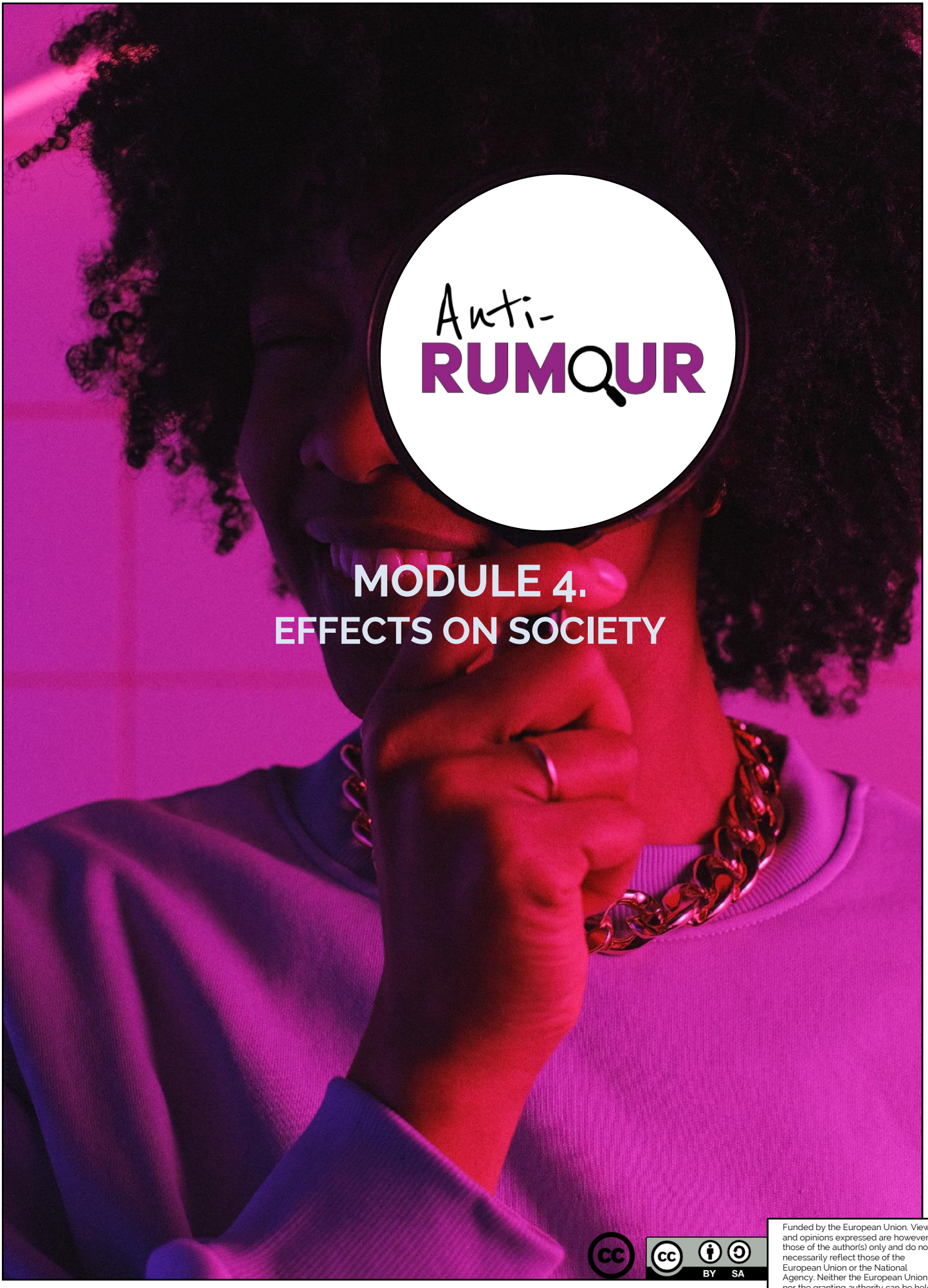

Anti-
RUMQUR

MODULE 4.
EFFECTS ON SOCIETY

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Module 4. Effects on society

3.1 Activity 2. Mis/Dis/Malinformation: practical excercise.

Duration: 30-40 minutes

Materials/ Resources needed: 5-8 blue stickers, 4-6 yellow stickers, 2-3 green stickers, 1 red sticker.

Learning outcomes/Key Messages. To understand effects of fake news and disinformation in democracy, to understand radicalisation and polarisation.

Estimated number of participants: 10-16.

Participant instructions: Tell them to form a circle and close their eyes. The facilitator shall make clear:

- They cannot open their eyes until the facilitator says so.
- They cannot speak a word during the whole activity. From the moment they are in the circle closing their eyes they can only communicate with gestures

Once they are all ready, assign to each participant one colour. Keep in mind that blues should be the majority, yellow the second majority, green the minority, and only one participant will get red. Afterwards, tell them to open their eyes and form groups. Do not give any other command, only to form groups. They would then need to communicate without words to form them.

Although participants are not told to group "By colour", that is what they are most likely to do as the facilitator has not given any instruction or any criteria for grouping. Because of people's habit of classifying things in the surrounding environment, the group will separate into subgroups of blues, greens, yellows, and reds, and leave the participant without a sticker all alone and isolated.

As participants (adults, children, young people, politicians, etc.) do the exercise, they realise that because they do not know what is on their forehead, they need to rely on each other to complete the task. Only others can see what colour they belong to and they cannot talk to each other to communicate. It will take about 10 to 15 minutes for the group to sort this difficulty out. It takes trust, co-operation and creativity to complete the assigned task.

Once they have formed groups, tell them to observe them carefully, and to come back to their original seats. It is then time for them to reflect.

It is likely that they formed groups based on their colour. Explain the following insights:

- The direct effect of disinformation in society is increased polarisation. As fake news spreads, categorization and stigmatization of societal groups become more present. The colour represents a 'social tag', a stigma that disinformation has created around them. At the same time, those individuals 'tagged' with a colour, will also see others represented by their colour (stigma) and not by who they are individually.
Therefore, they will prefer to group (to socialize, associate, believe and trust) with their individuals of their colour, while reject other groups, based merely on their artificial categorization (political ideas, economic status, cultural background…).

- As these echo-chambers are formed, some groups will be more numerous than others. If there is no mix between them, these small groups will become isolated, and their voice will not be heard. In order to do so, they will need to join one of the big groups.

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- Disinformation will lead them to adverse one side and blindly follow the other. The consequent effect is polarisation (the elimination of the in between opinions) and radicalisation (the demonization of the others). Thus, groups will enter into Us vs Them dynamics, using propaganda and deception techniques, which would be unintentionally believed by their group. In the long run, democracy and the role of institutions and mediators and democratic guarantees will be undermined

Possible alterations. The facilitator should consider adapting the number of colours to its audience, depending on the number.

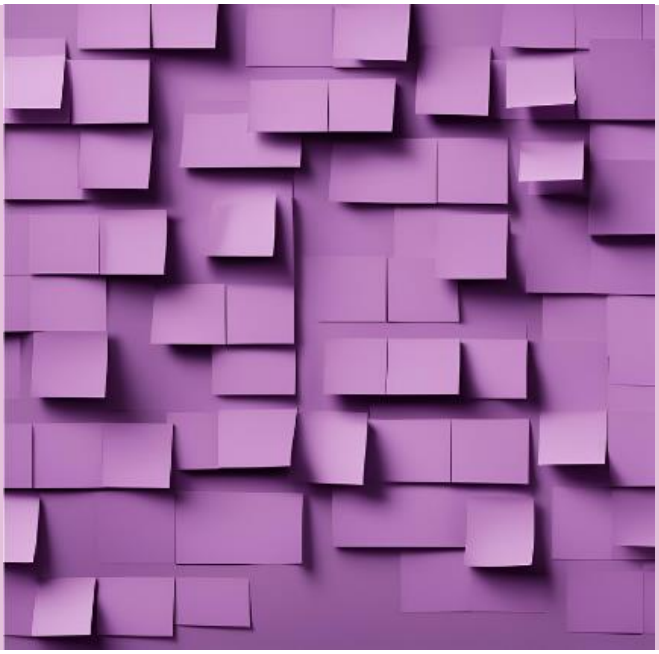
While they are forming groups, the facilitator should be watching carefully the dynamics, observing any interesting insight:

- How do participants communicate? Look closely if to indicate someone to join they do so by telling him/her to join, or to not go to another group. Maybe the other group rejects him/her as well.

- How does the only red participant behave? How do other groups react to him/her?

- Do they seem satisfied when groups are formed? Do they express dissonance with the decision of staying in a specific group?

If the facilitator sees that no clear separation dynamics are established and participants are not followed by their colours when forming groups, it should consider redoing the activity as many times needed for these dynamic to appear.

Debrief: Ask participants to reflect about how they felt when moving around. Did you change your mind? Why? Did you follow exclusively the colours? In what degree were you convinced by others to join them? Were you attracking those you believe were from your colour?

Background reading/External resources:
•https://www.learntochange.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/tasks-for-democracy.pdf.