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From: Presidency

To: Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security /
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Subject: EU Internet Forum: Ministerial meeting on 8 December 2016 - next steps

I. BACKGROUND

On 3 December 2015, the Commission launched the EU Internet Forum. At this occasion, participants agreed on the importance of having effective mechanisms in place between government and industry to remove terrorist content promptly, and to promote effective counter narratives. In parallel, Member States and industry pursue work on hate speech online in the framework of the EU dialogue with industry¹.

¹ Since the adoption of a Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online of 31 May 2016 (Commission together with Facebook, Twitter YouTube and Microsoft), the Commission has monitored the implementation of the commitments by IT companies, notably the commitment to remove illegal hate speech in less than 24 hours.

The industry participants of the Forum met in Brussels on 22 January 2016 to discuss a follow up on the roadmap for concrete action in 2016 and on 18 May 2016, Member States were informed about the state of play, including the recent visit by the Commission (DG HOME) together with representatives from the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), Europol and the Syria Strategic Communication Advisory Team (SSCAT) to Silicon Valley.

The Commission has regularly updated the Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security (COSI) as well as the Friends of Presidency (FoP) on Cyber Issues on the activities of the EU Internet Forum. COSI has also been invited to provide guidance.

Since the launch of the Forum last year, a number of internet companies and social media platforms have tightened up their terms and conditions, facilitating the early removal of content. Some are now also investing in civil society support and training on counter narratives. The Internet Referral Unit (IRU) launched in July 2015 and part of the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) at Europol, equally reports that its relationship with a number of service providers has improved.

However, it is clear that more needs to be done in relation to less cooperative companies, as has also been emphasised in the recent letter by the French and German Ministers of Interior². In addition, further reflection is needed on how to tackle increasing number of encrypted messages³.

II. PREPARATORY MEETING

Member States' experts participated in a meeting called by the Commission on 19 October 2016 to prepare the Ministerial meeting of the EU Internet Meeting. The Commission presented the activities undertaken under the Forum since its launch and presented the possible outcome of the Ministerial meeting. Some Member States stressed the importance of the following issues:

- 1) the need for a more proactive approach by industry and more work on an automated approach to identifying terrorist material from the outset without the need of prior referrals.to keep up with the speed and volume of DAESH distribution of content;

² 14001/16

³ See also 13434/16 concerning mapping of problems related to encryption.

- 2) the need for greater engagement with and support to the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) to help develop effective counter-narratives; and
- 3) access to digital evidence and the need to improve the response rate of the companies to referrals by members of the public.

Europol stated that the number of referrals from Member States is still low and that more staff is needed for the IRU (seconded from Member States). Europol will look to bring law enforcement partners together over the coming months to share best practices in tackling terrorists' modus operandi online; how to keep pace with the distribution of terrorist material across different platforms (...) is one of the most pressing issues to address. Looking into available technology (inter alia through the use of algorithms) to speed up the process of removal is another crucial matter.

III. MINISTERIAL MEETING ON 8 DECEMBER 2016

The Commission is finalising the preparatin of the second high level meeting of the EU Internet Forum scheduled for 8 December 2016. It will allow Member States, industry and civil society actors to take stock of progress made within the set objectives:

- reducing accessibility to terrorist content online (removal of content); and
- increasing the volume of effective alternative and counter narratives online.

Secondly, Member States will be asked to steer further work on preventing online radicalisation and tackling terrorist propaganda on the internet⁴.

Three deliverables are envisaged for the meeting:

- 1) Presentation of the outcome of (a piece of) research carried out by Voxpol (an EU-funded academic research network focused on researching the prevalence, contours, functions and impacts of violent online political extremism and responses to it) on the scale and the severity of terrorist content online;

⁴ First progress report towards an effective and genuine Security Union (13442/16).

- 2) Launch of a Civil Society Empowerment Programme with the aim of producing alternative and counter-narratives across the EU;
- 3) Launch of a Joint Referrals Platform with industry;

The Civil Society Empowerment Programme will be divided into three phases. Phase one will involve RAN to facilitate partnerships between the different stakeholders, including civil society and industry, create a platform for exchange of expertise and experience in this field and raise awareness and offer trainings in how to counter or provide positive alternative narratives. The industry will be invited to support trainings. Phase two will consist of a call for proposal for campaign projects by civil society groups across the EU. Phase three will evaluate the results of these campaigns. The Commission has earmarked 10 mio EUR to the programme.

IV. QUESTIONS

To prepare for the Ministerial Meeting on the Internet Forum on 8 December, delegations are invited to discuss the following questions:

- *how can we ensure a wider involvement of service providers with regard to the Forum's first objective of reducing accessibility to terrorist content online? In the light of the high compliance rate by companies, do delegations see a pressing need for legislation in this regard?*
- *how can the cooperation between EU IRU and national referral units be improved in terms of involvement and contributions?*
- *how to get the most value added of the suggested joint referral platform (coalition of internet companies) in relation to the work already undertaken at national and EU-level?*