

EU agrees deal to tame internet 'Wild West'

April 22 2022, by Daniel Aronsson



The EU's internal markets commissioner says the internet is like the 'Wild West'

The European Union on Saturday finalised new legislation to require Big Tech to remove harmful content, the bloc's latest move to rein in the world's online giants.

The Digital Services Act (DSA)—the second part of a massive project to

regulate tech companies—aims to ensure tougher consequences for platforms and websites that host a long list of banned content, from hate speech to disinformation and child sexual abuse images.

EU officials and parliamentarians finally reached agreement at talks in Brussels early Saturday on the legislation, which has been in the works since 2020.

"Today's agreement on DSA is historic," European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen tweeted.

"Our new rules will protect users online, ensure freedom of expression and opportunities for businesses. What is illegal offline will effectively be illegal online in the EU."

"Yes, we have a deal!" European Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton tweeted.

"With the DSA, the time of big online platforms behaving like they are 'too big to care' is coming to an end. A major milestone for EU citizens," said Breton, who has previously described the internet as the "Wild West".

The EU's provisional agreement reached Saturday remains subject to formal approval by the 27 member states and the European Parliament.

The regulation is the companion to the Digital Markets Act (DMA), which targeted anti-competitive practices among tech behemoths such as Google and Facebook and was concluded in late March.

The legislation had faced lobbying from the tech companies and intense debate over the extent of freedom of speech.

Obligations for large platforms

Tech giants have been repeatedly called out for failing to police their platforms—a 2019 New Zealand terror attack live-streamed on Facebook caused global outrage, and the chaotic insurrection in the US last year was promoted online.

The dark side of the internet also includes e-commerce platforms filled with counterfeit or defective products.

For its part, the large digital business lobby CCIA said Saturday that "a number of important details" need to be "clarified" so "the final legislation allows all businesses, large and small, to comply with the rules in practice".

The regulation will require platforms to swiftly remove illegal content as soon as they are aware of its existence. Social networks would have to suspend users who frequently breach the law.

The DSA will force e-commerce sites to verify the identity of suppliers before proposing their products.

While many of the DSA's stipulations cover all companies, it lays out special obligations for "very large platforms", defined as those with more than 45 million active users in the European Union.

While the list of companies has not yet been released it will include giants such as Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft, as well as Twitter and probably the likes of TikTok, Zalando and Booking.com.

These players will be obliged to assess the risks associated with the use of their services and remove illegal content.

They will also be required to be more transparent about their data and algorithms.

'A world first'

The initiative is "a world first in the field of digital regulation", the European Council, which represents the 27 member states, said in a statement.

"The DSA follows the principle that what is illegal offline must also be illegal online. It aims to protect the digital space against the spread of illegal content, and to ensure the protection of users' fundamental rights," the statement continued.

Hillary Clinton, the former US secretary of state and presidential candidate, has applauded the EU for taking action.

"For too long, tech platforms have amplified disinformation and extremism with no accountability," Clinton tweeted. "The EU is poised to do something about it."

The European Commission will oversee yearly audits and be able to impose fines of up to six percent of their annual sales for repeated infringements.

Among the practices expected to be outlawed is the use of data on religion or political views for targeted advertising.

Former Facebook employee Frances Haugen caused a huge stir last year when she accused her former bosses of prioritising profits over the welfare of users.

Haugen hailed Saturday's decision.

"Congratulations!!" she posted on Twitter.

Referring to Facebook's new name, Meta, she added: "For the first time in history, the public is going to be able to ask independent questions about how @Meta and the other big platforms work and get the data to see the truth."

However, the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) feared the text does not go far enough.

It wants a ban on all advertising based on the surveillance of internet users, and random checks on online vendors' products.

© 2022 AFP

Citation: EU agrees deal to tame internet 'Wild West' (2022, April 22) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2022-04-eu-eyes-internet-wild-west.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.