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**FINAL PROPOSAL | LISBON CONFERENCE**

Approved by at the EAPC 2025 LISBON CONFERENCE [May 8<sup>th</sup> 2025]

BRIEF STATEMENT – SHORT VERSION

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## **EAPC LISBON DECLARATION**

### **Defending Democracy, Combating Populism and Disinformation**

We, the members of the **European Association of Political Consultants (EAPC)**, united in our commitment to democratic principles, ethical political consulting, and the integrity of public debate, issue this **Lisbon Declaration** as a strategic Call to Action for European political leaders, policymakers, and consultants.

#### **I. The Threats to Democracy**

Democracy in Europe is under siege from rising populism, disinformation, influence from outside, vote buying, election misleading and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions. These challenges undermine informed decision-making, polarize societies, and weaken the foundations of democratic governance. As political professionals, we recognize our responsibility to counter these threats with integrity, transparency, and a firm commitment to truth.

#### **II. Our Commitments**

To safeguard European democracy, we pledge to uphold the following principles and encourage all political actors to do the same:

1. **Defending Democratic Institutions**
  - Strengthen and protect democratic norms, free elections, and the rule of law.
  - Promote an independent media ecosystem as a cornerstone of democratic accountability.
2. **Countering Disinformation and the spreading of Fake News**
  - Reject and actively combat the use of false narratives, manipulated content, and AI-generated misinformation.
  - Support fact-checking initiatives and encourage media literacy programs to empower citizens.
3. **Promoting Ethical Political Communication**
  - Ensure that political campaigns and advisory strategies are based on factual, transparent, fact-checked and responsible messaging.
  - Reject deceptive tactics, including deepfakes, algorithmic misleading, and targeted regime-led disinformation campaigns.
4. **Strengthening Public Trust**
  - Encourage political leaders to engage in open, evidence-based discourse rather than exploit fear, division, or resentment.
  - Advocate for policies that foster civic engagement and social cohesion.

#### 5. **Resisting Populism and Polarization**

- Reject simplistic, divisive narratives that undermine constructive policymaking.
- Support inclusive, long-term solutions to societal challenges rather than exploit short-term populist gains.

### **III. A Call to Action**

We call upon political parties, governments in all European Countries, the European Parliament and The European Council, civil society, and media organizations across Europe to join us in this commitment. Political consultants, as key players in shaping public discourse, must take a leadership role in fostering a political environment based on trust, responsibility, and democratic integrity.

The **Lisbon Declaration** is a commitment to defending European democracy from misleading, distortion, and division. The future of our democratic societies depends on our ability to resist disinformation, reject populism, and uphold the values of truth, fairness, and accountability.

**Adopted in Lisbon, March 8<sup>th</sup> 2025**

*European Association of Political Consultants (EAPC)*



## **EAPC LISBON DECLARATION**

### **Defending Democracy, Combating Populism and Disinformation**

#### **I. Introduction: A Call to Action**

European democracy stands at a crossroads. The rise of **populism**, the spread of **disinformation**, and the increasing use of **manipulative political tactics** threaten the core principles of democratic governance. Trust in democratic institutions, electoral processes, and media credibility is weakening, creating an environment where falsehoods thrive, polarization deepens, and citizens become disillusioned with the political system.

We, the members of the **European Association of Political Consultants (EAPC)**, recognize our unique responsibility in shaping political communication and public discourse. United in our commitment to democratic principles, ethical political consulting, and the integrity of public debate, we issue this **Lisbon Declaration** as a strategic Call to Action for European political leaders, policymakers, and professional consultants to combat these growing threats and **strengthen democracy through integrity, transparency, and responsibility**.

#### **II. Key Challenges Facing European Democracy**

A Key challenge facing European Democracy lies in the increasingly fragile state of its political environment, a reality that this section seeks to diagnose, identifying the main symptoms that illustrate these threats.

##### **1. The Rise of Populism and Political Misleading**

- Populist movements exploit fear, resentment, and societal divisions, offering simplistic solutions to complex problems.
- Political actors increasingly abuse of manipulative emotional framing, divisive rhetoric, and identity-based politics to mobilize support, often at the expense of rational policy debate.
- Democratic institutions are weakened when populist leaders attack checks and balances, media independence, and the legitimacy of electoral processes.

##### **2. The Spread of Disinformation and Fake News, Influence from outside, Vote buying, Election manipulation**

- Digital platforms, artificial intelligence (AI), and social media have accelerated the spread of false and misleading narratives.
- Deepfakes, manipulated images, Influence from outside, Vote buying, Election manipulation and algorithmic amplification are increasingly used to distort reality and mislead voters.
- State and non-state actors engage in coordinated disinformation campaigns, influencing elections and public opinion on critical issues such as climate change, migration, and security.

##### **3. The Erosion of Public Trust**

- Citizens are losing confidence in political leaders, institutions, and the media, making them more susceptible to conspiracy theories and extremist rhetoric.

- The failure to address socioeconomic grievances has fueled dissatisfaction with democratic governance, leading to greater receptiveness to authoritarian and illiberal alternatives.
- The lack of media literacy and critical thinking skills has made it easier for disinformation to spread unchallenged.

### III. EAPC's Commitments to Democratic Integrity

To counter these challenges, the EAPC commits to **five strategic principles**:

#### 1. Defending Democratic Institutions and the Rule of Law

- Advocate for **strong, independent democratic institutions** that uphold constitutional checks and balances.
- Promote **fair, transparent, and competitive electoral processes** free from foreign interference and digital manipulation.
- Strengthening **press freedom and independent journalism** as essential pillars of democracy.

#### 2. Countering Disinformation and the Spreading of Fake News

- Reject and **actively expose false narratives**, fact-checking political statements and campaign materials.
- Promote **responsible digital policies** to curb AI-driven misinformation and deepfake misleading.
- Support **media literacy initiatives** to equip citizens with the skills to critically assess information sources.

#### 3. Promoting Ethical Political Communication

- Uphold **truthful, transparent, and responsible messaging** in political campaigns.
- Reject **clickbait tactics, AI-generated misleading, and deceptive framing of information**.
- Encourage **cross-party collaboration** on setting ethical standards for political communication.

#### 4. Restoring Public Trust and Civic Engagement

- Foster **meaningful political dialogue** that engages citizens in democratic decision-making.
- Address **legitimate social and economic grievances** with evidence-based policies rather than emotional misleading.
- Encourage politicians to **listen to diverse perspectives**, engaging in constructive rather than adversarial debate.

#### 5. Resisting Populism and Political Polarization

- Challenge populist narratives with **fact-based, long-term policy solutions** rather than simplistic slogans.
- Promote **inclusive politics** that prioritize unity, shared values, and the common good over division and fear.
- Encourage political parties to **develop solutions that address societal frustrations** rather than exploit them for short-term gains.

### IV. Guidelines for Political Consultants and Campaign Professionals

As political consultants, we recognize our responsibility in shaping the future of political discourse. The EAPC **establishes the following guidelines** for all professionals engaged in political advisory, strategy, and campaigning:





1. **Transparency in Campaigning**
  - Disclose **sources of campaign funding and digital advertising strategies**.
  - Refrain from **using dark money, hidden sponsorships, or foreign-influenced campaign tactics**.
2. **Accountability in Digital Political Communication**
  - Avoid **algorithmic manipulation, bot-driven amplification, and targeted disinformation tactics**.
  - Support **platform accountability and regulatory efforts** to combat online misinformation.
3. **Ethical Use of AI in Political Campaigns**
  - Do not use **AI-generated content to mislead, deceive, or manipulate voter perceptions**.
  - Support legislation and industry standards for **ethical AI use in politics**.
4. **Fact-Based Political Advertising**
  - Ensure that all **political advertisements are verifiable and do not mislead the public**.
  - Support **clear labeling of AI-generated or manipulated content** in political messaging.
5. **Commitment to Constructive Political Debate**
  - Engage in **substantive issue-based discussions** rather than resorting to fear-mongering and personal attacks.
  - Promote **civic education and open democratic engagement** as tools to counter radicalization and misinformation.

## V. A Shared Responsibility for a Stronger Democracy

We call upon **political parties, governments in all European Countries, the European Parliament and The European Council, policymakers, civil society organizations, media professionals, and technology platforms** to join us in this commitment. Political consultants, as key players in shaping public discourse, must take a leadership role in fostering a political environment based on trust, responsibility, and democratic integrity.

**The Lisbon Declaration** is more than a statement—it is a **framework for action** to protect the integrity of democracy against populism, disinformation, and the erosion of public trust. The future of European democracy depends on **our collective ability to reject misleading, resist division, and uphold the principles of truth, fairness, and democratic integrity**.

We pledge to be at the forefront of this effort—defending democracy, strengthening responsible political communication, and ensuring that the future of European politics is built on transparency, accountability, and respect for democratic values.

**Adopted in Lisbon, March 8<sup>th</sup> 2025**  
**European Association of Political Consultants (EAPC)**

