

Minor Interpellation submitted by Member of the Bundestag Andrej Hunko and others and the Left Party parliamentary group

Measures to delete Internet content and responding with counter-propaganda

Bundestag printed paper 18/3465

Preliminary remarks of the questioners:

The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) newspaper reported that the Federal Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maizière (CDU) had called for "the propaganda of Islamists to be countered by an awareness offensive" (FAZ on 21 November 2014). According to the report, the minister visited the political desk of the FAZ himself, lamenting "Islamists like those from the terror militia" having "a considerable head start when it comes to Internet propaganda". De Maizière advocates countering the "dominance of this scene in public propaganda" by "a type of counter-offensive" and states that this task could be assumed by the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung).

With the participation of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, the governments of several EU Member States held discussions at different levels on new ways of halting "terrorist online activities" and deleting unwelcome contents in cooperation with Internet providers. The issue has also already been on the agenda several times at the regular G6 meetings of several EU ministries of the interior (Germany, France, the UK, Italy, Spain and Poland). At the most recent meeting, it was not just the US Secretary of Homeland Security and head of the Department of Justice that took part as usual - in addition to Canadian authorities, "high-level representatives" from Turkey are also said to have attended according to media reports (article in Neues Deutschland on 6 November 2014). Regarding the preliminary outcomes, the newspaper quotes de Maizière as saying, "we have agreed that by means of a structured dialogue with the major Internet providers we want them to decide in their own interest to remove such contents from the web so that they dry up this source of the digital jihad". So far, however, de Maizière describes this is an "urgent appeal".

Prior to their October meeting, the ministers of the interior of all EU Member States met for an informal dinner with the Internet companies Twitter, Google, Microsoft and Facebook; the EU Commission was also invited. The aim here was also to develop "tools and techniques" for countering "terrorist online activities". It is unclear, however, what content is actually meant here because in the case of videos of beheadings or other atrocities, the Internet providers have long since voluntarily endeavoured to identify footage as quickly as possible and to block access.

According to the Federal Government, the subject of the dinner was "Internet-related security tasks in the context of relations with major enterprises from the Internet sector" (Bundestag printed paper 18/2868). "Procedural requirements" were also said to have been discussed. In addition to "ways to prevent the dissemination of images of executions for propaganda purposes", the use of accounts in social networks was also reportedly an issue. The meeting was designed to "build confidence and trust and to create transparency".

The Federal Ministry of the Interior is also involved in further-reaching initiatives. This includes participating in a working group with the ministries of the interior from Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Luxemburg. It was stated that as a result of this, a "Workshop to develop prevention videos" was to be held before the end of 2014 in Vienna.

Germany also intended to participate according to a communication by the Austrian Ministry of the Interior (27 October 2014). This working group did not deal solely with counter-propaganda either however. According to the Austrian Minister of the Interior Mikl-Leitner it was above all a matter of "removing terrorist content from the Internet as swiftly as possible to prevent any seeds being sown". The same press release states that to this end Mikl-Leitner visited the "Google Development Centre in Zürich" which is described as the "company's largest development location outside of the US". The minister of the interior went there to see "what developments Google experts are working on to identify hate content".

1. What is meant specifically when the Federal Ministry of the Interior calls for "the propaganda of Islamists to be countered by an awareness offensive"?
2. On what reliable findings is the Minister basing his statement that "Islamists like those from the terror militia" have "a considerable head start when it comes to Internet propaganda"?
3. In what way is this "head start" to be made good by "a type of counter-offensive"?

On 1 to 3

The Internet plays an important role in radicalisation processes. New media is used heavily in particular by Salafists to spread their propaganda and in doing so to reach first and foremost young people and to attract them to join their cause. It makes sense therefore to also use new media to help impart the values of our open and free society. This includes raising awareness by means of civic education campaigns about terms and issues used by the Salafists.

4. In what way could the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung - BpB) be entrusted with this task?
 - a) What discussions producing what outcomes have already taken place on this?
 - b) To what extent has the Federal Ministry of the Interior stipulated that it must approve any publications by the BpB of this kind prior to their release?

On 4

The Federal Agency for Civic Education (BpB) has been dealing with the issue of Islamist extremism for quite some time now. One focal point here is Salafism, as radicalisation biographies of people from the Jihadist spectrum often begin by them turning to an initially apparently moderate Salafist philosophy. The BpB is working on developing formats with a big public impact to inform the public about the so-called "Islamic State", its cruel ideology and the dangers for people in civil war-stricken areas, but also in Germany. To this end, the BpB, like for all other relevant issues as well, engages in a regular exchange with the ministry as an agency reporting to the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI).

5. What (including competing) proposals are circulating within the G6 and/or "G6+1" on ways to stop "terrorist online activities" and delete unwelcome contents?

On 5

On 6 November 2014 there was an exchange of ideas and experiences on this issue as well as others in the format of the G6 meeting of interior ministers in Paris. In addition to the ministers of the interior of the G6 countries, the US, in the form of the Department of Justice

and the Department of Homeland Security, Canada, Turkey, the EU Commission and the EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator took part in this item of the agenda. All the countries taking the floor underscored the importance of cooperation with private-sector Internet providers (henceforth referred to as providers) and reported increasingly positive experiences and a growing willingness to enter into voluntary commitments.

6. What is meant when the Federal Ministry of the Interior states that the "G6+1" have "agreed that by means of a structured dialogue with the major Internet providers we want them to decide in their own interest to remove such contents from the web so that they dry up this source of the digital jihad"?

On 6

The participants of the meeting have agreed that they wish to engage in a dialogue with major providers on this issue. No more detailed arrangements on the next steps or the group of participants from the private sector were agreed on.

7. Which procedures and criteria does the Federal Government hold to be suitable for identifying such content and for "removing such contents from the web"?

- a) What discussions have federal authorities conducted on this with which companies?*
- b) To what extent has cooperation now been established as a result of the discussions?*

On 7

The Federal Government itself is not endeavouring to "remove" such contents "from the web". Therefore no such criteria have been or are being developed to this end nor are any such procedures being applied. Deletion is the respective service providers' own responsibility and is subject to the applicable contractual conditions. The Federal Government does however avail itself of the opportunity to make providers aware of Islamist, right-wing extremist or criminally relevant Internet content.

8. To the knowledge of the Federal Government, which (including competing) proposals are circulating at the level of the EU ministers of the interior on ways to stop "terrorist online activities" and to delete unwelcome contents?

On 8

Please refer to the answer to question 5. The Federal Government is not aware of further proposals by the EU ministers of the interior at the present time.

9. To the knowledge of the Federal Government, to what extent are proposals circulating within the "G6+1" and at the level of the EU ministers of the interior merely an appeal to the internet providers and to what extent are the proposals intended to lead to new regulations or legislative initiatives?

On 9

Please refer to the answer to question 5.

10. What knowledge does the Federal Government have regarding the aim, purpose and members of an EU Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team (SSCAT)?

On 10

The aim of the Syria Strategic Communication Advisory Team (SSCAT) is to support the EU Member States as well as European institutions in drafting campaigns on strategic communication and raising awareness to combat radicalisation and recruitment for terrorism. The plan is to establish a network of Member States authorities and experts at European level. The EU Commission is providing funding worth EUR 1 million for this. The Federal Government has no specific knowledge of the participants as the planning to establish a SSCAT is still underway.

11. Which Federal authorities are taking part in either as leader, co-leader or participant in which measures of the Operational Action Plan 2014 and the Operational Action Plan 2015 as part of the "EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime" whose aim is to establish Internet surveillance or to analyse Internet content (please state the status of the authority or agency for each project)?

12. What specific aim are the individual projects pursuing?

On 11 and 12

The priorities set in the context of the EU Policy Cycle 2014-2017 on the basis of the Serious Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) relate to the fields of serious and organised crime. The Operational Action Plans (OAP) 2014 and 2015 drafted as part of the EU-wide fight against serious and organised crime do not contain any measures aiming to establish internet surveillance or analysis of Internet content.

13. What knowledge does the Federal Government have regarding efforts by the EU agency Eurojust on the phenomenon of "foreign fighters", what is the content and aim of such projects and to what extent are federal authorities involved in them?

On 13

At the end of November 2014, Eurojust submitted a report on the phenomenon of "foreign fighters" ("Foreign Fighters: Eurojust's Views on the Phenomenon and the Criminal Justice Response"), which states the response by the individual EU Member States to this phenomenon and issues a series of recommendations.

14. What knowledge does the Federal Government have as to whether or to what extent other EU Member States, third countries or EU agencies also aspire to surveillance and/or prosecution of Kurdish groups (for instance the PKK) in terms of measures against "foreign fighters"?

On 14

The Federal Government has no knowledge as to "whether or to what extent other EU Member States, third parties or EU agencies" "aspire" to measures of the kind stated.

15. To what extent is the Federal Government of the view that Kurdish fighters in Syria could also be considered "foreign fighters", and as such could come under the scope of the said measures?

On 15

In its answer to question 4 of the Minor Interpellation submitted by the Left Party parliamentary group entitled "Gegenwärtige Erkenntnisse zur Fortführung des Vereinsverbots der PKK" ("Current findings regarding the continued ban on the association

PKK"), Bundestag printed paper 18/3491 of 9 December 2014, the Federal Government provided a summary of the information available to it relating to Germany on "Kurdish fighters in Syria". On the basis of this information, "Kurdish fighters" who have gone to Syria via Germany do also come under the scope of the said measures. If such fighters are attributable to the foreign terrorist association of the PKK, it must also be pointed out that the PKK is subject to criminal prosecution as an association prohibited in Germany.

16. What shortcomings does the Federal Government see in the current practices of the Internet companies such as Twitter, Google, Microsoft and Facebook for blocking and/or deleting content glorifying violence unbidden by authorities?

On 16

As the aforementioned providers Twitter, Google, Microsoft and Facebook are US companies and they are subject to American law when it comes to their terms and conditions, there may be different outcomes when evaluating content glorifying violence than under German law or in terms of interpreting decency, mores and moral standards.

For the scope of application of the Basic Law, the Federal Government has no knowledge of specific shortcomings in the current practices of the providers of telemedia services for blocking or deleting contents glorifying violence without being asked to do so by the authorities. To prevent the dissemination of illegal content and content harmful to young people on the Internet, an Internet complaints office has developed which has been operated by eco, the Association of the German Internet Industry, for more than 15 years. Since 2004, the complaints office has been contactable via the web portal internetbeschwerdestelle.de operated jointly with the association Voluntary Self-Monitoring of Multimedia Service Providers (*Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle Multimedia*). In the first six months of 2014, the eco complaints office processed 1,988 indications of unlawful web content. The largest part thereof (814 complaints submitted) were reports of child-pornography. 18 reports (six of which were relevant) concerned content which glorified violence. In July this year a further 137 indications were received concerning e-mails promoting "Jihad".

17. To the knowledge of the Federal Government, what purpose did one or several meetings in November of the EU ministers of the interior with the Internet groups Twitter, Google, Microsoft and Facebook and the European Commission in the form of an informal dinner serve?

a) What is meant when the Federal Government states in relation to the content of the dinner that it was about "Internet-related security tasks in the context of relations with major enterprises from the Internet sector" (printed paper 18/2868)?

b) What specific "procedural requirements" were discussed?

c) What "ways of preventing the dissemination of execution images for propaganda purposes" were discussed?

d) In what way was the use of accounts in social networks an issue?

On 17

On 8 October 2014, on the eve of the JHA Council, upon the invitation of the Italian Council Presidency and Commissioner Cecilia Malmström, a Ministerial Dinner took place in Luxembourg.

The subject of the discussions was the challenges arising from the use of the Internet by terrorists. During the meeting, company representatives emphasised that they do not permit terror organisations to hold an account and reported that footage of executions had already been removed from the web on several occasions. No decisions or agreements were made.

18. What proposals did those attending the meeting in November of the EU ministers of the interior and the Internet groups Twitter, Google, Microsoft and Facebook and the EU Commission make?

a) What specific "tools and techniques" did these proposals envisage developing to counter "terrorist online activities"?

b) What knowledge has the Federal Government gained from the discussions or other information about the extent to which Internet providers are now already able to automatically identify videos of beheadings or other atrocities?

c) What knowledge has the Federal Government gained from the discussions or other information regarding the extent to which Internet providers are already blocking videos of beheadings or other atrocities?

On 18 and a)

At the Ministerial Dinner on 8 October 2014 in Luxemburg "tools and techniques" were not the subject of discussion. Please also refer to the answer to question 17.

b)

The Federal Government has no knowledge of automated procedures by providers to delete videos of beheadings or other atrocities.

c)

To the knowledge of the Federal Government, most providers have put in place control and oversight mechanisms to block or delete content glorifying violence. Please also refer to the answer to question 7.

19. What conclusions does the Federal Government draw from the discussions and which "tools and techniques" to counter "terrorist online activities" does it believe to be suitable itself?

On 19

Tools and techniques were not the subject of discussion. The Federal Government has no information on the internal work processes and procedures of the providers and as such, it is not possible to provide a hypothetical answer on this.

20. What is the content of initiatives on the part of the Federal Ministry of the Interior in collaboration with the ministries of the interior from Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Luxembourg on "terrorist online activities"?

On 20

At the five-country meeting of the ministers of the interior, which took place on 23 and 24 October 2014 in Zürich, the development of a German awareness campaign on the Internet was discussed.

21. *To what extent is the depiction by the Austrian ministry of the interior that at one meeting or working group it was above all about "removing terrorist contents from the Internet as swiftly as possible" correct?*

On 21

Regarding the five-country meeting on 23 and 24 October in Zürich please refer to the answer of the Federal Government to question 26 of the Minor Interpellation of 25 November 2014 submitted by the Left Party parliamentary group (Bundestag printed paper 18/3295).

22. *What measures were agreed on for this purpose?*

On 22

Please refer to the answer to question 21.

23. *Which other participants attended meetings or are to be invited to future meetings?*

On 23

The five-country meeting on 23 and 24 October in Zürich was attended by the ministers of the interior as well as their staff. Future meetings have not been scheduled yet.

24. *To what extent have staff from the federal authorities also visited the "Google Development Centre in Zürich" or received a briefing containing what information on the outcomes of a visit by the Austrian minister of the interior?*

On 24

Members of the federal authorities did not attend the visit by the Austrian minister of the interior to the Google Development Centre. A briefing did not take place.

25. *To what extent does the Federal Government believe it to be necessary or indeed possible to set up an agency at EU level to simplify the deletion of "terrorist internet content" and which activities of its own has it developed in this vein?*

On 25

The establishment of such an agency at EU level is not currently believed to be necessary.

26. *What knowledge does the Federal Government have of investments by the European Commission in such endeavours in this vein and which institutions or Member States are benefiting from this?*

On 26

The European Commission hosted the Ministerial Dinner on 8 October 2014 in Luxemburg and as such expressed its interest in this topic and in the dialogue with the network operators. Furthermore, the European Commission attended the G6 ministerial meeting in Paris on 6 November 2014. There is no overview beyond this.

27. *To the knowledge of the Federal Government, to what extent have initiatives also been developed at EU level to collect and/or process internet-based evidence relating to "foreign fighters"?*

On 27

The Federal Government has no knowledge of such initiatives being developed at EU level. Please refer to the answer to question 28.

28. To the knowledge of the Federal Government, what forms of cooperation between which agencies (for instance Europol, Eurojust) and which EU Member States and/or third countries are being aspired to here or already practiced (for instance, the Balkan states, Morocco, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the USA, other Schengen partners)?

On 28.

The Federal Government has no knowledge of EU agencies aspiring to or already practicing cooperation pursuing the goal of "collecting and/or processing of internet-based evidence" regarding "foreign fighters".