contribution to the global decline of internet freedom in the last year: state censorship regarding mobile connectivity; restrictions on live videos applied by several governments; an increased number of technical attacks on news networks, the opposition and rights defenders; new restrictions on virtual private networks (VPN) and the concerning increase of physical attacks on internet users and online journalists.

The authors of the report state that: “Successfully countering content manipulation and restoring trust in social media—without undermining internet and media freedom—will take time, resources, and creativity. The first steps in this effort should include public education aimed at teaching citizens how to detect fake or misleading news and commentary.”

As for freedom press, the 2017 Freedom House report – “Press Freedom’s Dark Horizon”<sup>19</sup> shows that press freedom deteriorated to its lowest point in 13 years in 2016, not only in states with authoritarian regimes, but also in countries with a long-standing recognized democracy. State leaders attacked media reliability in certain countries, and telecommunication services failed in certain states at times of political or social turmoils. The authors of the report state that there is a grim outlook for the future, since, as shown in the

content, also in major democracies where such intrusions had not been witnessed before, one can see an interference with freedom of expression (in various ways: delegitimizing sources of information, editorial pressure, selling or even closing hostile publications, etc.).

In the words of Dan Swislow<sup>20</sup>, “online repression tactics (...) erode democratic dialogue”. I would add that all these methods to alter information endanger institutional transparency and good governance, the role of civil society and human rights in particular.

### 3. Fake news

This term is more and more frequently used in the public setting and more and more people express their concern on how fake news affect social life.

The American journalist Brooke Borel<sup>21</sup> considers that “(...) fake news is worrying media folks. Stories meant to intentionally mislead are an affront to journalism, which is supposed to rely on facts, reality and trust.”

At a social and human level, communication today takes place “in real time”<sup>22</sup>, and information has become actual or contemporary in the information society. The evolution of limitless online communication is an important step for society, as a “new space” is practically discovered. The current environment of information society needs uninterrupted flows of information, highly quick exchange of information, with the key words of current communication being: “immediate, instantaneous and interactive”<sup>23</sup>. Interactivity implies an exchange of information between individuals, as all are part of the communication society, with no exception. Social experience results to an ever quicker, immediate change, and an individual needs new information, faster and faster, to be able to adapt to such changes.

Some<sup>24</sup> argue that the internet is the means to transmit information that suppresses all other means. In my opinion, sending information online only helps increase the speed of information. Other means to disseminate information are still used, but their share is decreasing, given the social need to obtain information in “real time”. However, this “real time” does not leave enough time to check the accuracy of the data we are provided.

We can notice that, in the online environment especially, the most important source of information (as

<sup>17</sup> On Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/about-us>. Romania was not included in the Freedom House research.

<sup>18</sup> Manipulating Social Media to Undermine Democracy, November 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2017#>

<sup>19</sup> Press Freedom’s Dark Horizon, April 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2017#>

<sup>20</sup> Swislow D. – “The distributed denial of democracy. Coming together to address anti-democratic trolling and disinformation online”, <https://medium.com/@dswis/the-distributed-denial-of-democracy-23ce8a3ad3d8>

<sup>21</sup> Borel B. – “Fact-Checking Won’t Save Us From Fake News”, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/fact-checking-wont-save-us-from-fake-news/>

<sup>22</sup> Bourque B. – “Temps et communication: trois moments historiques. Mémoire présenté comme exigence partielle de la maîtrise en communication.”, Université du Québec à Montréal, January 2009. Le «temps réel», p. 2

<sup>23</sup> Bourque B. – op. cit., p. 78-79

<sup>24</sup> Bourque B. – op. cit., p. 78

shown by surveys), there is an amalgamation of information, with actual one being combined with fake one, so that a distinction is rendered more and more difficult. The source of information is more difficult to identify in the online environment, and the temptation to share information (apparently interesting or attractive, at a first sight) to one's virtual friends is high. The recipients, in turn, tend to believe that the information is real, since it has been provided by a reliable person.

In his 2016 article, David Uberti shows the risk of amplifying the "fake news" phenomenon for freedom of expression. He proposes that more accurate terms should be used: "disinformation, mislead, lie", considering that the generic term "fake news" discredits the entire press as a whole, which is a danger for a citizen's right to information. The author tries to show that, along the times, unreal information has appeared in prestigious publications, so that blaming the online environment nowadays only generates a dispute for the power to generate and disseminate news, a fight that, as shown before, has already been lost by the traditional media in the content of IT development.

Claire Wardle<sup>25</sup> also claims that the term "fake news" is "unhelpful", as no substitute term has been found. The journalist also states that the content of information, the motivation of people creating such information and the means to disseminate "fake news" must be subject to analysis. The author suggests a definition of information that may be included in the analysed category, i.e.:

1. "satire or parody (no intention to cause harm but has potential to fool);
2. false connection (when headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content);
3. misleading content (misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual);
4. false context (when genuine content is shared with false contextual information);
5. imposter content (when genuine sources are impersonated);
6. manipulated content (when genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive);
7. fabricated content (new content is nearly entirely false, designed to deceive and do harm)."

Analysing the typologies and hierarchy identified by Wade, we find that all previously mentioned forms of altering information may be included in the fake news category. We are fighting a genuine "information war", and causes generating fake news are multiple. In Wardle's opinion, these are: poor journalism, to parody, to provoke, passion, partisanship, profit, political influence or power and propaganda.

I consider that Wardle accurately states the causes of propagation of fake news, which affect the citizen's right to information. All identified reasons affect the integrity of information to a lesser or higher extent, so that the beneficiary no longer is certain of making informed decisions; s/he makes such decisions based on the information s/he receives which, hence, may not be fully accurate.

Authorities should be involved to prevent the spreading of fake news; such involvement could be shown with greater transparency, a better information on the adopted measures (be it the government, be it the legislative process) and the adoption of measures to regulate the virtual environment. Of course, regulating an area recognized as dedicated to the free circulation of information may result in controversy regarding the restricted right to information and freedom of expression.

Germany may be an example on the adoption of legislative measures. A draft law for improving law enforcement in social media was proposed in the spring of 2017. Criticisms to its content appeared in the public area presently, but the law<sup>26</sup> passed on September 1, 2017 and came into force on October 1, 2017. Its provisions mostly regard social media networks, as well as platforms for individual communication or specific content distribution. The provider of a social network is exempt from the obligations stipulated in this legislative act if the social network has less than two million registered users in Germany. The illegal content targeted by the text of the law is represented by facts sanctioned according to the German Criminal Code, which are not justified. The law stipulates some reporting requirements for providers, regarding complaints for illegal content, as well as the obligation to adopt an efficient and transparent procedure to manage such claims.

Italy has also passed measures against fake news, administrative action<sup>27</sup>, as the police created a website where citizens may report information that seem to be fake, which shall be checked by specialised police officers. If the information is proved to be fake, this shall be publicly informed, and in case the information is denigrating in a criminal sense, the court will be notified.

The French President, Emanuel Macron<sup>28</sup> takes into consideration amending French legislation so that more transparency is requested from online platforms.

The European Commission<sup>29</sup> also is concerned to fight such fake news, as a High Level Group (HLG)<sup>30</sup> to advise on policy initiatives to counter fake news and the spread of disinformation online, including 39 experts, academics, media organisations, journalists, social media platforms, as well as civil society

<sup>25</sup> Wardle C. – "Fake news. It's complicated", <https://firstdraftnews.com/fake-news-complicated/>

<sup>26</sup> Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Rechtsdurchsetzung in sozialen Netzwerken (Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz – NetzDG), [https://www.bmjv.de/SharedDocs/Gesetzgebungsverfahren/Dokumente/BGBl\\_NetzDG.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=2](https://www.bmjv.de/SharedDocs/Gesetzgebungsverfahren/Dokumente/BGBl_NetzDG.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2)

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/155a6077fdb05e3865595940>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica-externa/2018/01/04/emmanuel-macron-anunta-o-lege-impotriva-fake-news--30782>

<sup>29</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/fake-news>

<sup>30</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/commission-appoints-members-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>

representatives, was set up on January 15, 2018. Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, considers that “a European approach” is needed to the fake news phenomenon, with a public consultation being organized on such aspects. A conference was to be held with all stakeholders, with a view to establishing course of action and effectively protecting European citizens.

## Conclusions

Information provided to citizens must be genuine, provided in due time, and drawn up in good faith. Hans Hellmut Kirst<sup>31</sup> states that the “so-called truth is a constantly moving swing - what matters is the moment when you sit on it”. Of course, as shown in the first part, every individual filters the received information through his/her own mind, and s/he understands it according to his/her level of knowledge and understanding. However, it is essential for a citizen to be provided with diverse and reliable information, so that it may help him/her and so that s/he may choose.

Rieffel defines manipulation as “an organized lie, depriving the audience from freedom and an instrument to defeat its resistance”<sup>32</sup>. We may conclude that the citizen’s right to information is affected by any of the techniques of altering information that were exposed above.

The professional deontology of those who disseminate information in the public space (journalists), as well as the self-censorship of non-professionals (bloggers, influencers), are very important. In the first case, of the professional, traditional or “only online” media, one should go back to the recognized values of the profession, to its primary role, to accurately inform public opinion. In the second case, of persons distributing online informative content, self-censorship is important when they have no guarantee that the information they spread is genuine.

The truth always comes out, but what do we do, as a society, when fake news only satisfy the thirst for sensation, for panic, for denigrating people, etc.? In this case, I would support the idea that “a fake news maker may be a social hazard”<sup>33</sup>.

As shown by Borel<sup>34</sup> in his article, “fact-checking is key to journalism — it’s a skill and a service that’s instrumental in providing the information to the public”.

The contribution of each of us to stopping fake news, by refusing to reproduce and possibly share information, with no minimum checking, is important. Our right to information can only be defended by engaging everyone, by refusing to propagate information whose accuracy is not guaranteed. A reader should have the same degree of attention in the online and in the actual environment, and s/he should manage clicks responsibly, as they legitimize information.

Authorities also play an important part, which is, in my opinion, a guarantee of the right to information, i.e. to communicate publicly, in a transparent manner, to clarify their decisions for citizens, so as to discourage the publication and dissemination of fake news. The state’s regulatory role should be carefully analysed, since such measures could limit freedom of expression and, as in the case of any other right, a balance must be struck between guarantees and limitations.

Moreover, companies specialising in information technology should show some concern to identify new ways of recognizing fake accounts that disseminate fake news and affect the information environment.

Journalism professionals should re-focus on information, leave entertainment aside, accurately check news and try to recover the trust of information recipients, by reducing partisanship. For a good information of citizens, especially regarding public issues, information should aim at an objective presentation of facts, not public or political persons.

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<sup>32</sup> Rieffel R. – op. cit., p. 60, quoting Philippe Breton – “*Manipularea cuvântului*”, Editura Institutul European, Iași, 2006

<sup>33</sup> Bârliba C. – “Informație și competență”, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1986, p. 98 – quoting La Bruyère

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