

Joint appeal by EU ministers responsible for digital and electronic communications to the digital sector

We the EU ministers responsible for digital and electronic communications condemn in the strongest possible terms the Russian Federation's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine. By its illegal military actions, Russia is grossly violating international law and the principles of the UN Charter and undermining European and global security and stability.

In order to respond to this situation, the EU has imposed massive and severe consequences on Russia for its action, in close coordination with our partners and allies. Such sanctions include the suspension of the broadcasting activities of Sputnik' and RT/Russia Today in the EU, or directed at the EU.

The Russian-initiated battles in the current conflict are raging not only on the ground, but also on the Internet.

For billions of people, digital services are a place of comfort where they can talk with their friends and relatives, share their thoughts and fears and keep in touch with the events around them. As such, they are a prime target for actors that want to disrupt our democracies and try to unfaithfully shape public opinion by disseminating disinformation; try to sow chaos by disrupting services and critical infrastructure and seek to use digital services for nefarious purposes.

Given the impact of digital technologies and services on society and because we firmly believe that such technologies and services can help citizens exercise their fundamental rights in a safe and positive manner

We call on representatives of digital companies - large online platforms, video streaming platforms, social media, interpersonal communication platforms, providers of intermediation or information services as well as any other players in the digital sector:

- to dedicate more human resources to monitor and act swiftly on issues that may arise for users of their services in the conflict zone including by fully mobilizing their fact-checking capabilities and by engaging with volunteers who could help to reinforce content monitoring, especially in Russian and Ukrainian languages;
- to intensify the efforts for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of those most at risk in the current situation by adjusting their services in light of the specific risks that users in conflict zone are facing;
- to take necessary steps – within the framework required by freedom of expression – to ensure that their systems do not become a vehicle for spreading disinformation and manipulative content, by applying the relevant commitments undertaken in the existing Code of Practice on Disinformation and with further commitments in coordination with governments and the civil society.
- to join and implement the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation;

- to prioritize dissemination of trustworthy sources accurate information from trustworthy sources by radio, TV and digital services for all users around the world, including in countries participating to the aggression.
- to adapt, where needed, swiftly their policies to the changed situation, in anticipation of the risk-based approach which is at the core of the upcoming Digital Services Act, while providing information to users and remaining transparent about changing policies.
- to share real-time information as well as all relevant data on what they are observing on their systems and to cooperate with networks of fact-checkers, specialised researchers and civil society organisations in order to identify and implement concrete actions serving the objectives identified in this joint-call.

We count on digital companies to take the appropriate measures to ensure that their services remain trustworthy and safe.

We will keep on monitoring closely the situation and the implementation of the sanctions on Russian state-owned disinformation outlets. As stated by the President of the Commission, we will stand ready to design new sanctions in the digital realm.