Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to welcome you to the launch of the EU Internet Forum. Thank you for coming here today, particularly to those who have travelled from afar.

We need no reminder of the threat we face from terrorists. Many of us are still reeling from the most dreadful atrocities inflicted on Paris just three weeks ago. And those of us in Brussels have been shrouded in the shadow of an imminent threat which has caused great

anxiety across the city. Whilst counter terrorism efforts are being ramped up at national, EU and international level, it is one specific element I want us to focus on today, and that is the internet.

The sheer volume of terrorist material that can easily be

accessed online is indeed alarming. Some terrorist groups have employed sophisticated media arms, dedicated to churning out large volumes of multidimensional terrorist propaganda, and disseminating it broadly and swiftly across the internet.

Their purpose is to intimidate, to radicalise and to recruit, to facilitate and direct terrorist activity, and to glorify in their atrocities. Their material includes threats and hate speech, training manuals, advice on how to obtain and import weapons, instructions on how make bombs and how

individuals becoming radicalised in a matter of weeks rather than months. It would be wrong to suggest that the internet is solely to blame, but I do believe that the internet is intensifying and accelerating the radicalisation process.

Furthermore, we need only look to recent attacks and attempted attacks to see that terrorists' use of the internet is a recurring theme. The perpetrator of the Thalys attack appears to have downloaded a video calling for 'jihad' before he launched his attack. And in the

aftermath of the Paris attacks, it was abhorrent to see how Daesh glorified in their atrocities and released videos online, urging others to continue targeting French interests, everywhere, and by every available means.

I am under no illusion that we can rid the internet entirely of all such harmful material. But the current situation is untenable. We cannot standby and allow terrorists to continue to have the run of the web. It is our moral duty to address this challenge. Just as internet companies have a

duty to protect their users from harmful materials, so we, as politicians, have a duty to protect our citizens. Let me assure you that today's gathering is not a knee-jerk reaction to recent events, but part of a long-term strategy, as set out in the European

Agenda on Security, which was published in April.

We must not underestimate, nor be deterred, by the scale of the challenge that lies before us. In preparatory discussions, academics have informed us that counter narratives, if delivered

effectively and targeted carefully, can deliver far greater impact and attract more interest than that of the extremist narrative. For that reason, we must empower civil society partners to do just that. I think we all agree that Governments are not best placed to deliver those

messages. It is civil society who has the authoritative and credible voice on this issue.

But we must ensure that they have the necessary support.

And companies, with your technical expertise and know-how, you can also play a vital supporting role.

Companies, we appreciate that you are global entities, attracting users on a global scale. It is not surprising that your sites and services also appeal to criminals, who are determined to exploit them for criminal gain.

And yet, with so many users, we appreciate the difficulties in knowing when your sites are being exploited. I know many of you are active in this area, and have adopted a firm stance against child sexual exploitation on your sites, and increasingly so also against terrorist material. But

the volume of online terrorist material remains high. For that reason, we have established the EU Internet Referral Unit at Europol in order to refer such harmful material to your attention and with a professional assessment clearly justifying the reason for the referral.

We will hear from the Europol Director, Rob Wainwright shortly. But in order to ensure that the IRU is able to reach its full potential, we not only require the support of Member States but we need the companies to ensure that they have the necessary resource in place to respond

swiftly and make sure that material taken down, stays down. Academics have informed us that speed is of the essence. The quicker the material is removed, the less harm it can inflict. But we cannot just rely on the EU IRU, or the few Member States who have national

units in place. We also need to empower the public to report material of concern.

Just as the terrorist groups are prioritising the internet, so must we. We must be smarter, and more collaborative in how we rise to these challenges. We

cannot work in isolation. We all have a role to play and expertise and knowledge that we can bring to the table. I want to use the EU Internet Forum to strengthen the relationship between Member States and the industry. To hear each other's challenges, understand each

other's capability, and work together in identifying and implementing solutions. I am firmly of the view that together, we can make a difference.

I hope we can use the launch of the EU Internet Forum to have an open and frank

discussion. Today's agenda will focus primarily on reducing online terrorist content, and empowering civil society partners to increase the volume of effective counter narratives online, fully recognising there are a number of other competing areas we need to

address going forward. I want to use these discussions to take stock of what has been achieved this year, and help determine actions for 2016. I want to make real progress and use this voluntary partnership to deliver concrete results. I also want to hear your views as to how

this Forum can be used to explore other priority areas such as migrant smuggling, and drug trafficking.

Without further ado, let me now handover to Commissioner Jourova who has today come from a meeting of Justice Ministers

debating the challenges

posed by hate speech.