Notes from a meeting with Google, on 24 May 2023

Participants from Google:

Participants from the Cabinet:
Vice-President Věra Jourová
Daniel Braun
Wojtek Talko
Marie Frenay

VP shared her concern about the spread of pro-Kremlin war propaganda and disinformation, also on Google’s products and services. She expressed her appreciation for Google’s engagement in the Code of Practice on Disinformation but stressed that more work is needed to improve the reporting under the Code, ahead of the July round of publication of new reports. She also urged to improve access to data for researchers that would allow them to better assess the spread of disinformation. VP highlighted the risks of disinformation for electoral processes in the EU and its Member States and repeated the need to allocate appropriate resources to smaller languages in the EU, particularly in Slovakia ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Google expressed commitment to the Code of Practice and to improving their reporting. They recalled a pre-bunking campaign that they ran on YouTube in Czechia, Slovakia, and Poland as well as their 1,000 Languages Initiative, an AI model that supports 1000 languages. As for Slovakia, they are in contact with Slovak ministries and will follow up on the issue at GLOBSEC.

Both agreed AI could have an impact on disinformation tools and that everyone should be prepared for a new wave of AI-generated threats. Part of the efforts could go into marking/making transparent AI-generated content. VP asked about the possibilities of marking AI-generated text, which, according to Google, is a much harder problem than images. Google stressed that Google’s AI models already include safeguards and that the company continues investing in this space to ensure a safe rollout of the new products. VP asked whether those safeguards correlate with the risk-based approach in the AI Act, to which Google replied that in some ways yes, but in some areas they diverge. Both agreed on the need for stronger transatlantic cooperation on AI.

They also agreed on the importance of ensuring the visibility of trustworthy information online. In particular, they discussed the access to information in Russia. VP raised the issues faced by Russian independent media on YouTube, including the fact that they cannot monetise their content in Russia. VP stressed this was urgent and is looking forward to swift action. She asked for solutions in consultation with Russian independent media and civil society. Google agreed to follow up on this. VP noted that the Commission’s lawyers are available to help to guarantee that Google is not breaking EU sanctions.
Still on Russia, VP asked about the future prospects of YouTube operating in Russia and about Android’s position in the Russian market.

On regulation on transparency of political ads, Google stressed the importance of the alignment with other pieces of legislation, including the Digital Services Act and GDPR, the need to protect the freedom of speech, and avoiding overly strict restrictions on targeting proposed by the European Parliament.

Daniel assured Google of alignment between the digital files, encouraged them to be active on the Code of Practice (since it also includes a commitment on transparency of AI tools and it is an evolving mechanism), and urged them to step up in the treatment of small languages in terms of semantics and human power.