

No.3, 2017 (November)

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Internet / Tech Industry

EU Guidelines for Platforms to Tackle Hate Speech Online

Many governments have become increasingly concerned about the wave of hate speech spreading via social networks. At a special session on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September, heads of governments told the leaders of some of the biggest internet companies to intensify their efforts to take down terrorist propaganda.

A week later the EU Commission published a [Communication](#) on Tackling Illegal Content Online providing "guidelines and principles" for online platforms to increase the proactive prevention, detection and removal of illegal content inciting hatred, violence and terrorism.

To speed up detection online platforms are encouraged to work closely with "trusted flaggers". They should also establish easily accessible mechanisms to allow users to flag illegal content and to invest in automatic detection technologies.

Platforms should also clearly explain their content policy to their users and dissuade them from repeatedly uploading illegal content, for example by automatic tools to prevent the re-appearance of previously removed content.

At the same time, platforms should introduce safeguards to prevent the risk of over-removal. The fight against illegal content online must be carried out "with proper and robust safeguards to ensure protection of the different fundamental rights at stake", stresses the Commission.

The EU executive also says that the outlined measures are voluntary and not legally binding but warns that it will "carefully monitor progress" made by the online platforms over the next months and assess whether additional measures are needed, "including possible legislative measures". This work will be completed by May 2018.

Guidelines on Hate Speech a Threat to Online Expression?

At their summit in October the EU leaders welcomed the Commission's guidelines for platforms to tackle online hate speech and said they were ready to support "appropriate measures at EU level, if necessary".

Tech companies also seem pleased. "Technology companies breathed a sigh of relief as the communication did not appear to reduce their protection against liability for content carried on their networks and devices", [reports](#) the newsletter Intellectual Property Watch.

Civil liberties organisations, on the other hand, worry about the Commission guidelines. The Centre for Democracy and Technology (cdt), for example, [writes](#) that the rules' policy direction "could have significant impact on online expression and debate in Europe."

"Before any content can be tackled, a determination must be made about whether it is actually illegal. It is a fundamental principle in democratic societies that these decisions should ultimately be made by courts. Now such decisions will

be made by platform moderators...under significant pressure from public authorities."

"This creates considerable risk that platforms will be incentivised to err on the side of caution and to suppress flagged content without proper review."

The organisation is also wary of the encouragement to use automated technologies to detect and prevent sharing of "illegal" content, pointing out that automated filtering tools are notoriously prone both to taking down perfectly lawful speech and to being fairly easily circumvented.

Continued EU Hunt on Tax-Evading Tech Giants

EU's high-profile Danish anti-trust chief, Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, continues her crusade against tax-evading tech giants.

Her latest target is Amazon, a company expecting to record at least 173 billion dollars in annual sales this year. In October the EU Commission [ordered](#) Luxembourg to recover unpaid taxes worth around €250 million from the company, saying the country had granted Amazon's European arm "undue tax benefit" by allowing it to shift profits to a tax-exempt shell company.

That's peanuts compared to the back taxes Apple should pay. The Commission also [decided](#) to refer Ireland to the European Court of Justice for failing to recover from Apple illegal state aid worth up to €13 billion, as required by a previous Commission decision from August 2016, against which Ireland has appealed.

A month later Vestager announced that the Commission had asked Apple for an update on its current tax structure, part of which now involves the company using corporate entities in low-tax Jersey, a British crown dependency, to avoid paying higher taxes in other jurisdictions.

In these cases the EU countries which grant the tech behemoths such "undue tax benefits" are naturally as much to blame as the companies taking advantage of them. But who wouldn't want all the potential jobs, investments and other benefits these companies could bring to your country?

Tax havens within the European Union can thus cause much disruption. The EU must make progress in tackling this "fundamental problem" in tax matters, warned Pierre Moscovici, the Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs who soon will present a blacklist of "non-cooperative tax jurisdictions", or tax havens.

This issue also seems to be one of the main stumbling blocks in on-going attempts to create a common EU solution to taxing the digital giants (see below).

EU Debate on Taxing Digital Companies

European countries have become fed up with the tech giants earning billions of euros from their consumers without paying their fair share in taxes. In recent months there has been a fierce debate among EU member states on how to solve this problem.

In September ten EU finance ministers endorsed a plan – proposed and heavily pushed by France – which would force major tech companies to start paying tax on revenues where they do business, instead of where they report it. By the end of the month 19 EU Member states had come on board.

Opposing these efforts were countries like Ireland and Luxemburg which offer Silicon Valley's largest companies financial incentives to set up shop in their country.

Officials from the U.K., Sweden and Cyprus were sceptical too. These countries seem to prefer greater global coordination through the OECD, which will publish a report early next year about possible ways to revamping digital taxes worldwide.

One major problem is that tax decisions taken at EU level must be agreed unanimously by all member states.

Meanwhile the Commission published a [Communication](#) on the subjects, in which it says: "the ideal approach would be to find multilateral, international solutions to taxing the digital economy given the global nature of this challenge" mentioning the forthcoming OECD report, but also stresses that EU Member States should have "a coordinated position" to have a greater impact on the work at global level.

Later, Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager explicitly [warned](#) that "if there's no international answer to this issue by spring next year, we'll produce our own proposal for new EU rules to make sure digital companies are taxed fairly."

At the end of October the Commission launched a [public consultation](#) – running until 3 January 2018 – asking citizens, businesses and organisations to help decide on a fairer tax regime for digital corporations.

Here it says that the international tax framework needs reform but that "agreeing on solutions at a global level has proved to be difficult" and that EU action is necessary to avoid fragmentation of the single market.

U.S. Lawmakers Critical of Silicon Valley Too

It's not only in Europe that the tech giants are getting increasingly bad press. In recent months there has been an unmistakable turn against the tech industry in America too.

Much criticism has been voiced regarding privacy issues, hate speech, disinformation and a lack of gender and racial diversity in the tech industry. Not to mention the way social media platforms were used by the Russians to interfere in the 2016 Presidential election, the subject of tough hearings in Congress in November.

Tech companies' shareholders are critical too – and worried. Before the Congress hearings big shareholders in Facebook, Google and Twitter [demanded answers and accountability](#) with regard to foreign interference in the presidential election and the growth of hate speech and disinformation on the three platforms. Such issues may create "numerous financial risks which could present material challenges to the company and its shareholders."

The hearings in Congress came just after revelations that the reach of the Russian-connected disinformation campaign on Facebook, Google, and Twitter was [much larger than initially reported](#).

All three company lawyers said they were appalled by what they had discovered about the Russian effort, but they also sought to portray the content posted by the Russians as an exceedingly small part of the overall flow of information across their platforms, [reports the Washington Post](#)

The lawmakers were not impressed. "For the first time in years, legislation imposing new restrictions on how the companies operate — especially when it comes to political advertising — is being discussed seriously in Washington, despite the work of the industry's large, well-connected lobbying teams." comments the newspaper.

Senator Dianne Feinstein raised that threat explicitly after complaining about the industry's inability to thwart Russia's effort to influence the 2016 election, saying: "You bear this responsibility. You've created these platforms. And now they are being misused. And you have to be the ones to do something about it. Or we will."

U.S. Net Neutrality Rules To Be Scrapped?

Recently the head of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) unveiled plans to scrap the [landmark 2015 rules](#) intended to ensure a free and open internet, moving to give broadband service providers sweeping power over what content consumers can access, [reports Reuters](#).

FCC Chairman Ajit Pai, a Republican appointed in January 2017, said the regulatory agency will vote on his plan at a meeting on 14 December.

FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, a Democrat, is opposed to Pai's proposal which "hands broadband providers the power to decide what voices to amplify, which sites we can visit, what connections we can make, and what communities we create. It throttles access, stalls opportunity and censors content."

But with three Republican and two Democratic commissioners making up the FCC, the plan is quite certain to be approved.

The Internet Association, which represents leading internet companies on matters of public policy is [planning protests](#) across the country, [mobilizing thousands of calls](#) to Washington and planning a [big rally outside the FCC](#) on 14 December. Media freedom groups, such as [Free Press](#), are also calling for action to preserve the net neutrality rules.

EU Rules for Free Flow of Non-Personal Data Proposed

Last spring ministers from 15 EU members states – among them the Nordic countries – called for legislation to get rid of so-called data localisation. These ministers – and many tech companies – were surely delighted in September when the Commission proposed a [new set of rules to govern the free flow of non-personal data](#) in the EU.

Together with the already existing rules for personal data, these new measures will enable the storage and processing of non-personal data across the Union to

boost the competitiveness of European businesses and to modernise public services, explains the Commission.

“The free flow of data will also make it easier for SMEs and startups to develop new innovative services and to enter new markets”, pointed out Andrus Ansip, Commission Vice-President for the Digital Single Market.

The draft EU Regulation proposes that Member States should no longer be able to oblige organisations to locate the storage or processing of data within their borders. Restrictions will only be justified for reasons of public security. Member States will have to notify the Commission of new or existing data localisation requirements.

But the rules also include a “principle of data availability for regulatory control”, allowing competent authorities to access data wherever it is stored or processed in the EU.

The EU Council, which represents the member states, is now working on this proposal and expects an agreement to be reached by June 2018.

Freedom of Expression

EU Policymakers Appalled by Murder of Top Investigative Journalist

The murder in October of Malta’s top investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia – who conducted a series of high profil corruption investigations in the country – provoked outrage among news organisations and international press freedom groups. The killing also brought widespread condemnation from the international community and European politicians.

Manfred Weber, leader of the European Parliament’s European People’s Party, said it was a “[dark day for democracy](#).” Green MEPs called for official investigations given Galizia’s involvement in the Panama Papers exposé.

At a plenary meeting of the European Parliament its President Antonio Tajani, a former journalist, expressed his admiration for Caruana Galizia and said: “In my view, Europol must be involved, as part of an international investigation in which all police forces can work together to bring those responsible to justice.”

At the same meeting Tajani announced that the Parliament’s press room in Strasbourg would be named after Daphne Caruana Galizia. He also attended her funeral.

News organisations however seem to expect more of EU policymakers than fine words and symbolic gestures. [In a letter to Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans](#) the heads of seven of the world’s largest newspapers and the director of news and current affairs at the BBC called for the European Commission to investigate the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia and the independence of the media in Malta.

In response to the letter, Commissioner Timmermans – who is responsible for the rule of law and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights – said: “We insist that the

Maltese authorities leave no stone unturned ... The eyes of Europe are on the Maltese authorities."

Such shaming may, however, be all that can be expected from the EU. When asked during a recent colloquium at Columbia University in New York what the EU could do to defend media freedom in Poland and Hungary, Timmermanns explained that the EU has "very limited instruments" and "no strong legal weapons" in this area and can mostly only resort to political pressure.

Parliament Wants Tough EU Law to Protect Whistleblowers

The murder of Maltese investigative journalist Daphne Caruana probably helped push through a [resolution](#) in the European Parliament a week later calling for a tough EU law on the protection of whistleblowers, despite last-minute attempts to water it down and a hundred far-right MEPs voting against it.

EU rules are needed to protect and support whistle-blowers and their role in revealing serious breaches of the public interest, such as corruption, miscarriages of justice, tax avoidance, and attacks on human or workers' rights. But whistleblower protection in the EU is patchy and often inadequate, explains the Parliament.

MEPs therefore call on the Commission to propose EU-wide rules – including a protection for whistleblowers who have no other possibility than going directly public (to a journalist or media) to disclose information of public interest - before the end of this year.

This is not the first time the Parliament has called on the EU Commission to propose rules on whistle-blower protection. The Commission promised to present a bill and organised a public consultation on the subject, but so far no rules have materialized.

Catalan Referendum: Much Criticism of Censorship But EU Silent

In September, after the Constitutional Court of Spain decided that the referendum on Catalan independence would be unconstitutional, the Spanish authorities launched a censorship campaign, searching print houses, seizing referendum material and blocking websites.

This met with furious protests from the Catalan government and widespread international criticism. The Catalan government wrote a letter to to Andrus Ansip, the EU Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society claiming that the Spanish government's actions were in breach of EU law.

UN experts – among them David Kaye, Special Rapporteur [on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#) – [called](#) on the Spanish authorities to ensure that measures taken ahead of the Catalan referendum would not interfere with fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression, "regardless of the lawfulness of the referendum".

Civil society groups were naturally up in arms. The European Digital Rights organization (EDRI), for example, called the Spanish government's censorship of online speech "wildly disproportionate".

The EU, however, kept a tight-lipped silence, both then and later when evidence of police violence was shown. The Commission steadfastly refused to comment in detail on what it regards as an internal matter for Spain and said it respects Spain's constitutional order and legal framework.

EU members states made similar comments as they publicly closed ranks behind Madrid.

The EU reaction is not really surprising, considering how sensitive the topic of regional separatist movements is for a number of member states and the apprehension about a fragmentation – and perhaps ultimate dissolution – of the Union in the wake of the Brexit vote and the surge of nationalist movements.

New OSCE Representative Builds Coalition To Defend Media Freedom

Harlem Désir, the newly appointed [OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media](#), seems keen on his new job and cooperating with civil society organisations working to protect media freedom and the safety of journalists. (OSCE is the intergovernmental Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe).

In September Désir and the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) arranged a [meeting in Brussels](#) to discuss challenges and develop new ideas for cooperation to defend media freedom across Europe.

Participating in the meeting were, among others, the International Federation of Journalists, Index on Censorship, PEN International, Reporters Without Borders and David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Mr. Désir expressed his commitment to work with journalist organisations and media freedom groups to defend an increasingly challenging media freedom landscape in the 57 OSCE participating states (which include countries like Malta, Turkey, Hungary and Poland...).

At the roundtable the participants discussed, i.a., the declining media freedom in Ukraine, Poland, Hungary and Russia, the continuing state of emergency in France and Turkey, and the new surveillance laws in France, UK and Germany.

Copyright

Copyright reform: Controversial Upload Filters in Focus

The debate on the reform of EU copyright rules has been intense in recent months. Much of the discussion has focused on the contentious Article 13, on which views seem to differ both within the European Parliament and the member states gathered in the Council.

Article 13 in the [Commission proposal](#) calls for internet platforms hosting large amounts of user-uploaded content to monitor their site by "measures such as the use of effective content recognition technologies", often called automated upload

filters.

Civil society groups - much concerned about such filters - often call them "censorship machines". In October 57 human rights and digital rights organisations sent an [open letter](#) to MEPs asking them to delete article 13 from the draft copyright directive.

The letter explains that the proposal "would lead to excessive filtering and deletion of content, while at the same time constantly monitoring users' activity online. These conditions would violate freedom of expression, freedom of information and also privacy."

Some EU Member States seem concerned about the legality of such filters too. But others, like France, Spain and Portugal, seem to want even tougher measures, for example that larger providers should also be required to "prevent the availability" of content that is identified by rightsholders.

A recent "compromise" proposal by the Council's Estonian Presidency appears to reflect the position of these three countries.

Meanwhile, many of the Parliamentary Committees involved in the copyright reform have discussed the issue, expressing a variety of views on Article 13.

On 20 November the Civil Liberties Committee adopted its Opinion, in which it proposes not to delete this article but to remove the obligation for internet platforms to employ technologies like automated content recognition to surveil all user uploads to try to pre-empt copyright infringement, [reports](#) MEP Julia Reda from the German Pirate Party, who thinks this is a "balanced approach".

Now only the most important committee has yet to vote, the Legal Affairs Committee, which is responsible for the Parliament's report on the copyright reform.

The vote is scheduled for 24-25 January 2018 but before that, on 7 December, the Committee will hold a hearing on another controversial issue in the draft copyright directive, namely the EU Commission's proposal to add a publisher's right that would require online search engines to pay news outlets when they share parts of their copyrighted work.

Decision on Geo-Blocking Rules: Music and e-Books Not Covered

Spotify and other companies in the entertainment industry must have been pleased on 21 November when MEPs, member states and the European Commission agreed on a compromise deal to end so-called geoblocking restrictions. Their type of services will not be covered by the new rules.

Proposed by the Commission in May 2016 the regulation requires that online buyers of goods or services from another EU country be treated like local customers. The aim is to increase online sales and help European e-commerce grow.

In the compromise deal member states [struck down](#) a measure in the Parliament's version of the bill that would have extended the ban on geoblocking to music streaming services and ebooks.

MEPs had pushed for the rules to apply to non-audiovisual copyrighted content but came up against fierce opposition from member states, as well as music streaming services, ebook sellers and video game producers.

The Commission's original proposal did not suggest applying the ban on geoblocking to any copyrighted material.

In the compromise Parliament's negotiators however achieved a "review clause" in the rules saying that the EU Commission must assess, within two years after the entry into force of the regulation, not only whether to extend its scope to non-audiovisual copyrighted content, but also to carefully analyse whether additional sectors, such as the audio-visual and transport services, should be included in the scope.

The provisional agreement still needs to be formally confirmed and approved by the Parliament and the EU Council of Ministers. [Read more](#)

New Online Broadcasting Rules: Only More News Across Borders?

On 21 November the European Parliament's Legal Affairs (JURI) Committee approved a watered down version of the proposed overhaul of the the satellite and cable directive. Some were happy about this, others less so.

The aim of the overhaul is to give consumers a wider choice of online TV and radio across borders in the EU by addressing difficulties related to the clearance of copyright.

Under the draft rules approved by the MEPs broadcasters will have to show news and current affairs programmes in their online catch-up offers across the bloc. But the Parliament rejected a broader approach proposed by the EU Commission, which would have required broadcasters also to make shows and movies available online for consumers in any EU member state.

The Commission regretted the MEPs' limitation and the Parliament's own rapporteur MEP Tiemo Wölken was disappointed too: "The chance to create a European audience was missed. Conservative forces put the interests of Big Players over the interests of millions of European citizens in an irrational, unbalanced way", [he said](#).

Wölken [explained](#) that industry groups had "lobbied massively" to ask MEPs to exclude films and TV shows from the kinds of content that must be made available online.

Not surprisingly, the European Film Agency Directors (EFADs) welcomed the vote in Parliament and said they "want to continue working with the European institutions". EFADs were particularly happy about the Committee's support for territorial exclusivity, "which is essential for the sustainability of the audiovisual sector and the circulation of European films across the EU".

The Association of Commercial Television in Europe was pleased too, [calling](#) the Parliament's version of the bill "definitely a step in the right direction". However the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which represents public service media,

[regrets](#) the reduced scope of the “country of origin” principle to news and current affairs programmes.

“...this will encourage consumers to resort to more illegal online content services. It will also provide the ground for making non-European players even stronger” says the EBU.

The updated directive – now a Regulation – must be approved in three-way negotiations between the Parliament, member states and the Commission before it can go into effect. Those talks have not yet started.

Privacy

EU Parliament Wants Strong e-Privacy Rules

In October – after intense lobbying, fiery debate and last minute attempts to introduce more amendments – the EU Parliament’s Civil Liberties Committee (LIBE) approved, with a narrow margin of votes, its report on the new e-Privacy regulation.

The Regulation was proposed by the EU Commission in January to ensure stronger privacy in electronic communications and align these rules with the new [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#).

LIBE’s [report](#) constitutes the Parliament’s negotiating mandate for upcoming talks with the Council (i.e. the EU member states) on the revision of the EU e-privacy rules.

Centre-right MEPs were generally negative to the report whereas left-wing and liberal MEPs hailed the vote for data protection rights.

The Parliament wants strong privacy rules for online communications, in some cases even stronger than [those proposed by the EU Commission](#). Among its demands:

MEPs call for a ban on “cookie walls”, which block access to a website if the person does not agree to his or her data being used by the same site.

Snooping on personal devices via cookies or software updates, or tracking people without their clear approval through public hotspots or Wi-Fi in shopping centres, should also be prohibited, say MEPs.

“Privacy by default” settings should become standard for all software used for electronic communications and service providers must provide for strong encryption, they add.

MEPs also want to set strict limits on data processing and insist that data should only be used for the purpose for which consent has been given by the individual.

So-called “meta-data”, which can give information about numbers called, websites visited, geographical location or the time and date a call and other sensitive data, should be treated as confidential and never passed on to third parties.

Now the Parliament can enter into negotiations with the Council. But the Council must first agree on its own negotiating mandate before talks can start. Member states have been divided on the issue.

e-Privacy rules: Tech Giants, Advertisers and Media Up In Arms

Given the divisions about the e-privacy bill in the EU Parliament and among member states, as well as the strong resistance to the proposed rules in powerful industry groups, it's not easy to predict how they will end up looking.

More predictable are the renewed lobbying assaults by various industry groups that will follow now that they have the Parliament's position to dig their teeth into. In fact, just after the Parliament committee vote companies lined up to complain about the rules, [reported the news service Euractiv](#).

DigitalEurope, a lobby group that represents tech firms such as Amazon, Apple and Google, called the report "unbalanced" and said it will "prevent beneficial technological innovation even when there is no or little impact on citizen's right to confidentiality..."

Advertisers argued that the safeguards to prevent websites from tracking consumers without their consent could clamp down on their revenue and hurt online news outlets as well.

Indeed the European Publishers' Council (EPC) saw "[with great regret](#)" the approval of the negotiating mandate, pointing out that advertising provides the media with the necessary resources to be able to operate independently. "Without advertising, much of the world's media simply would not exist."

Privacy advocates and consumer groups, on the other hand, praised the draft legislation. The European Consumer Organisation BEUC applauded the vote in the EU Parliament, saying: "The Parliament wants to keep consumers' digital correspondence confidential and prevent companies from snooping in our private lives when we are online. The EU is leading the way and sending a clear message that the internet should not be a tool for constant commercial surveillance of consumers."

A key person in the upcoming negotiations on the bill is Birgit Sippel, a German Socialist MEP, who is the new Parliament Rapporteur of the controversial privacy file. She has [vowed to fight for the text](#) but says her aim will be "not only to protect the user but to take this opportunity to make Europe the very place where we organise digital businesses and services in a way that helps business and protects the user at the same time."

EU Data Protection Rules Give Competitive Advantage?

Many companies complain that the new EU general data protection regulation, GDPR – which will enter into force in May 2018 – will be cumbersome and costly to implement, which may especially be a problem for small businesses. But perhaps the GDPR can help create more up-to-date business models too?

[A recent article](#) in the Financial Times describes how privacy has become a competitive advantage in the tech industry. Apple, for example, recently rolled

out a new privacy website to better showcase features which give users more control over what the company can see, believing this differentiates the company from competitors, such as Google.

Already in 2016 an event called [Privacy – The Competitive Advantage](#) took place in London which made a direct connection to the new EU data protection rules, describing itself as “the first conference integrating the commercial opportunity of privacy and the new GDPR”.

Consumers are weary of privacy breaches and data scandals and analysts are calling for companies to turn privacy policies into marketing opportunities, wrote the organisers in their invitation. The next event is scheduled to take place in the spring of 2018.

Encryption: Police Access to Encrypted Data Without Backdoors?

In the wake of the many terrorist attacks in the past year European politicians have urged the European Commission to propose an EU law to give police easier access to criminals’ communications that might be encrypted. This makes some people nervous.

In October the Commission announced new measures to “address vulnerabilities exposed by recent terrorist attacks”, among them an extra €500,000 for police training on encryption next year.

The main aim of these measures is to encourage national governments to develop expertise in decrypting secured communications – and to share their knowledge with other member states, [explains the news service Euractiv](#).

The [Commission’s proposal](#) says that member states should develop a “toolbox of alternative investigation techniques” that police can use to obtain needed information encrypted by criminals “without weakening encryption at a more general level or affecting a large or indiscriminate number of people”.

Despite the Commission’s disavowal of so-called backdoors for police to access private data, some industry groups and privacy advocates have warned that the new proposals could still pose a risk to encryption.

Dutch MEP Marietje Schaake is wary of the proposals too. “The Commission wants to have its cake & eat it too: toolbox to break encryption...without weakening encryption,” she tweeted.

Media - general

EU Commission Calls For Advice on Fake News

The European Commission seems to be in urgent need of advice on what to do about fake news. Recently it launched a public consultation on the issue as well as called for applications to a High-Level Expert Group – open until 11 December 2017 – to discuss it with.

The work of the High Level Expert Group as well as the results of the public consultation will contribute to the development of an EU-level strategy on how to

tackle the spread of fake news, to be presented in spring 2018, explains the Commission.

In the [public consultation](#) – which runs until **23 February 2018** – citizens, social media platforms, news organisations, researchers and public authorities are invited to share their views as to what actions could be taken at EU level.

For the [High-Level Expert Group](#) the Commission is inviting experts from academia, online platforms, news media and civil society organisations to advise the Commission and give recommendations. The [call for applications](#) is open until 11 December 2017. The Group is expected to start its work in January 2018.

Hearing in Parliament about Fake News

The European Parliament, too, evidently wants input on what to do about fake news and disinformation.

At a recent hearing with experts on this issue, Culture Committee MEPs heard that technological tools can help humans fight fake news. But responsible editors, appropriate laws and investment in digital literacy are also vital.

Answering MEPs' questions and concerns about how fake news can be controlled without compromising freedom of speech or imposing censorship, the experts said that proper EU regulation is useful and that massive support and funding for digital literacy are also very much needed.

MEPs and experts agreed that media skills are essential in the process of detecting, controlling and stopping fake news. MEPs will discuss possible action or legislation at EU level with the Commission, but EU member states should also support all these initiatives, they concluded. [Read more](#)

Brexit To Affect International Broadcasters and Creative Workers?

International television channels – such as Nordic ones – based in the UK may have reason to be concerned. TV firms may have to move some operations abroad if there is no Brexit trade deal, the body for international broadcasters in the UK has warned, [reports the BBC](#).

Thanks to the EU's country of origin principle, hundreds of international media organisations based in the UK can broadcast to anywhere in the EU.

"International broadcasters based here would, reluctantly, be forced to restructure their European operations. No deal would put at risk thousands of jobs in the UK broadcasting sector, hundreds of millions of pounds of investment every year, and would undermine the sector's long-term global competitiveness", says the Commercial Broadcasters Association (COBA).

The British media watchdog Ofcom recently said that Brexit was now one of the biggest challenges facing the sector. The UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has said it will work during the negotiations "to get the right deal for broadcasters."

UK-made films, music and video games [could also be hit](#) by a post-Brexit restriction on immigration, a trade body has warned.

The Creative Industries Federation (CIF) said the 87 billion pounds a year the sector generated for the economy was at risk if immigration was restricted. The sector relies heavily on freelance staff, many of whom are from the EU.

Twitter Vital in Modern Political Communication?

Today more and more politicians and other authority figures use Twitter. A recent [article in the Financial Times](#) gives an insightful explanation of this phenomenon.

The article describes how Lloyd Blankfein, the chief executive of the financial giant Goldman Sachs, lately became quite a Twitter fan. Considering his company's role in contributing to the financial crisis one would perhaps not expect him to want that kind of exposure.

However Blankfein discovered that using Twitter has many benefits. "I never thought I would tweet – I thought it was too dangerous", says Mr Blankfein. But he changed his mind after spending time in Silicon Valley and observing President Trump.

He is especially impressed by the way Trump engages directly with the public and "disintermediates" the press. To bypass the media is of course appealing for somebody such as Blankfein, who – like Mr Trump – felt bruised by journalists, notes the article's author Gillian Tett.

Disintermediation works best with punchy messages like tweets. After all, says Ms Tett, the only real trust in authority figures today lies in peer-to-peer communications that feel authentic and personal.

Similar thoughts are expressed in a recent [report](#) requested by the EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker on how to strengthen the ties between the European Union and its citizens.

It's important to win both the hearts and the minds of citizens, says the report. "The legitimacy of the Union cannot simply depend on a mere **acknowledgement** of the Union by its people, nor its **acceptance** by them. It must also be based on a degree of **emotional engagement** with the Union by Europeans."

"Make full use of the opportunities offered by social media", recommends the author.

Nordic Coproduction Wins LUX Film Prize

On 14 November "Sámi Blood", a Swedish/Norwegian/Danish co-production, won the European Parliament's prestigious LUX Film Prize.

The film – by Swedish director Amanda Kernell – tells the story of a young Sami girl who abandons her community because she dreams of a different life, but to pursue her goal she has to face racist attitudes.

Presenting the award the President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani explained: " The LUX Prize aims to defend European cultural identity, as well as the European film industry, which represents a large sector of the European economy..."

European Media Policy

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The Newsletter provides an up-date on policy developments at the European level. We concentrate on news from the European Union – current issues and trends in media policy, new proposals for legislation, debates in the European Parliament, recently taken or impending policy decisions and reactions among those concerned, new support programmes, EU studies in the field etc. There will also be some coverage of policy developments in the Council of Europe and at the international level. The newsletter is published three times a year.