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Frédéric Donck (ERB)

Internet Access

EU: Commission to prioritise investment in “first class” connectivity infrastructure

- In a recent interview, Carlota Reyners Fontana, the European Commission’s Head of Unit for High-Capacity Networks, emphasised that investment in “first class connectivity infrastructure” is among the EU’s top priorities to cover the bloc’s broadband gaps.
- In the EurActiv [interview](#), Ms. Reyners stressed the importance of the EU’s broadband expansion, with an allocation of €6 billion of European Funds for the 2014-2020. In the next budgetary period (2021-2027), the EU will support high speed connectivity through financing instruments like the European Regional Development Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.
- On the urban-rural divide, the Commission official highlighted the Rural Action Plan, which proposed measures to national governments around exchanging best practices through the Broadband Competence Offices network, targeted Member State missions, closer monitoring of broadband spending within Europe’s regional development funds and updated guidelines on broadband investment.
- For Ms. Reyners, the main obstacles to delivering high-speed connectivity in rural areas are: costs tied to deployment, lack of returns and geographic difficulties.

EU: The European Parliament signs off on Digital Europe Programme

- The European Parliament during its last plenary session of the 2014-2019 mandate [adopted](#) the €9.2bn “Digital Europe” programme (DEP). The Agreement, which was adopted with 561 votes in favour, 39 against and 50 abstention, is the EU’s first ever programme dedicated to the deployment of new technologies fully funded by a European budget.
- The DEP sets aside money to fund five areas over 2021-2027, focused on deploying, as opposed to trialling or testing, new technologies in high

performance computing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, interoperability and eGovernment, as well as educational programmes supporting Digital Skills.

- The rapporteur for the file, Angelika Mlinar, an Austrian Liberal Member of the European Parliament, welcomed the agreement reached between the European Parliament and Council, saying: “For too many years, Europe’s tech sector has lagged behind third countries such as the US and China. We need a coherent Union-wide approach and an ambitious investment to secure a solution to the chronic mismatch between the growing demand for the latest technology and the available supply in Europe”.

Trust

Global: Mozilla releases its 2019 Internet Health Report

- The software company Mozilla has released its [2019 Internet Health Report](#) addressing “what it means for the Internet to be healthy, and to participate in setting an agenda for how we can work together to create an Internet that truly puts people first”. The report itself is not a country-level index, but rather a mix of interviews, research and data analysis on how issues affecting the Internet can be solved.
- The report covers five themes: privacy and security; openness; digital inclusion; web literacy; and decentralisation. It concludes with a series of privacy-centred recommendations aimed at improving Internet health. These include frequent checking of app privacy settings, particularly with regards to internal data sharing and what could be defined as ‘first class knowledge’ of the user’s preferences and habits.

EU: Commission welcomes efforts by online platforms to fight fake news

- The European Commission [welcomed](#) earlier this week the latest reports by Facebook, Google and Twitter on the developments made in March 2019 fighting online disinformation in the context of the 2019 European elections.
- The platforms did not, however, report on the same kind of information. While Google reported on concrete actions to improve the scrutiny process of the placement of political issue-based advertising in the EU, Facebook reported on actions taken against the online adverts that violated internal rules, for example, for including misleading or low-quality content. Twitter, on the other hand, provided an update of its political campaigning policy and provided further details on the public disclosure of political ads.
- Four EU commissioners, Věra Jourová (Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality), Julian King (Security Union), Mariya Gabriel (Digital Economy & Society), and Andrus Ansip, (Vice-President for the Digital Single Market), published a joint statement welcoming the platforms to fulfil their commitments. The statement also highlighted that “further technical improvements as well as sharing of methodology [will be] necessary to allow third-party experts, fact-checkers and researchers to carry out independent evaluations”.

UK: Minister considering “potential criminal investigation” into high-level 5G leak

- Following the unauthorised disclosure by a high-placed member of the British government of confidential discussions on the role of Huawei Technologies in Britain’s 5G network supply chains, the British culture minister Jeremy Wright [announced](#) he was considering a potential criminal investigation.
- The information leak occurred after a meeting of the British National Security Council (NSC), during which the decision was taken of banning Huawei from all core parts of the country’s 5G network.
- Wright stated: “I do not think that the motivation for this leak matters in the slightest. This was unacceptable and it is corrosive to the ability to deliver good government.”

Germany: Google’s online copyright dispute with publishers escalates

- VG Media, a collecting society that manages the rights of German press publishers like Axel Springer along with radio and TV stations, has [asked](#) Google to retroactively pay €1.24 billion over the use of copyright-protected content from 2013 until 2018.
- According to Politico, the tech giant could be planning on counteracting the fine by arguing that the publishers “have received hundreds of millions of clicks through the search engine, which had been freely monetizable”.
- The collecting society invoked the recently-adopted European copyright reform, which grants publishers a neighbouring right, and while this directive has not yet been published in the EU Official Journal, the case foreshadows many of the upcoming disputes likely to be faced by Google in the future.

Belgium: Privacy Watchdog pursuing stricter compliance with GDPR

- Eleven months after the entry into force of the GDPR, the Belgian Data Protection Authority (GBA) put in place a [stricter system](#) to further monitor corporate compliance with European privacy rules.
- The GBA will apply a more sophisticated penalty scheme that can go up to 20 million euros or 4% of the company’s revenue.
- The recently appointed Chairman of the GBA, David Stevens, recognised that Belgian companies certainly “showed procrastination” when introducing the European data protection rules, and acknowledged the GBA’s current lack of a management committee. However, Chairman Stevens told newspaper De Tijd, that the “time to sit back and relax over GDPR is over”, and that the watchdog will be going the “extra mile” to ensure Belgian companies comply.

Ireland: New investigation into Facebook’s security systems

- The Irish Data Protection Authority (An Coimisiún um Chóisiúnt Sonraí) has been [notified](#) of Facebook’s password storage in plain text format in its internal servers and is now studying the company to check its compliance with the GDPR on this issue.

- The investigation follows Facebook's [announcement](#) in March that after a "routine security review" they realised several user's passwords had been stored in a readable format in their internal data storage systems. The tech giant announced then that the problems had been solved and informed affected users of the issue.
- The investigation into Facebook by Ireland's Data Protection Commission will carry over the summer of 2019.