



A ban on false information would bring us closer to "1984"

Audrey Duperron

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The fight against false information, imposing censorship on us, could bring us closer to a world similar to the one described in the dystopian novel "1984" by George Orwell, say representatives of 2 think tanks American and Danish Who defend individual freedoms, in an opinion piece in The Washington Post .

Flemming Rose is a member of the Cato Institute (an American think tank), while Jacob Mchangama heads the think tank Justitia (based in Copenhagen).

Indeed, more and more voices, especially those of politicians, call for treating the dissemination of false information as a crime at the penal level, and possibly sanctioning it with prison sentences. European Commissioner for Justice Vera Jourova threatened Facebook and Twitter to introduce a law in response to their passivity in the face of the spread of false news. In EU member states, including Germany and Italy, legislators have also proposed taking measures against tech giants to force them to fight against the dissemination of this deliberately misleading information.

A remedy worse than evil

They recall that during the Cold War it was forbidden in the Soviet Union and within the Eastern bloc to criticize the political and social system. This ban was used to muzzle dissidents of all kinds.

"It is understandable that liberal democracies are very concerned about misinformation, which is ruining the fabric of pluralistic democratic societies. (...) But this justification loses much of its relevance when lies and misinformation become impossible to distinguish from the truth, "write Rose and Mangangama.

Clearly, it is freedom of expression that could be achieved, which would make this struggle a first step towards a repressive dictatorship. The remedy could therefore be worse than the evil.

"And there is no need to dig through the Cold War archives to worry about what happens when governments become arbiters of the truth"

Egypt, The Gambia or Russia

The authors cite examples from Egypt, the Gambia or Russia. "In the last two years, Egypt has sentenced six Al Jazeera journalists to death penalty or long prison sentences for allegedly spreading false information. In 2013, the Gambia - until the dismissal of Yahya Jammeh, one of the worst dictatorships in Africa - introduced a sentence of up to 15 years' imprisonment and heavy fines for those accused of spreading "false Information "(...). Russia (...) uses vague and far-reaching anti-extremism laws to prohibit news that the Kremlin considers to be propaganda, including prison sentences for social media users who continue to assert That the Crimea is part of Ukraine. "

Europe is not safe

The two authors also warn Europeans:

"Europe could soon find itself with populists in power like Marine Le Pen in France, and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands. Such leaders would draw a line between false information and freedom of expression very different from that traced by traditional politicians ".