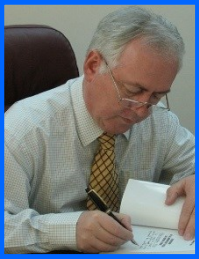


Motto: "Opinions are free, but not mandatory"—I.L.Caragiale

## EDITORIAL

### "Fake news" - "everything changes since nothing changes"

*Corneliu PIVARIU*



Fake news (FN) was The Word of the Year 2017 (according to Collins Dictionary), a term which was not to much in use two years ago. Nonetheless, the governments and influential people used the information as weapon thousands of years ago for maintaining and enforcing their power as well as for weakening their opponents/competitors. The example used often for illustrating the term dates back to the Roman period, when Octavian used a disinformation campaign for defeating Mark Antony (who eventually committed suicide).

In the XXth century, when new forms of mass communication permitted carrying out much more extended disinformation and manipulation operations, especially during war time and the most notable example in this respect is the Fascist regime in Germany.

There are several definitions of FN, yet there is none internationally accepted (if one din't succeed in defining terrorism, how could have FN been defined?), and there are different estimations concerning the importance and the effects of FN as well as the actions to be taken for limiting the FN negative consequences in the society. We underline the deliberate character of FN. Furthermore, FN is in strong correlation with another term in vogue, *post-truth* (The Word of The Year 2016, according to Oxford Dictionary - see the editorial in Strategic Pulse No. 232/05.03.2017), and the FN relevance increased in the post-truth politics.

A Freedom House research covering 65 countries that pay pro-government commentators shows that the number of countries paying for FN increased gradually from 20 countries in 2013 to 30 countries in 2017. The government-run interference in on-line media (in the same number of 65 analyzed countries) led to the expansion of governmental media in 33 countries while FN about the elections was contested in 16 countries and 10 countries practice the electronic identity theft.

In general, one witnesses a decline of public trust in mainstream media while the trust in on-line media evolves differently (increases or decreases) due to factors pertaining in general to education, culture, freedom of expression, etc.

Before the emergence of Internet, the process of disseminating information and, implicitly, FN was much more costly, as earning the trust of a certain public could last several years and media regulation or selfregulation was much easier. The growth of social media eliminated many of the limits preventing the FN dissemination within democratic regimes, the financial field included. Practically, everyone can create and disseminate data. Facebook and Twitter ( with 2 billion and, respectively, 330 million users) allow an exchange of information in real time and on a scale that could not have been even anticipated in the past, while platforms such as WordPress permit anyone to easily create a dynamic site. In fact, barriers to disseminating FN are almost nonexistent. Yet, if it is relatively easily to measure the FN disseminating capacity, it is difficult to appreciate its influence. The multitude of data and information that are conveyed makes its filtering by a common citizen more and more difficult and who is, most of the times, confused by data's rapidity, multitude and diversity as he is bombarded with and doesn't know what to believe. It is the situation in which he acts in accordance with his own misconceptions (which, in their turn, can be shaped over time).

One of the FN most recent examples is the dissemination, by Syrian media and the Russian trolls, (an activity that increased by 2,000% within the first 24 hours after the April 14th attack on chemical facilities in Syria) in accordance to whom 17 or 71 (see the figures game intended to induce doubts) missiles launched by the allies were intercepted. In fact, no interception took place.

The history's wheel continues to revolve, time is pressing us and the danger of mistaking the reality with one's own wisher or with a FN induced reality is ever bigger. Since the battle between the Hittites and Egyptians, in the XIIIth century B.C., and until today "everything changes since nothing changes".