Brussels,
Ares(2016) s- 7776095

Mr Jean-Claude Juncker President of the European Commission BERL 13/057

Dear Mr President,

Online platforms have been making substantial contributions in promoting innovation and technological growth and progress in Europe, including by providing better services to our citizens.

At the same time, not a day passes without media coverage on issues linked to the growing role of online platforms in our society – from concerns about the proliferation of fake news or hate speech on the Internet to criticisms that algorithms may unduly restrict access to relevant information or influence the type of information citizens are exposed to. In particular, social media platforms are fast becoming the dominant source of news and information for ever larger segments of society. Many citizens share and spread news through social media without regard to the quality or reputation of the source, but frequently simply because a news item confirms their belief or prejudice. Through this, the public opinion is increasingly determined by echo chambers ("filter bubbles") that amplify existing prejudice, and many citizens are exposed to alleged "facts" that do not have any scientific foundation (for example on the risks/merits of vaccinations). Of course, similar phenomena already existed in the offline world (for instance in the tabloid press) – yet their spread, scale and intensity have grown dramatically with the emergence of large online platforms.

In this way, online fake news and polarising opinions have begun to greatly influence public opinion, thus potentially weakening the democratic control function of the traditional free press (which is one of the reasons why we have addressed the issue of publishers' rights in the copyright reform). This is of course also of relevance to the reputation of the EU, in that fake news may further aggravate an anti-EU feeling in the population.

The Commission has responded to specific concerns about the role of platforms in sectoral initiatives (e.g. through the Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech, the forthcoming Terrorism Directive, proposals on copyright, audiovisual media services, telecoms and e-privacy). Yet, these initiatives may not be sufficient to tackle today's phenomena in terms of fake news or filter bubbles.

The Commission	needs to	address	these	concerns	as a	a matter	of	urgency.	

What are possible policy responses that we could discuss on this occasion?
For instance, Facebook just announced that it will begin flagging fake
news stories with the help of users and outside fact checkers (including journalist
associations).
Professional journalistic standards and codes of ethics for the 'traditional' media are integral
parts of our EU democratic societies.

Given the importance of these issues in the current political context, I suggest the College debates them thoroughly and reflects upon the possible policy responses at earliest convenience in the New Year.

Yours sincerely,