

European Regional Bureau Newsletter



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Internet Access

EU: Record number of participants join EU Code Week

- One of the leading digital skills initiatives supported by the European Commission, [EU Code Week](#), involved 2.7 million participants and nearly 44,000 events in its 2018 edition, a record that has “exceeded all expectations” [according](#) to the organisers.
- Activities took place around the globe, as far as Peru, Malaysia, and Egypt. Italy was the most active European country with 20,000 activities, followed by Turkey (7,700) and Poland (5,000). In France almost half (49%) of participants were girls or women.
- The initiative began as a grassroots initiative in 2013 and is run by volunteers, with the aim of promoting coding, computational thinking and digital literacy.
- Welcoming the results, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya Gabriel, said “Our goal is to involve at least half all European schools in the EU Code Week by 2020, hence I encourage even more organisers to get on board and offer coding activities during the EU Code Week 2019.”

EU: IoT companies agree on principles for 5G patent licensing

- A large group of companies [announced](#) this week their agreement on a list of principles to make it easier for SMEs to licence the standard essential patents (SEPs) found in 5G devices.
- The principles, [drafted](#) by the EU’s standardisation bodies CEN and CENELEC, aim to provide law courts and industry stakeholders with guidance when interpreting the voluntary licensing commitments, known as [FRAND](#) terms (“fair, reasonable, and non-discriminatory), often requested by standards organisations from intellectual property right-holders.
- The principles cover six areas, including: avoiding the use of injunctions, ensuring easy-access to licences, not using patent bundling as an excuse to withhold a

patent licence, and requirements to use Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) fairly and not exploit information advantages.

- One of its signatories, Morgan Reed, President of ACT | “The App Association”, emphasised how this would help SMEs trade online: “The FRAND promise is essential to a functioning standards system and allows SMEs to fully participate in the technology marketplace, advancing competition. The growth of the global innovation economy depends upon this promise.”

Spain: Telefonica and SEAT sign new 5G partnership boosting Connected Cars

- The automobile company SEAT and telecoms operator Telefonica have [signed](#) a collaboration agreement for a pilot project to test connected cars, with the aim of expanding access to 5G technology in Barcelona.
- The project lies within the scope of the 5G Barcelona consortium, aimed at consolidating the city of Barcelona as Europe’s benchmark 5G hub.
- The characteristics of 5G technology that should help the deployment of connected cars include the use of low latency and edge computing – simplifying Internet of Things (IoT) device traffic and permitting real-time local data analysis, all of which will to help communication between the car and its surrounding infrastructure.

Trust

EU: Europe “urgently” needs a security strategy on 5G to counter China

- In an [op-ed](#) for the Financial Times this week, the EU’s Security Commissioner Sir Julian King, said that Europe risks becoming “collateral damage” in the race between the United States and China to dominate the global technology market.
- It is “increasingly urgent” for Europe to come up with strong security strategy as new 5G Internet networks are rolled-out worldwide.
- He underlined Europe’s heavy reliance on China’s technology, mentioning that “more than 90 percent of our IT devices are made in Asia, notably China, and China controls 70 percent of the global supply of the critical raw materials you need to make them.”
- The commissioner proposed to use the EU’s newly [agreed](#) investment screening mechanism for the technology sector to coordinate spectrum auctions for 5G and boost joint funding in AI.

EU: Initial feedback released on actions taken against fake news

- This week, Google, Facebook, Twitter, Mozilla and the trade associations representing the advertising sector submitted their first [reports](#) on the measures taken to comply with the Commission’s Code of Practice on Disinformation.

- The reports finds progress was made in taking down accounts and de-monetising purveyors of disinformation, but more must be done to widen [access](#) to fact-checking tools.
- Facebook has taken measures to address all the measures in the Code, but should be clearer on how it will boost cooperation with fact-checkers. Google has taken steps to implement all commitments, particularly on improving the scrutiny of ad placements, but must make its tools available in all EU Member States as it is not currently the case.
- Twitter has prioritised actions against malicious actors, closing fake or suspicious accounts but more information is needed on how this will restrict persistent users of disinformation from promoting their tweets.
- And Mozilla is about to launch an upgraded version of its browser to block cross-site tracking by default, but, according to the report, the online browser must be more concrete on how this will limit the information revealed about users' browsing activities.
- The first report will be officially published in February 2019 and will be followed by similar monthly reports until May 2019. By the end of 2019, the EC will carry out a comprehensive assessment at the end of the Code's initial 12-month period.

EU: Facebook to roll out ad transparency rules ahead of EU elections

- Facebook will implement tools to make political advertising more transparent during the upcoming EU elections, including "issue-ads".
- Speaking at an [event](#) in Brussels, Sir Nick Clegg, the company's Vice President for Global Affairs and Communications, announced that: "In late March, we will launch new tools to help prevent interference in the upcoming election and make political advertising on Facebook more transparent."
- Issue-based ads, which attempt to influence voters on an issue such as immigration rather than pull them towards a specific candidate, will also be covered by those rules – most of the political ads ahead of the Brexit referendum were focused on issues rather than people.

EU: Negotiators remain dead-locked on new Platform-2-Business legislation

- The European Parliament and the Council of the EU did not manage to agree on key aspects of the European Commission's [Regulation](#) "Fairness in Platform-to-Business Relations" when they met for a three-way trilogue meeting with the Commission on Monday, earlier this week.
- The co-legislators must still find a compromise on obligations imposed on search engines (other than online rankings), provisions linked to terminations and suspensions (article 4), and their online ranking system. The issues will be discussed again at technical level on February 12.
- The so-called "P2B" file is one of the EC's key proposals to improve the trust of Internet users in online platforms with [new rules](#) increasing the transparency of their terms and conditions and a better dispute resolution system, all in a bid to

help hotels, online traders, app developers and other companies that rely on search engines for attracting Internet traffic.

Germany: Minister warns Facebook against “monopoly” plans

- Katarina Barley, Germany’s Justice Minister, [warned](#) Facebook this week that Germany will enforce European law against Facebook if it combines its Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram messaging services into a unified platform, saying it would amount to a “monopoly”.
- The minister raised concerns about data protection and the principle of technological interoperability, saying that “What Facebook is planning is making a mockery of the idea of interoperability”, the concept should instead be “about allowing users of smaller and more secure messengers to send messages to WhatsApp users, for instance.”

UK: Digital Minister takes cautious approach to online content regulation

- The British government is grappling with how to tackle distressing content and self-harm on social media, after The Sunday Times ran an [investigation](#) on the impact of social media on teenage suicide: “Revealed: how Big Tech pushes teens like Molly Russel to suicide”.
- Health Secretary and former Digital Secretary Matt Hancock, has [written](#) a strongly worded letter to the online platforms concerned (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest) and called for the government to legislate “if [the UK government] think [those companies] need to do things that they are refusing to do”.
- His successor as Digital Secretary, Jeremy Wright, has been more cautious, warning after he took the position that U.K. Internet regulations must be “properly thought through”. But the Minister eventually weighed in [announcing](#) that a “online harms white paper” would set out “new laws to tackle the full range of online harms and set clear responsibilities for tech and social media companies in the UK”.

Poland: Data protection complaint filed against Google

- The Polish NGO Panoptykon Foundation [filed](#) complaints against Google and the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) related to the online behavioural advertising market.
- The complaint focuses on the role of Google and the IAB as “organisations that set standards for other actors involved in the OBA market...They should therefore be treated as data controllers responsible for GDPR infringements.”
- The Panoptykon Foundation is a member of European Digital Rights in Brussels.