



MUNSS

GA3 Chair Report

Topic 2: Addressing the Threat That
Authoritarianism and Misinformation Present
to Freedom of Speech in the Digital Age

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Personal Statements

Chair – Simona Hiller



Honourable Delegates,

I am Simona Hiller from the Friedrich Schiller Gymnasium.

It is an honour for me to be the Chair of the General Assembly 3.

This is my third participation at MUNISS, the last two years as a delegate and this year as your chair.

I am seventeen years old and I am currently attending the 11th grade.

I've always found it exciting to see what you can do as a young person in politics and where better than at MUN?

Together with my deputy chair Carlotta Laukenmann, we will make sure that it will be a unique time with purposeful debates and great experiences!

The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (GA3) is one of the six main committees of the United Nations General Assembly. It includes all UN Member States, as well as observer states, each of which has an equal vote. Created Documents require a simple majority to pass. However, it does not have the authority to authorize armed interventions, impose sanctions, or pass binding resolutions. This committee primarily focuses on matters that directly impact people, such as human rights concerns and reports from the newly established Human Rights Council.

I look forward to seeing you all in April!

Yours sincerely,
Simona Hiller

Deputy Chair – Carlotta Laukenmann

Honourable delegates,

I am Carlotta Laukenmann and I am excited to be your deputy chair for this MUNISS conference. I am eighteen years old and attend the 11th grade at the Friedrich Schiller Gymnasium in Marbach. This will be my third MUNISS conference. The previous two times I attended as a delegate and this will be my first time as a chair.



I hope you all have a successful preparation time and I look forward to seeing you in April and having some interesting and fruitful debates!

Kind regards,
Carlotta Laukenmann

Introduction

In the digital age, the freedom of speech, which lies at the centre of all liberal democracies, is threatened by at least three sides: It is threatened inside the authoritarian regimes, as public opinion is manipulated through disinformation and censorship to fit the state agenda. It is under threat from authoritarian regimes using disinformation to destabilize liberal democracies from the inside by spreading fake news and influencing election results through internet trolls and social media. It is also threatened by disinformation campaigns from populist parties and groups inside liberal democracies disseminating fake news, thus hijacking the public discourse. These challenges are particularly relevant today as democratic societies worldwide struggle with issues such as electoral manipulation, censorship laws, and the role of major technology companies in moderating content. Recent events, including the spread of conspiracy theories influencing elections, government crackdowns on digital activists, and the increasing use of artificial intelligence to generate disinformation, highlight the urgency of addressing this issue. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how misinformation can have life-or-death consequences, as false narratives about vaccines and treatments spread rapidly online, influencing public health responses. The question facing the international community is how to combat these threats without infringing on fundamental rights. Overregulation or broad censorship policies risk being exploited by authoritarian governments to silence opposition, while an absence of oversight can allow harmful falsehoods to proliferate unchecked. It is essential to develop strategies that uphold freedom of speech while promoting accountability, transparency, and responsible digital governance. This report will look at how misinformation and government control in the digital space affect free speech, focusing on the role of governments, tech companies, and international organizations. Delegates must find a balance between fighting false information and protecting free expression, ensuring that any solutions uphold human rights and democracy. The decisions made in this committee will shape the future of free speech in the digital age.

Glossary

Authoritarianism – Blind submission to authority and the repression of individual freedom of thought and action. Authoritarian regimes are systems of government that have no established mechanism for the transfer of executive power and do not afford their citizens civil liberties or political rights. Power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader or a small elite, whose decisions are taken without regard for the will of the people.(Lindstaedt)

Generative AI – Generative AI can be thought of as a machine-learning model that is trained to create new data, rather than predicting a specific dataset. A generative AI system is one that learns to generate more objects that look like the data it was trained on. (Zewe)

Censorship – The suppression or restriction of speech, communication, or access to information, often by governments or private entities. This can include blocking websites, removing content, or punishing individuals for their opinions.

Misinformation – False or misleading information that is spread, regardless of intent. Unlike disinformation, misinformation may not be deliberately designed to deceive.

Disinformation – False or misleading information that is intentionally spread to manipulate public opinion, distort facts, or influence events, often used by state actors or organizations.

Fake News – A broad term used to describe false information presented as legitimate news, often designed to mislead people or influence political or social issues.

Freedom of Speech – The right to express opinions without government restriction, protected under international human rights law. However, this right is subject to limitations, such as restrictions on hate speech or incitement to violence.

Digital Surveillance – The monitoring of online activity, communications, and behavior, often by governments or corporations, which can be used for security purposes but may also infringe on privacy and free speech.

State-Controlled Media – News and media organizations that are directly or indirectly controlled by the government, often used to spread propaganda or suppress dissenting opinions.

Content Moderation – The process by which social media platforms and websites regulate user-generated content, removing harmful material such as hate speech, misinformation, or violent content.

Internet Shutdowns – The deliberate disruption of internet access by governments, often used to suppress protests, control the flow of information, or prevent the spread of dissent.

Issue Explanation

In the past decades, traditional media outlets have decreased in significance in favour of online spaces, which has deepened our reliance on social media as a source of information. However social media is being increasingly targeted by not only authoritarian regimes but many governments in this world in order to censor opposition and influence opinion.

Freedom of speech online is at an all-time low, according to the Freedom on the Net Study. In many countries, people can face arrests or even being attacked or killed due to their activity on the internet.

In at least 25 elections censorship of opposing opinions and content manipulation have been used to influence the outcome of the election for example Russia and Bangladesh.

Access to content from opposing political parties was reduced, so that they weren't able to reach possible voters. This censorship was also applied to independent reporters. (Funk)

In an age where most people rely on online spaces to inform themselves and form their political opinion, the inability of these people to access unbiased information, due to censorship and disinformation can lead to rigged elections and if left unchecked the establishment of more authoritarian regimes.

Combatting disinformation on the internet is currently facing a newly arising issue. The use of generative AI has become incredibly easy, allowing anybody to fake information through pictures in a matter of seconds. With the improvement of large language models, it will become increasingly more difficult to tell real sources from generated ones.

Generated pictures are becoming increasingly similar to real photos and videos will likely follow this trend in the near future. Governments could use this technology to manipulate the population into believing what fits their agenda. Especially if content from international sources is censored.

How many people are affected by the issue?

5.56 people or 67.9% of the global population are internet users as of February 2025. 63.9% use social media. (Petrosyan) This issue affects over half of the world's population directly and might affect even more indirectly. This is also mirrored by the fact that 63% of younger Europeans claim that they have come across fake news more than once a week. 51% of Europeans think that they have been exposed to disinformation online. The scope of the issue becomes clear when 83% of the people think disinformation threatens democracy. (EU code)

Perspectives of Parties Involved

United States of America:

The new Trump administration proclaims the aim to protect free speech as the president wrongfully accuses the previous Biden administration of limiting that right. Trump believes there should be no regulations on what can be said online. (Restoring Freedom) However, the Trump administration has been censoring critical speech. For example, reporters of the Associated Press have been accused of disinformation and banned from White House events due to the press agency not complying with Trump's executive order to rename the Gulf of Mexico. (Johnson)

People's Republic of China:

China has consistently ranked as the worst abuser of internet freedom. (China: Freedom on the Net) The country engages heavily in media censorship and many foreign servers are blocked there. They successfully banned all information on the Tiananmen-Massacre in June 1989 for all internet users inside China.

European Union:

The EU wants to ensure greater transparency and accountability of online platforms. Additionally, they aim to provide a structured framework for monitoring and improving the policies on disinformation on these platforms. (Digital Services Act)

Since the year 2000, Russia's President Wladimir Putin has transformed the country fundamentally. Today Russia can count as an authoritarian country with severe restrictions on civil rights. With his unprovoked and illegal attack on Ukraine he started an unprecedented disinformation campaign: He wrongly claimed that his attack on Ukraine was acceptable to oust an alleged Nazi-government, that he wasn't waging war at all and threatened everyone contesting the official version with up to 15 years in jail. He banned social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. He also banned NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and forbade the work of international civil society organisations. Thus he managed to control all the information accessible to his people.

The new law on the dissemination of disinformation threatens anyone who contradicts it. (Demokratie und Rechtsstaatlichkeit)

History of the Topic

According to FOTN online freedom has been on the decline for 14 consecutive years. (Funk)

In 2012 the UN Human Rights Council approved a resolution to protect free speech on the internet (Zeldin)

2018 Myanmar: UN finds that Facebook was a key tool to spread hate and enable the subsequent violence against the Rohingya minority due to Meta not regulating the spread of misinformation and hate speech. (UN blames Facebook)

Between January and June 2021, Facebook restricted over 600 posts in Vietnam after requests from its government, due to them allegedly criticising the Vietnamese government. Additionally, in the same time period, it also restricted 442 posts in India, following the direction of India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. Following these actions, many groups criticised Facebook's complicity in government censorship on their site and pointed out the danger this could pose to freedom of press.

2022 Elon Musk, the richest man on earth, bought the online platform Twitter to allegedly transform it into a place of free speech. What he actually did was provide a space for unregulated hate speech and using it to influence election campaigns (USA 2024 and Germany 2025)

In 2025 Marc Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, announced in advance obedience to the Trump administration that he would stop fact checking and allow unregulated discussions on sensitive issues such as immigration and gender identity.

Potential Solutions for the issue:

To address the growing threats of authoritarianism and misinformation to freedom of speech, the **United Nations (UN)** can take a leading role in establishing global standards for digital rights. This includes creating a legally binding framework that protects free expression while countering disinformation, strengthening the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and passing stronger resolutions against digital repression. The UN can also support independent fact-checking initiatives, promote digital literacy programs through UNESCO, and pressure tech companies to improve transparency in content moderation. Additionally, monitoring and sanctioning governments that engage in internet censorship, surveillance, and disinformation campaigns would help hold bad actors accountable.

In the **United States (US)**, strengthening legislation on disinformation while safeguarding free speech is crucial. The US government can introduce regulations requiring tech companies to disclose how their algorithms promote or suppress content and impose sanctions on authoritarian regimes that engage in digital repression. Expanding cybersecurity protections against foreign disinformation campaigns, increasing funding for independent journalism, and enhancing whistleblower protections are also key steps. Furthermore, investing in digital literacy programs in schools and collaborating with allies such as the EU and NATO would help create a unified global response to disinformation and digital authoritarianism.

The **European Union (EU)** can continue leading efforts to regulate online platforms through the **Digital Services Act (DSA)** and **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** while ensuring transparency in content moderation. The EU could establish an independent, government-backed fact-checking network and impose stricter measures to prevent foreign disinformation campaigns, particularly during elections. Promoting digital rights as fundamental human rights, developing fair AI regulations for content moderation, and supporting research in cybersecurity and counter-misinformation strategies will further strengthen its approach. By combining international cooperation, strong regulations, and public education, the UN, US, and EU can work together to protect freedom of

speech while mitigating the dangers posed by misinformation and authoritarian control in the digital space.

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