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Internet Access

EU: Eastern Partnership – Ministerial meeting promotes digital cooperation

- Meeting in Bucharest on Thursday 28 February, the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU hosted government representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to discuss ways to deepen digital cooperation across the region.
- The ministers agreed to address in priority i) the online service economy to ensure better prices with greater choice; ii) stronger personal data protection, iii) and initiatives to boost trade and employment.
- Welcoming the results of the ministerial meeting on behalf of the European Commission, Andrus Ansip, Vice President for the Digital Single Market, declared: "Today our Eastern partners have taken an important step towards the reduction of roaming tariffs among their countries. This is one concrete step with real impact, but it's crucial to work on every aspect of digital - including data flows, security and regulatory alignment."

EU: Mobile broadband prices going down, says OECD

- The results of a new OECD study show that mobile broadband prices went down in 2018 for most EU countries.
- The countries with the cheapest broadband prices are: Italy, Poland, Austria, France, the UK, Luxembourg and Finland.
- While the most expensive were: the Czech Republic and Cyprus, followed by Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland and Croatia.
- As part of the OECD's broadband statistics update, the organisation also found that the share of high-speed fibre in fixed broadband Internet connections in its member countries rose by 25, up from 12% eight years ago, indicating that OECD members are making progress in rolling out faster broadband.

EU: European Parliament hosts hearing on connectivity

- Last week, Members of the European Parliament's Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) Committee of the European Parliament held a [public hearing](#) on 5G connectivity to discuss its wider implication on Europe's digital future.
- Participants discussed the current state-of-play of the 5G rollout, the barriers and potential benefits. The panellists (Antonio Capone from the Technical University of Milan and Daniel Gueorguiev from GMSA) reminded that the EU is in the top five leading regions of the world for 5G connectivity, but hobbled by the divergence in network coverage across Member States, which is keeping the EU far behind the world's leading 5G country: South Korea.
- The second panel focused on satellite navigation and how commercial satellites can help countries progress towards ubiquitous connectivity by integrating large amounts of data on its terrestrial network.

Trust

Global: The Internet Society releases its Global Internet Report

- This week, the Internet Society (ISOC) released its 2019 Global Internet [Report](#), taking a deep dive into the effects of market consolidation on the online economy.
- Building on findings from the previous 2017 report, ISOC finds that stakeholders are most concerned about the growing concentration of power in the Internet economy, pointing to market and technical forces driving the consolidation at different layers of the Internet.
- One of the consequences of consolidation highlighted in the report are "deep dependencies" in which default one-stop shops, interoperability and standards development as well as the flattening of the Internet's infrastructure render the development of new applications across the global economy increasingly dependent on a small number of private platforms owned by the largest Internet companies.
- In the [forward](#) to the report, ISOC CEO Andrew Sullivan, says the trends resulting from consolidation have "the potential to alter how the Internet works, and together they may represent a challenge to the traditional Internet architecture."

EU: Commission launches new pilot projects to reinforce cybersecurity capacity

- The European Commission [announced](#) on 26 February that is will invest €63.5m in four pilot projects to lay the ground work that will help build a European network of centres of cybersecurity expertise.
- The four pilots, CONCORDIA, ECHO, SPART and CyberSec4Europe, will contribute to the creation of a common European Cybersecurity Research & Innovation Roadmap beyond 2020.

EU: Platforms must do more on fake news, says Commission

- The European Commission (EC) [criticised](#) social media platforms this week (Google, Facebook and Twitter) on their efforts to tackle disinformation online.

- The three companies are signatories to the EU Code of Practice on disinformation and have agreed to provide monthly reports on the metrics they are using to reduce online disinformation.
- Facebook has not reported its efforts on the scrutiny of ad placements or the number of fake accounts linked to malicious activity targeting the EU.
- According to the EC, Google has not shown concretely how it has implemented its policies to ensure election integrity, and Twitter has provided too few metrics on a range of issues, including on the scrutiny of ad placements.
- The companies defended themselves, with both Twitter and Facebook highlighting their company's recent efforts to develop new performance indicators for political advertising. Google's Vice President Kristie Canegallo emphasised that the company is ready to act, that "[Google] has twenty years of experience in these information challenges and would "strive to do better than anyone else".

EU: Fake News - New measures to build "democratic resilience" are needed

- The European Parliament's Civil Liberties committee (LIBE) has this week released a report on the impact of fake news on the functioning of the rule of law in the EU.
- The authors, including academics from HEC (Alberto Alemanno) and Hungary's Central European University (Petra Bard) set out recommendations on how the EU can increase its "democratic resilience", calling on the Commission to create a European election observation body similar to the EEAS's election observation service.
- On dissemination methods, the authors argue that bots, automated accounts and artificial intelligence (AI) should be ruled out as means to publish and disseminate political issue ads, and that political micro-targeting should be made fully compliant with the GDPR's Article 22, which gives users the right not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing.
- The report also advocates new forms of self-regulation, saying Member States should create harmonised rules to induce political parties to lay down codes of conduct.

EU: Copyright Agreement on final stretch towards adoption

- The Legal Affairs (JURI) Committee of the European Parliament this week approved the proposed reform of the Copyright Directive, which was agreed in the trilogue deal between the Commission, Parliament and Council two weeks ago.
- The Council has already signed off on the reform, the next step is now final adoption in the European Parliament's plenary session, in either late March or early April.
- There is however a campaign underway to get the plenary to reject the agreement. The European Digital Rights (EDRi) NGO and others have launched a website where MEPs can pledge to vote against the directive's Article 13.

- The website claims that at the upcoming EU election, "we will only vote for politicians who vote against Article 13". So far, 61 MEPs have signed up.

EU: "Let's avoid a Digital Iron Curtain", says Chinese Ambassador to the EU

- In a by-lined article published in EUobserver this week, the Head of China's Mission to the EU Zhang Ming stressed the need for cooperation on 5G technology.
- Describing the technology as a product of global innovation and cooperation, the Chinese ambassador makes a parallel with the Iron Curtain that once divided Europe, warning that a new digital iron curtain would "upset global economic and scientific cooperation, undermine the principles of free trade and fair competition, disrupt market order, and eventually, hurt the interests of every consumer".
- On the industry's side, the Chinese vendor of telecoms equipment Huawei has pledged to invest €2bn to improve its "software engineering capability" with the aim of enhancing the security of its products in an effort to counter security concerns expressed by European lawmakers and MEPs.

Ireland: Irish DPA launched 15 investigations on tech giants in 2018

- Ireland's Data Protection Authority released this week its first annual report since the GDPR came into force, revealing that it opened 15 investigations between May 25 and December 31, 2018.
- Ten of the investigations targeted Facebook (WhatsApp, Instagram), two on Twitter, two on Apple, and one on LinkedIn.
- The DPA noted its "significantly increased workload" during this period, and alongside the statutory enquiries, also dealt with 260 complaints, 38 cross-border processing personal-data breach notifications handled, and 23 formal requests issued by the DPA to organisations seeking more information on their GDPR compliance.

UK: UK leads the way in AI investment in Europe

- A report published last week by Tech Nation found that AI start-ups from the UK raised almost as much as France, Germany and the rest of Europe combined in 2018.
- British AI companies raised a record $1.3 billion in capital last year while French AI companies raised $400m and German companies raised $300m. According to the study, interest in AI companies has leapt since 2014, when UK AI companies raised just $200m.
- Whilst investments in AI have been rising across all sectors, fintech and health tech have seen particularly strong growth.