

Jeremy Godfrey Opening Statement

I thank the Committee for the invitation to appear today. I am Jeremy Godfrey, Executive Chair of Coimisiún na Meán and I am joined today by my colleagues Stephanie Comey and Tiernan Kenny.

Coimisiún na Meán's overall purpose is to ensure a thriving, diverse, creative, safe and trusted media landscape. This plays a crucial role in supporting an open democratic society.

Disinformation and misinformation can undermine democracy and require a cross-societal response. Coimisiún na Meán has contributed to the National Counter-Disinformation Strategy Working Group and expect to have a significant role in the recommendations and actions arising from the strategy.

I should like to highlight three ways in which we help to address the challenge: our regulation of online platforms, our promotion of media literacy, and our promotion of reliable and trustworthy journalism.

The recent elections for the European Parliament, and the local, and Limerick mayoral elections were the first elections held since the EU Digital Services Act became fully applicable earlier this year. We worked with the European Commission and our counterparts in other member states on the development of guidelines about how platforms should analyse and respond to the threats posed by disinformation and misinformation. We coordinated the implementation of the guidelines in Ireland, including facilitating collaboration between platforms, An Coimisiún Toghcháin and accredited fact checkers.

While a full review of the elections and the effectiveness of the guidelines is pending, the European Digital Media Observatory has noted that there were no large-scale, last-minute disinformation incidents. However overall levels of online disinformation about the EU increased significantly in the months before the vote.

There were also incidents of online abuse of electoral candidates. We provided candidates with a briefing pack on their rights and will be reviewing how we can improve the effectiveness of the mechanisms for protecting participants in public life from online hate speech and harassment.

We have long promoted media literacy through our support of Media Literacy Ireland. This initiative aims to counter disinformation by equipping people to evaluate information, and to increase awareness about the ownership, operation, and regulation of the media landscape. This helps them make informed choices about what they see, read and share online.

We collaborate on media literacy initiatives with our regulatory counterparts and media literacy experts across Europe so we can identify and apply best practices in media literacy. We also helped to localise and to promote pan-European media literacy campaigns associated with the recent elections.

Trusted journalism plays an important role in promoting information integrity, and countering disinformation. We support trust in broadcast journalism with our rules requiring fairness, accuracy and balance in news and current affairs. We also recognise the role of public service media in providing reliable journalism, and deploying it online as well as in traditional broadcast bulletins.

We have started a review of the broadcasting moratorium, to consider if it is still effective and useful in the shifting media landscape and we expect to have this review concluded later this year.

Finally, we intend to shortly open applications for our first two journalism schemes, focusing on reporting on district courts and the activities of local authorities. While the schemes themselves are not designed to address fake news, a thriving and pluralistic news media landscape can help to meet the challenges of disinformation and fake news. The Future of Media Commission report of course recommended the creation of five journalism schemes, and we look forward to bringing these to life in due course.