European Regional Bureau Newsletter

18 May 2019 – 24 May 2019
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Internet Access

EU: SILKA Project – Getting the EU ready for the 5G revolution

- As part of its ongoing commitment to 5G, the European Commission (EC) is funding projects to develop more efficient antennae, electronics and signal-processing algorithms.
- Spotlighting one of these projects, the EC published this week more information on the SILKA Project, a project launched in 2016 with a €3m budget by researchers in Sweden and Belgium to test various types of antennae needed for 5G base-stations.
- Project Coordinator Ulf Johannsen from Eindhoven Technical University explained that "to make use of the new frequency bands for 5G, SILIKA's base station combines the signal power of many antenna elements into beams that can be automatically directed towards the users. Based on this concept, the project team is working towards a system demonstrator and has already manufactured the first components".

UK: Digital divide – residents in rural England frustrated with slow broadband

- County Broadband, a leading British provider of wireless Internet services in rural regions, has conducted a survey among more than 2000 rural England residents finding that they are "often left frustrated with slow broadband speeds and uncertain over the type of service they are subscribed to".
- County Broadband's Chief Executive Lloyd Felton commented on the survey, saying that "it reveals a lot of confusion with many homes and business signing up for 'fibre' thinking they are getting the faster speeds, when in fact their superfast connection relies on existing copper which significantly reduces speed and reliability".
- The survey comes after County Broadband's announcement of plans to launch a new ultrafast full-fibre network in rural villages in the East Anglia region, and finds

that 57% of the interviewed were frustrated, and a 22% did not know the broadband speeds they had contracted from their provider.

Trust

Global: Facebook deletes more than two billion fake accounts in less than a year

- In a blog post published by Guy Rosen, Facebook's Vice President of Integrity, the social media giant announced it has taken down around 2.2 billion fake accounts in the first quarter of 2019 in comparison to the total of 1.2 billion erased last year.
- Guy Rosen links the rise of fake accounts to "automated attacks by bad actors who attempt to create large volumes of accounts at one time". He also told reporters that the company could not attribute the authorship of the accounts, adding they are "spammers who are constantly trying to evade our systems".
- The announcement is framed in the context of Facebook's Community Standards Enforcement Report, which tracks the company's performance on preventing and removing content that goes against its Community Standards.

EU: Fake news - Populist anti-immigration themes are the most prevalent type, says report

- A report published this week entitled "Junk News during the EU Parliamentary Elections" analyses the nature of the disinformation being shared prior to the EU elections, as part of The Computational Propaganda Project of the University of Oxford's Internet Institute.
- The study found that that Twitter is less likely than Facebook to share fake news, as less than 4% of sources shared were junk news or known Russian sources.
- Facebook seems a more favourable environment to share junk news, where individual junk news stories were found to "hugely outperform" even the best, most important professionally produced stories.
- According to the Oxford Internet Institute, the most successful fake news stories reflect populist themes, anti-immigration and Islamophobic sentiment, while only a few posts expressed Euroscepticism or directly mentioned European leaders or parties, indicating the problem of online disinformation is wider than a dissatisfaction with the EU's policies.
- The research analyses the quality and quantity of political news shared by social media users on Facebook and Twitter in English, French, German, Italian, Polish and Spanish in the month preceding the election (5 April – 5 May).

EU: GDPR – One year later, privacy complaints continue rolling in

- One year after the adoption of GDPR, up to 145,000 privacy complaints have been filled across the EU, and up to 90,000 data breaches have been notified.
- In Spain, the data protection authority received more than 14,000 complaints, which led to over 2,000 cases. The administration also reported almost 1,000 data breaches in the last year, a third of which led to the loss or theft of people's devices or personal documentation.

- Other examples of countries taking action include Lithuania, which recently imposed a €61,500 administrative fine on MisterTango, an e-payment company that "improperly processed personal data in screenshots", making it publicly available and failing to report the personal data breach to the relevant authority.
- EU Justice Commissioner Věra Jourová believes that Greece, Portugal and Slovenia have not yet adapted their legislation to EU's privacy rules. She stated, "I would like to urge the three remaining Member States to adapt their national legislation". And added "GDPR left quite wide [sic] some space for national specificities. We have to watch whether, by using this space, countries deviate from the lines of GDPR".

EU: European Commission to re-evaluate plans to fight hate speech in October

- Speaking about the Commission's Code of Conduct on Illegal Hate Speech, EU Justice Commissioner Věra Jourová stated this week that she would like to see the last monitoring report completed under her mandate, with a report presented to Home Affairs ministers in the Council in October.
- Although this presentation will lead to a set of recommendations for the next Commission, Justice Commissioner stated that the Council meeting will be an opportunity to think more long term about the need to regulate or not online hate speech at EU level, leaving the door open for the next Commission to take a decision.
- Similar initiatives are also being developed at national level. Germany approved in 2017 its law fighting illegal hate speech in 2017, and France is still currently in the process of adopting its own proposal.

EU: Poland to challenge copyright reform in EU's Court of Justice

- The Polish government announced on Twitter earlier this week that it would take the EU's copyright reform to the European Court of Justice.
- The reform, which the Polish executive defines as a "disproportionate measure that fuels censorship and threatens freedom of expression", puts companies such as YouTube in the position of having to negotiate licensing agreements with rights-holders, including record companies, collecting societies and media companies, to publish their content.
- This directive was adopted earlier in the year and published in the EU's Official Journal last week. Poland had repeatedly voted against in the Council of the EU.

EU: Potential review of the e-commerce directive in the air

- After years of talks, stakeholders, governments and policymakers are openly discussing in Brussels whether the 2000 e-commerce directive is still fit for purpose.
- Speaking on behalf of the Commission at a recent policy event organised by Microsoft in Brussels, Werner Stengg, Head of Unit for Platforms and e-Commerce, says the issue now lies in the hands of the next College of

Commissioners to decide whether the e-commerce legislation should be re-assessed or not.

- According to Microsoft's Cornelia Kutterer: "We have been betting on when the European Commission was going to reopen the e-commerce directive for the last 10 years [...] Now there are signs from the Commission that there is a likelihood it will happen soon".

- Werner Stengg has previously argued that there is a need to analyse the different types of information society services because "different types of services raise different types of challenges". In this regard, concepts such as "passive platforms" might no longer be relevant or fit for purpose.