European Regional Bureau Newsletter

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Internet Access

Global: Internet growth around the world has stalled according to a new report

- The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development [released] a report this week, according to which Internet network development is "failing to reach the remaining half of the global population still lacking online access."
- To counter this trend, the Broadband Commission advocates for a 'meaningful universal connectivity' – a concept which envisions a holistic approach to broadband networks development focused on greater resource sharing among parties.
- This notion not only "encompasses broadband that is available, accessible, relevant and affordable" but also "leads to positive impact" at times when governments seek new ways of financing networks roll-out.

EU: The Commission released the preliminary results of Wifi4EU's third call

- This week, the European Commission [published] the preliminary results of its third call for Wifi4EU, an initiative that promotes free access to Wi-Fi connectivity in public spaces.
- More than 11,000 applications from municipalities of participating countries were received, of which 1,780 were granted vouchers of €15,000 to install state-of-the-art Wi-Fi equipment in public spaces.
- With a budget of €120 million between 2018 and 2020, the Commission has issued nearly 8,000 vouchers to date, contributing to the expansion of connectivity across EU Member States.

EU: European broadband initiatives are highly successful, Trade Commissioner says

- In a speech at the Broadband Competence Offices Conference this week, EU Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan [underscored] that European broadband plan has brought big success over the last two years.

- As "fast broadband coverage in rural areas has risen from 20% in 2013 to 53% today", the digital divide between urban and rural areas has already begun to narrow, according to the Commissioner.
- Commissioner Hogan also stressed the importance of investments into infrastructure, pointing out that in the current period, the Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (CAP) has allocated €6 million for broadband infrastructure.

Trust

Global: Disinformation campaigns around the world doubled over the last two years

- The Oxford Internet Institute published a report this week which outlines that organised social media disinformation campaigns have more than doubled over the last two years.
- Researchers found evidence of various types of disinformation techniques used in 70 countries in 2019, a number much higher than the 28 states mentioned in 2017.
- China has surpassed Russia as the leader of targeted government disinformation campaigns, while other countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Venezuela have also been active in spreading false information online.

Global: The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism strengthens its commitment to fighting online extremism

- Members of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) met with government leaders this week in the margins of the UN General Assembly to discuss their progress on the implementation of the Christchurch Call to Action.
- GIFCT announced that it has introduced a number of toolkits, techniques, and algorithms that assist companies and civil society in countering violent extremism and building capacity online.
- Established by Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube, GIFCT has recently achieved its 2019 target, incorporating over 200,000 digital fingerprints of terrorist content into its database.

Global: Facebook to allow politicians who break rules to continue posting

- Facebook declared this week that it will leave up posts from politicians that otherwise violate the company's content standards.
- The company will only remove rule-breaking posts that lead to "real world violence and harm" and can endanger consumers.
- Facebook VP Nick Clegg justified the company's decision by claiming that a private company that regulates political rhetoric online would be unacceptable to society.

EU: EU and US hold talks to facilitate law enforcement access to data

- Officials from the European Commission and the US Department of State met this week to begin talks on the "EU-U.S. agreement to facilitate access to electronic evidence in criminal investigations."
- Justice Commissioner Věra Jourová welcomed the negotiations, stating that the initiative will "strengthen our security, while protecting the data privacy and procedural safeguards of our citizens." An EU-US agreement would also aim to solve conflicts of law companies face under the US CLOUD Act and the EU's current regime of mutual legal assistance treaties with the US to exchange such data.
- After a successful first round of negotiations, the two parties are expected to meet regularly, with the next EU-US meeting scheduled for December 2019.

EU: MEPs demand companies to remove terrorist content within one hour
- This week, the new European Parliament's civil liberties committee backed the position that MEPs had taken in May on terrorism content online.
- The Parliament demands companies to remove terrorism-related content from their websites "within an hour of receiving an order from national authorities."
- As the Council of the EU reached a political agreement in December 2018, the Parliament's committee approval of the file could mean that negotiations between the two EU bodies could soon commence to reach a final position.

EU: The EU Cybersecurity Agency and MEPs discuss Europe's cyber future
- The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) organised a debate this week with EU lawmakers.
- Key cybersecurity priorities of the Union were discussed, among which IoT Security, 5G, digital sovereignty, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and regulation.
- It was stressed that the EU should continue to maintain its leadership in "key pieces of legislation such as the GDPR and the Cybersecurity Act in an increasingly interconnected digital society."

EU: Regulatory NGO outlines the future of tech regulation in Europe
- The Centre on Regulation in Europe (CERRE) released a white paper this week that highlights EU's policy priorities on AI, data, content, and infrastructure.
- The paper recommends that users should be empowered with greater transparency, which would incentivise platforms to remove illegal content.
- Regarding AI and data, CERRE recommends that data portability should go beyond the GDPR.

EU: European Court sides in Google on a landmark 'right to be forgotten' case
- The European Court of Justice ruled on Tuesday that Google is not obliged to apply the 'right to be forgotten' rule outside of the EU.
- Nonetheless, privacy expert Gabriela Zanfir-Fortuna highlighted that "The Court left open the possibility for global delisting in limited number of cases."

- Such delisting cannot occur automatically, but it can be triggered by relevant national authorities which will be given the jurisdiction to do so.