

01/06/2022

Meeting with META

Ms. Antigone Davis

Subject of meeting: Commissioner Dalli met with Ms. Antigone Davis, Vice President and Global Head of Safety at Meta, to discuss measures to address online gender-based violence.

Date and time of meeting: 1st of June 2022, at 13:20

Participants: Antigone Davis (*Vice President and Head of Global Safety*), [REDACTED], [REDACTED], Commissioner Helena Dalli (*European Commissioner for Equality*), Silvan Agius (*Cabinet Expert*), Lesia Radelicki (*Member of Cabinet*), [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Minutes:

Ms. Davis thanked Commissioner Dalli for her availability while underscoring the aim of the meeting to discuss means to limit and eliminate harmful content online, particularly harmful content that can be considered gender-based violence.

Commissioner Dalli thanked Ms. Davis for the proposal to meet and noted that we are still in the early stages of artificial intelligence digital technologies and that it would be critical to eliminate the mirroring of violence from the physical to the digital sphere.

Ms. Davis concurred and provided the example of improvements in filtering out harmful content where at the early stages it would still require the user to confirm whether a particular message contained hatred or harassment to the current norm. She stressed that they are in the process of refining and strengthening policies to eliminate harmful content online but noted that much work remained. The safety of women online is paramount. Ms. Davis noted that the experience of women vis-à-vis harmful content online, particularly for women public figures was typically different to men. Generally, it tends to be gendered and sexualised. This not only includes harmful posts but also direct messaging.

Commissioner Dalli noted her own experiences, including gendered and sexualised language as well as threats of violence. She also lamented the disgraceful and harmful language she and other female Commissioners have received in relation to the war against Ukraine.

Ms. Davis noted work to filter out harmful content for example in comment threads.

Commissioner Dalli highlighted that there is an option to disable comments; however, she lamented that such an option also filters out positive and critical but important feedback.

Ms. Davis concurred with Commissioner Dalli but stressed that they are implementing software to remove harmful content, including misogynistic content, without the need to disable comments. In addition, they are offering specialised training to women public figures vis-à-vis filtering mechanisms on their platforms.

Commissioner Dalli welcomed the initiatives while noting such harmful content can deter many women away from politics as it often manifests a toxic environment for such women.

Ms. Davis underscored that Meta's aim was to ensure that all users feel safe on their platforms.

Commissioner Dalli described social media as a knife that can be used to well or in a harmful manner.

Ms Davis highlighted Meta's work to create mechanisms to limit harmful content (comments, messaging, fake accounts, hate accounts), coordinated harassment, as well as the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. She also noted that they often work behind the scenes, particularly for women public figures. When it comes to limiting the non-consensual sharing of images, she mentioned software to find and remove such images, particularly if requested by the victim as she lamented often such images are used to harass, intimidate and blackmail women, including women public figures.

Commissioner Dalli noted that non-consensual sharing of images was of grave concern and therefore such work was paramount.

Ms. Davis concurred while highlighting that it was also critical to work hand in hand with legislators.

Commissioner Dalli highlighted the work on the digital services protection act which will seek to address both harmful content as well as the non-consensual sharing of images. However, she stressed one cannot address these serious issues through legislation alone and that training is of the essence although it may be more important to people from her generation who are not digital natives.

Ms. Davis concurred that a 360-degree approach was necessary, not only do we need to have the right policies in place we also have to develop a culture of safety online and particularly on social media platforms. She stressed that the right resources, education, and training were also necessary. She gave the example of outreach at schools as well as at family centres which include lessons on what healthy relationships are, including online. She noted that the Commission and Meta were very much aligned on their goals.

Commissioner Dalli emphasised that collaboration will be key to address online gender-based violence and thus further discussion between the Commission and Meta is imperative.

Cabinet Dalli also asked for more information on measures to address coordinated harassment, including through the use of bots, what particular language is considered to be gender-based violence, and how these filter mechanisms work in other languages apart from English and particularly languages such as Maltese that have a relatively small user base.

Ms. Davis noted that they have specific software to uncover coordinated harassment, including through bots and that they were constantly improving the software to be detect such instances. Furthermore, she noted that it is not specific language such as "*bitch*" which would be considered violent and misogynistic rather it is the entirety of the language and intention therein which she categorised as falling under three types: insults, intimidation/harassments, and threats of violence. She stressed that not all cases of the use of derogatory language such as "*bitch*" can be considered as violent and misogynistic as it may be used between friends in a playful manner. However, she stressed that the software to detect such instances of online harmful content is also being implemented for all languages.