



## **History proves how dangerous it is to have the government regulate fake news**

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Italy's antitrust chief Giovanni Pitruzzella feels so overwhelmed by the amount of information on the internet that he has called for government regulation to fight fake news. Pitruzzella builds his case by contrasting the First Amendment with the European Convention on Human Rights, which he argues provides no constitutional protection of "fake news." This is due to an interpretation of the limits of protected speech that says that the distribution of "fake news," in Pitruzzella's words, violates Europeans' "right to be pluralistically informed." Yes, our digital era and the explosion of speech and communication on social media are unique.

But the introduction of the printing press in the 15th century and its impact on the world in the ensuing centuries may serve as an instructive analogy from which Pitruzzella may take a lesson or two. In the 16th and 17th century, access to the press triggered waves of fake news and dissemination of wild conspiracy theories about witches and millenarian crazes. Religious fanaticism was printed side-by-side with scientific discoveries. During the first century after Gutenberg, print did as much to spread lies and false information as enlightened truth.

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