

Memorandum on Regional Cooperation in Combating Fake News and Enhancing PR Education

Preface

As promoters of truth, transparency, and trust—fundamental values in Public Relations—and in line with our commitment to international standards, the national PR associations from eight countries have pledged to strengthen cooperation across the region. We will focus our joint efforts on combating fake news and updating university curricula to equip future professionals with the skills they need to tackle emerging challenges in communication.

Background

This memorandum is the result of discussions held during the Regional Summit organized online by the Romanian Association of Public Relations (ARRP) on November 23rd, 2023. The summit brought together PR professionals from eight countries in the region to address the growing challenges of fake news and explore opportunities for cooperation in improving PR education.

Fake news counts! How?

The spread of fake news has escalated over the past decade, following events like the Arab Spring and gaining momentum during the Ebola epidemic, the Brexit vote, and U.S. elections. Our region is not immune. Political, economic, and cultural narratives have all been distorted by fake news, making it increasingly difficult for citizens to discern factual information and make informed decisions.

Based on the Eurobarometer on fake news (2018), 37% of respondents said they were exposed to fake news daily or almost daily, with 31% at least once a week. However, only 1 in 3 Europeans expressed strong confidence in their ability to recognize fake news.

Technological progress and AI have not only facilitated the spread of fake news but have also enhanced its sophistication. What was once detectable through cross-referencing three sources has evolved into "deepfakes," where fake voices and images make it nearly impossible to verify authenticity.

Why We Should Act

As PR professionals, our commitment to truth and transparency makes us uniquely positioned to combat fake news. In the context of a busy electoral calendar and the escalating geopolitical tensions in the region, our role in promoting accurate, ethical communication is more critical than ever. By reinforcing the integrity of public discourse, we can mitigate the disinformation that threatens both democracy and civic engagement.

In this political and social context, we, as professional PR associations, are responsible for upholding ethics in media relations and educating future professionals in the spirit of truth. Our duty extends beyond combating fake news; we must also impose norms and standards in public communication.

Playing Our Part

As national professional associations of Public Relations, we are committed to close regional cooperation and to taking systematic and effective actions to combat fake news. We also pledge to significantly contribute to the education of future communication professionals across institutions, organizations, corporations, administration, and civil society. To fulfill these objectives, we commit to:

- encourage collaboration in the region among our associations to strengthen resistance to fake news and develop norms for professional communicators to follow;
- offer support (human resources and skills) to national associations to combat anti-democratic and exclusionary discourse in their respective countries;
- share expertise and best practices regarding crisis management with local and regional third parties actively involved in combating fake news;

- invite national institutions, decision-makers, academia, and the media to collaborate and support initiatives to combat fake news at the national or regional level;
- make joint efforts to update university curricula in educational programs for future communicators, ensuring they are better prepared to combat fake news.

We will pursue these commitments, along with other necessary activities, with full integrity, transparency, and in accordance with ICCO's ethical norms and principles. Our focus will be on increasing resistance to fake news and improving professional training for future PR professionals across the region: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. The success of our cooperation will be measured by the reduction of anti-democratic discourse and the increase in civic engagement aimed at strengthening democratic values.

We call on national institutions, decision-makers, academia, and media to collaborate in this vital mission. By pooling our expertise and resources, we can strengthen the region's defenses against fake news and disinformation, ensuring a more informed and engaged public.

We will organize regular summits, workshops, and collaborations over the next two years to monitor progress, share insights, and adjust our strategies. Our success will be measured not only by the reduction of fake news but also by the increased resilience of our societies in defending democratic values.

Final Call

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Signatory Section

We, the undersigned, hereby commit to the principles and actions outlined in this memorandum and pledge to collaborate in combating fake news and improving the education of future communications professionals in our region.

| Full Name | Position | Signature |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------|
| Maxim BEHAR | President of the World Communication Forum Association (WCFA) | |
| Grzegorz SZCZEPAŃSKI | ZFPR - Polish Public Relations Consultancies Association, Founder and President President of International Communications Consultancy Organization (ICCO) | |
| András SZTANISZLAV | HuPRA - Hungarian PR Association, President Chief Executive of International Communications Consultancy Organization (ICCO) | |
| Iva Grigorova | BAPRA - Bulgarian Association of PR Agencies Chairperson | |
| Sergii BIDENKO | UPRA - The United PR Association of Ukraine President | |
| Cătălin HOSU | ARRP - Romanian Association of Public Relations Vice president and Board Member | |
| Radek MARŠÍK | APRA - Association of Public Relations from Czech Republic President | |
| Mario AUNEDI MEDEK | CPRA - Croatian Public Relations Association President and Board Member | |

ARRP

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ASRP - Association of Public Relations from
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Date: 09.09.2024

