

## Implementing the European Agenda on Security:

### The EU Internet Forum

Brussels, 3 December 2015

#### What is the problem and what are the challenges we need to address?

There has been a steady rise in the volume of **violent extremist and terrorist material on the internet**. Terrorist groups such as Da'esh are exploiting the internet to produce propaganda at an alarming rate, often delivering sophisticated, high definition audiovisual material on an almost daily basis. Their persistent yet agile presence on the internet combined with their rapid, multiplying means of dissemination, enables them to target EU nationals for the purpose of recruitment, radicalisation, and the promotion and facilitation of terrorist activity.

The **threats and challenges** posed by the use of the internet and social media for terrorist purposes are manifold including in particular the need to detect and impede the dissemination of terrorist material, reduce its impact and to protect vulnerable users of the internet. Efforts need to be enhanced at all levels (international, European and Member State level) and with the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders (industry, law enforcement and civil society). It is a complex challenge requiring a careful balancing of the respective interests as well as a careful choice of appropriate tools, including legal action against those inciting terrorism, regulatory framework, cooperation and information exchange, etc.

The **EU Internet Forum builds on cooperation, exchange of best practices and development of concrete deliverables** as part of a broader endeavour to tackle the problem.

#### What is the purpose, scope and approach of the EU Internet Forum?

The **European Agenda on Security** announced the launch of an EU-level Forum on online counter terrorism, bringing together internet companies, civil society and law enforcement authorities. Building upon the preparatory meetings organised in 2014 and 2015, the Forum will focus on deploying the best tools to counter terrorist propaganda on the internet and in social media. In cooperation with internet companies, the Forum may also explore the concerns of law enforcement authorities on issues of e-evidence. Other topics, such as migrant smuggling and drugs and firearms trafficking may be addressed as well.

The fight against **hate speech** and terrorist propaganda online has commonalities in terms of tools used, strategies and use of counter-narratives. It is therefore envisaged that the industry dialogue on hate speech online might use the umbrella of the EU Internet Forum, when appropriate, to maximize synergies and join efforts, develop mutual learning and avoid overlaps.

Work within the **EU Internet Forum builds on voluntary engagement** with the industry and better collaboration between the different stakeholders. Without prejudice to the respective legal obligations of internet companies under existing EU or national law, a voluntary approach helps secure the highest volume of referrals and in the quickest time possible.



## What are the objectives of work within the EU Internet Forum?

The preparatory work leading to the launch identified two priority areas where significant and measurable progress needs to be made in the next months:

First: '**Reducing the Availability of Terrorist and Hate Speech Material Online**': Efforts need to be increased to reduce the huge volume of terrorist material online, all too accessible within a few easy clicks.

The main objectives here are to encourage companies to put in place robust terms and conditions, to encourage material that is taken down to 'stay down', to empower the public to refer material of concern, and to ensure that companies have the necessary resources, staff and infrastructure in place to respond swiftly to referrals.

Secondly: '**Supporting and Increasing Effective Counter-Narratives Online and Promoting Media in Cooperation with Civil Society Partners**': Efforts need to be increased to ensure that credible moderated voices are not drowned out by terrorist material and that we increase the volume of effective counter narratives, effectively challenge the extremist narrative and provide positive alternative avenues of action.

The main objectives here are to offer to civil society the necessary training, expertise and advice to help them develop counter narratives and promote their communication campaigns.

## How will the EU Internet Forum help in achieving these objectives?

The EU Internet Forum provides a **platform** to develop cooperation between the different stakeholders, to steer further discussions at a strategic level, and to agree on concrete deliverables in terms of exchange of practices and operational cooperation.

The Forum has as its primary purpose to facilitate and **enhance cooperation**. While regulatory or legislative initiatives are not as such part of the discussions, experience gained within the EU Internet Forum can inform discussions on regulatory matters (e.g. as regards the ongoing discussions in the context of the **Digital Single Market Strategy**). The Forum could also consider at a later stage the need to establish guidelines or recommendations if considered useful and necessary by all stakeholders involved.

When it comes to the **implementation** and **follow up work** of the different initiatives agreed among stakeholders, the EU Internet Forum will also draw on other fora and platforms. For instance, as regards the development of counter narratives, making available expertise developed within the Radicalisation Awareness Network (in particular form the **RAN Working Group on Communication & Narratives**) or the Strategic Communications Advisory Team (**SCAT**). Similarly, as regards referral mechanisms, operational cooperation will be developed with **Europol** and its **EU Internet Referral Unit (IRU)**. In a similar vein, ongoing work in expert groups on **e-evidence** can feed discussions within the EU Internet Forum and prepare the ground for possible further action and enhanced cooperation in this field.

## What are the next steps?

Following the agreement reached among all participants on the future initiatives and actions, the Commission services will work with stakeholders at technical level on a more **concrete outline of follow up work**. Where necessary to help implementing the agreed objectives and actions, the Commission stands ready to support or facilitate through the provision of ad hoc **workshops**.

The Forum will **reconvene in the course of 2016** to take stock of progress, discuss evolving challenges, and revisit strategic objectives.