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A FOURTH BRANCH FOR DEMOCRACY: ESTABLISHING A EUROPEAN INFORMATION AUTHORITY TO DEFEND TRUTH IN THE DIGITAL AGE

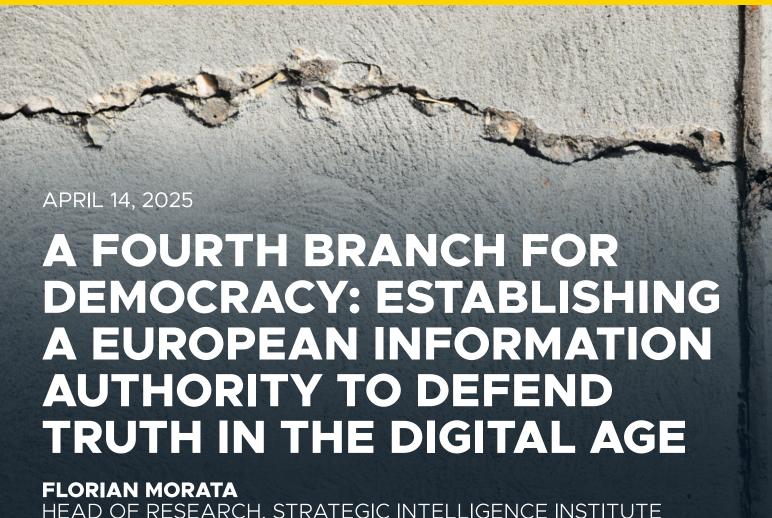**FLORIAN MORATA**
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Executive Summary:

The European Union faces an existential challenge: the erosion of truth in public discourse through coordinated disinformation, propaganda, and falsehoods. To safeguard democratic institutions and public trust, we propose the creation of a fourth institutional branch within the EU: the **European Information Authority (EIA)**. This independent body would operate with scientific rigor and democratic transparency to **monitor, flag, and correct disinformation, while preserving freedom of speech**. Its work would rely on a hybrid model of vetted AI for real-time triage and academic expert panels for authoritative review, with a robust appeals process overseen by a specialized tribunal.

1. The Problem: The Weaponization of Lies

Falsehoods have always been a danger to democracy, but the digital era has made them scalable, targeted, and profitable. Consider:

- **Russian propaganda** networks that undermine trust in elections and institutions.
- The **Trump-era "Big Lie"** that incited the abandonment of Ukraine.
- The genocidal **lies of Nazi Germany**, where propaganda prepared the public for unspeakable crimes.

Today, AI-generated misinformation, propaganda media and opaque algorithms on social networks make truth more fragile than ever, especially when they are privately owned by billionaires with questionable motives. Existing EU institutions and platform regulations (e.g. the Digital Services Act) are steps forward, but they lack the independence, scientific authority, and structural permanence to tackle this crisis long-term.

2. Proposal: The European Information Authority (EIA)

Mandate:

- Identify and address **factually false** or **highly misleading** public claims.
- Distinguish between truth, error, and opinion without entering partisan or political conflicts.
- Maintain an **evidence-based**, **scientifically grounded**, and **publicly accountable** information process.

3. Core Principles

Fact-Based, Not Opinion-Based

- Only **empirically verifiable claims** are addressed (not opinions, values, or predictions).
- Claims must be **provably false** to be restricted or taken down.

Contextual Integrity

- Misleading but factually accurate statements are flagged with **mandatory context** and references to peer-reviewed or consensus-based counterpoints.

Scientific Method as Governance Model

- Decisions are based on **peer review**, **transparent methodology**, **evidence hierarchies**, and **open data**.
- **Hypotheses are tested**, **disagreements published**, and **consensus documented**.

4. Structural Design

Composition:

- **~1,000 permanent members**, organized by disciplinary panels (climate science, health, law, AI, etc.).
- Members selected through **academic peer nomination** and **vetted public review boards**.
- Each panel has **rotating election cycles** (e.g. 1/3 replaced every 6 years).

Eligibility:

- Tenured or equivalent experts in accredited academic fields.
- Demonstrated independence from political and corporate interests.
- Diversity in geography, language, gender, and academic schools of thought.

Insulation from Political Pressure:

- Not under command of the EU Commission, Parliament, or Council.
- Budget set by a fixed percentage of EU GDP (not subject to annual negotiations).
- Immunity from arbitrary dismissal, protected by EU-level constitutional law.

5. Technological Backbone: Vetted AI and Human Expertise

To ensure timeliness and scalability:

- A **publicly vetted AI system**, trained on **transparent**, **non-partisan data**, flags disinformation in **real-time**.
- AI only triages content; **human panels verify**, **contextualize**, or **dismiss** each case.
- AI-flagged content assessed as **"high risk"** must be approved by a human **before publica-**

tion, helping to prevent the spread of massive AI-generated propaganda that frequently achieves millions of views within its first 15 minutes.

- A dedicated **Appeals Tribunal**, staffed by both legal and academic professionals, ensures checks on decisions.

- All interventions are **logged publicly**, with rationales, dissenting opinions, and evidence cited.

6. Operations & Governance

Structure:

- Divided into thematic panels (Health, Climate, Law, Economics, etc.)

- Includes multilingual monitoring hubs to cover the entire EU information space.

- Funded through a fixed GDP-tied budget line to ensure stability and independence.

Process Flow:

1. Content flagged by AI or citizens.
2. Initial human review confirms scope and priority.
3. Assigned to a relevant expert panel.
4. Published review includes classification (False, Misleading, Partially True) and required context.
5. High-risk content must be kept private for human verification before public publication.
6. Verification must be done within 24 hours to avoid "censorship by bureaucracy".
7. Public dashboard updated with outcome and appeals window.

7. A Light-Track Approach: Building a Prototype Agency

While the creation of a fourth institutional branch may require significant legal and political overhaul, a "light" version can be initiated more rapidly through existing frameworks. This **Proof-of-Concept Agency** could be launched at either the **national** or **EU agency level** as a forerunner to the full EIA.

Key Features of the Prototype Agency:

- Created under the authority of an existing institution (e.g. European Commission, or a national digital affairs ministry).

- Smaller scope: focus on 3–5 priority domains (elections, public health, climate, AI).

- Recruitment of 100–200 experts through a transparent process, with open calls and vetting.

- AI pilot built using open-source models with transparent datasets.

- Partnership with platforms for voluntary content flagging and labeling.

- Transparent dashboards and open feedback loops with civil society.

- Includes an appeal mechanism with an advisory tribunal.

Benefits:

- Easier to fund and launch.

- Politically more feasible.

- Provides real-world testing and metrics.

- Builds public trust and demonstrates effectiveness before institutionalizing.

From Pilot to Permanent Institution:

- Publish annual reports on impact, accuracy, and public response.

- Invite independent audits and academic review.

- Once trust and utility are proven, convene a multi-country coalition to propose constitutional expansion into a fully independent fourth branch.

8. Addressing Legitimate Concerns

Concern 1: Censorship / "Ministry of Truth"?

- Only **verifiably false** or **misleading content** is flagged.

- No power over opinions, satire, or political dissent.

- Decisions published openly, with minority views included.

Concern 2: Who decides what is "true"?

- Truth claims reviewed using the **scientific method:** evidence-based, peer-reviewed, and transparent.

- Multidisciplinary panels to ensure epistemic humility.

Concern 3: Bias in AI?

- AI models and data must be **fully open source** and trained exclusively on carefully **vetted data**.
- Public oversight board for auditing bias, fairness, and updates.
- AI will never be perfect, that's why decisions should be made by humans. AI is just a tool.

Concern 4: Abuse of Power?

- Robust **appeals tribunal** and annual independent audits.
- Members may not hold political office or corporate roles.

9. Democratic Legitimacy & Next Steps

To establish the EIA:

1. Draft a Charter on Information Integrity, ratified by EU-wide referendum or unanimous national approval.
2. Host a Pan-European Citizens Convention to deliberate and propose institutional mechanisms.
3. Phase 1: Expand EDMO and EUvsDisinfo with EIA principles.
4. Phase 2: Transition to permanent EIA institution by 2030.

Conclusion: A New Defense of Democracy

The right to speak freely does not include the right to deceive en masse.

If democracy is to survive in the information age, it must evolve to defend truth as a public good. The European Information Authority offers a bold but necessary reimagining of how societies distinguish truth from falsehood, not through censorship, but through scientific transparency, integrity, and public accountability.

The future of truth is the future of freedom. Europe must lead the way.