

# The US-controlled fact-checking mafia from Correctiv, DPA, NewsGuard & Co. is facing a strong headwind

by Norbert Häring,\* Germany



Norbert Häring.  
(Picture ma)

*NewsGuard, presumably an important service provider for the government's censorship campaign against independent, critical media, is facing a parliamentary investigation in the US to clarify the company's relationship with the*

*government and its handling of conflicts of interest. The so-called fact-checkers are also facing massive headwinds.*

NewsGuard is a US organisation founded and managed by former publishers and editors-in-chief of the *Wall Street Journal*, *Reuters*, *AP* and *Chicago Tribune* in 2018, which compiles negative lists of supposedly unreliable websites. "Unreliable" is generally a synonym for "critical of the government".<sup>1</sup>

In 2022, the *World Health Organisation* (WHO) announced that it was working with *NewsGuard Technologies* "to obtain the latest trends on disinformation topics and identify *which websites and accounts are spreading them*".<sup>2</sup> NewsGuard provides data on disinformation collected on behalf of the WHO in electronic form to relevant social media and search platforms. According to the WHO, these platforms are happy to delete posts objected to by the WHO.

It is not known whether and to what extent NewsGuard has also acted on behalf of the US government and other governments to suppress unwelcome contents. An investigation by the *House Oversight Committee* of the US Congress should shed some light on this. According to a report by *Reclaim the Net magazine*,<sup>3</sup> the company has been asked to hand over all documents relating to contracts with the government to the

committee, as well as its handling of conflicts of interest and its own mistakes.

This was preceded by complaints from *The Daily Wire*, *The Federalist* and the state of Texas, among others, attacking the fact that a company subsidised by the government with 750,000 dollars is assessing the "reliability" of media critical of the government, and that social media platforms are using this as a basis for censorship measures.

## Fact-checkers under pressure

The fact that 130 fact-checking organisations from 80 countries recently gathered in Sarajevo, Bosnia, for their eleventh "world conference" clearly shows the scale of the fight organised by governments against so-called disinformation, i.e. against criticism of them. This corresponds with a *press release* from the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in Florida.<sup>4</sup> This is where the threads of the international network of fact-checkers converge.

Poynter founded the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) in 2015, which many of the most important international news agencies and publishers quickly joined. In Germany and Austria, members include the leading news agencies DPA and APA and the pro-government "research collective" *Correctiv*. The network is *funded*<sup>5</sup> by the US State Department, the *National Endowment for Democracy* (NED), the *Omidyar Network Foundation*, the *Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*, *Open Society Foundations*, *Google* and *Facebook*, among others. A fact-checker who wants to obtain lucrative contracts with social media platforms to suggest content for censorship must be licensed by the IFCN.

The good thing is that the press release also shows how much pressure these censorship service providers of the government are now under because of their perfidious activities. The headline reads:

"The world's fact-checkers issue a 'Sarajevo Declaration' at the *GlobalFact 11* conference, in

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which they characterise fact-checking as freedom of expression, not censorship.”

### **Never label fact-checking as censorship**

Fact-checking should never be labelled as censorship, even if those in power pay for it. In the statement written by the Poynter Institute, the 130 signatory organisations, including DPA, APA and Correctiv, complain:

“In recent years, fact checkers have been attacked as online censors, and after such attacks they have been insulted and harassed. Such reactions are unjustified. Censorship removes information. [...] Fact-checking is not about erasing or eliminating messages, but about preserving them as part of the public debate while providing evidence necessary for that debate to be informed.”

The censorship service providers’ flimsy argument as to why what they promote is not censorship consists solely of the fact that the posts they criticise are generally not deleted. However, the criticism of censorship refers to the fact that the social media platforms pressurised by the governments have concluded (lucrative) contracts with the fact-checkers, according to which the targeted texts or videos criticising the government are massively restricted in their distribution.

This uncomfortable fact is only briefly and hypocritically alluded to as: “False claims should not be rewarded with popularity and going viral.” However, there is no fundamental difference between deleting a post and massively restricting its distribution, only a (slight) gradual difference. If those who determine what is true receive money from the government and accept official statements as proof of truth, as the fact-checkers regularly do, then this is indeed censorship in the government’s interest.

### **Fact-checkers as victim**

The so-called fact-checkers complain bitterly that they are being dragged through the courts by the victims of their censorship efforts all over the world – especially in the USA. (The Poynter Institute, with its financially strong sponsors, supports them in their defence). Lawsuits have resulted in scientists having to curtail their fact-checking work to “improve election procedures”.

In 2020, the presidential election process in the US was “improved” in part by the fact that shortly before the election, a report by the *New York Post* about the extremely embarrassing

contents of a laptop belonging to *Joe Biden’s* son was *censored on social media*<sup>6</sup> and not picked up by other media because it was allegedly disinformation emanating from Russia. It was not until long after Biden’s narrowly successful election that the major media reported that the laptop was authentic, and that Russia was apparently not involved.

Correctiv is also increasingly having to deal with the courts. First, *Correctiv was forbidden*<sup>7</sup> to repeat false allegations against constitutional law expert *Ulrich Vosgerau* in relation to the so-called Postdam meeting of far-right migration critics, then in March Correctiv boss *David Schraven* was forbidden by the courts to *repeat the lie* spread by the FAZ that the Hamburg regional court had confirmed Correctiv’s reporting on the meeting as “procedural truth”.<sup>8</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The loss of trust in those in power due to their anti-freedom excesses in terms of coronavirus, migration, climate and heat propaganda, gender policy, the “fight against the far right” and war-mongering is dramatic. This makes it even more important for them to ensure that government criticism on social media is kept in check through censorship.

Hardly anyone trusts the fact-checkers who have surrounded the associated propaganda with a protective wall. But the platforms carry out their censorship orders and journalists from news agencies and broadcasters must comply with the judgements of the government-affiliated fact-checkers from DPA, ARD and the like, whether they like it or not. However, public opinion is gradually changing the jurisdiction of the courts.

However, neither the courts nor a new government in the fact-checker motherland, the USA, should be expected to put an end to the fact-checking malaise. The central fact-checking function of suppressing criticism of NATO’s policy and information that is inconvenient for NATO will not be restricted by a Trump administration or the courts.

Source: <https://norberthaering.de/propaganda-zensur/newsguard-congress/>, 30 June 2024

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

<sup>1</sup> <https://norberthaering.de/propaganda-zensur/newsguard-steinhoefel/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://norberthaering.de/propaganda-zensur/who-soziale-medien/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://reclaimthenet.org/house-oversight-committee-targets-newsguards-media-influence>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2024/worlds-fact-checkers-issue-sarajevo-statement-supporting-fact-checking-as-free-speech-not-censorship-at-global-fact-11-conference/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.poynter.org/international-fact-checking-network-transparency-statement/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://norberthaering.de/propaganda-zensur/new-york-post-biden/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://justiz.hamburg.de/gerichte/oberlandesgericht/gerichtspressestelle/unterlassungsantrag-gegen-correctiv-berichterstattung-nur-teilweise-erfolgreich--635106>

<sup>8</sup> <https://apollo-news.net/potsdam-treffen-correctiv-chef-schraven-raeumt-falschbehauptung-ein/>