Report of videoconference between the EVP Vestager and Sundar Pichai CEO of Google and Alphabet, 25 January 2021

Attendees

- Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager
- Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google and Alphabet
- Oliver Bethell, Director EMEA Competition at Google
- Karen Massin, Director EU Public Policy at Google
- Sylwia Giepmans-Stepien, Google’s EU Public Policy team
- Christiane Canenbley (CAB VESTAGER)
- Werner Stengg (CAB VESTAGER)
- Penelope Papandropoulos (CAB VESTAGER)
- Guillaume Loriot (COMP)
- Nicholas Banasevic (COMP)
- Wojciech Saryusz-Wolski (SG)

In his opening remarks Mr Pichai underlined his understanding for the mounting public concern with online platforms, especially following the recent events in Washington DC. Alphabet, and in particular YouTube, aim at promoting quality journalism, with intensified efforts to remove any incitement to violence following the 9 December certification of the results of the US Presidential election. Alphabet tries to use numerous criteria to ensure that its’ users are presented with diverse types of content, and in cases which are particularly sensitive it explicitly favours curated content from certified journalistic sources. However, decisions on content moderation are not always binary, with many “grey” areas, and providers’ efforts need to constantly evolve given that the content available online keeps on growing and changing. Google is happy to engage with Commission staff to explain and showcase its’ content moderation activities. Alphabet is supportive of uniform EU-wide rules, instead of an array of national ones, and does not exclude that in the longer term they might also serve as a template for third countries. He also expressed hopes for closer transatlantic cooperation in the area of digital regulation.

In this context the EVP pointed at the recent Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act proposals, on which the Commission would appreciate to be receiving direct feedback from the company. The basic philosophy behind the DSA proposal is to ensure that what is illegal offline stays illegal online, and what is legal offline is also legal online, and how this can be effectively achieved without impeding fundamental rights. Both proposals aim at ensuring uniform rules across the single market, so as to avoid regulatory fragmentation. The DSA proposal explicitly maintains the country of origin principle, while also preserving the national competence to define what is illegal or harmful.

When queried by the EVP on artificial intelligence (AI), Mr Pichai stressed Alphabet’s big R&D engagement in this filed. It is important that AI algorithms are explainable. Given the sensitivity of this technology Google has put on itself limits, for instance by not making public the application programming interfaces (APIs) of its’ facial recognition algorithms.