

EU threatens tougher rules on hate speech after Facebook meeting

17 February 2020, by Alex Pigman



Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg was in Brussels urging officials to not go too far in punishing platforms for carrying hate speech

A top EU official for digital policy warned Monday that big tech companies could face tougher rules and penalties in Europe if they failed to adequately curb hate speech and disinformation.

European Industry Commissioner Thierry Breton remarks followed talks with Facebook boss Mark Zuckerberg, who was in Brussels urging officials to not go too far in punishing platforms for carrying [hate speech](#).

"If all the platforms operating on the European continent do not respect the conditions that I have just outlined, yes, we will be forced to intervene in a stricter way," Breton told reporters.

But Breton, who leads up EU digital policy along with Commission Executive Vice President Margrethe Vestager, warned that [new legislation](#) by the end of the year could be much tougher on big tech.

These new rules "can be binding to avoid this kind

of abuse, because it is abusive, when totally illegal content is massively disseminated to our fellow citizens," Breton said.

The former French finance minister said a proposal for a Digital Services Act by the end of the year could carry real consequences for companies like Facebook that had so far self regulated.

In the meetings, the founder of the world's biggest social media network that also owns Instagram and Whatsapp, emphasised the importance of better controlling hate [speech](#) and disinformation on platforms—but without muzzling free speech.

He raised the topic with European Commission Vice President Vera Jourova, a top Brussels official who became an outspoken critic of Facebook after the Cambridge Analytica data scandal in 2018.

Good regulation of hate speech would require a new type of regulator for the EU, Zuckerberg argued to Jourova.

'Not enough'

In a paper submitted to the commissioners, Facebook stressed that the way to limit unwanted speech was to make sure that platforms put the right systems in place, not by holding them liable for the speech itself.

"Publisher liability laws that punish the publication of illegal speech are unsuitable for the internet landscape," the paper said.

Breton said the proposals by Facebook were "interesting" but "not enough: too slow, too low in term of responsibilities".

Facebook needs "to be more specific on the responsibility and market dominance was not mentioned", he added.

Zuckerberg came to EU headquarters as Brussels prepares to unveil a highly-anticipated strategy to regulate artificial intelligence.

Google boss Sundar Pichai made a similar visit in January and called on Brussels to tread carefully in regulating AI.

With AI in mind, Zuckerberg also met with Vestager, another leading scourge of big tech, who has inflicted billions of euros in anti-trust fines on Google.

Her proposal on AI, due Wednesday, was expected to pursue a "risk-based" approach similar to how Europe approaches food safety concerns, such as GMOs and certain chemicals.

Vestager has told reporters she would back away from a ban on facial recognition technology and instead ask companies and authorities to think hard before deploying it.

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