Meeting with IT platforms to discuss the spread of disinformation on coronavirus

Online meeting via Webex

Date and Time: 27 March 2020, 13h30 – 15h30

Vice-President Vera Jourová met again with the platforms and other signatories of the Code of Practice against Disinformation (Facebook, Twitter, Google, Microsoft, Mozilla, EDIMA) to discuss the spread of disinformation related to Covid-19 and to follow up on the measures taken by the signatories.

The participants assessed that the measures they have taken in the last few weeks brought positive results and contributed to increased access to authoritative information, such as the WHO or national health authorities. All the participants noted that there was a spike in traffic to authoritative sources and verified information, notably on health issues, which highlights both the positive results of actions to promote those sources as well as the need for maintaining high quality of such content in all languages.

The platforms confirmed that they observed constant flow of false and harmful information, mainly related to health, which they removed in large quantities. They have also put in place measures to remove ads related to protective equipment such as masks and to demonetize harmful or illegal content. They however recognized some remaining gaps in fully enforcing these new policies. The participants informed that they have not detected any significant increase in the inauthentic coordinated behaviour.

VP Jourová welcomed online platforms’ efforts to facilitate access of their users to authoritative sources, tackling forbidden or harmful content and systematic take down of exploitative or misleading ads while at the same time preserving the freedom of information. She said that it is important that the EU goes through the crisis with our freedoms and democracy preserved.

VP Jourová stressed that more needs to be done. Platforms need to step up efforts to fully enforce their new policies and offer more evidence that the measures they have taken are working well. They need to provide better access to relevant data for research and fact-checking
community and strengthen the cooperation with them. VP Jourová agreed with the platforms that GDPR does not prevent platforms to share data for research purposes.

The representatives of platforms agreed to share samples of detected and removed disinformation also with authorities, including the Commission, to help better target their response and understand the situation. The participants agreed to step up measures to increase access of users to authoritative sources and address the spread of false and dangerous information on encrypted applications or services such as WhatsApp.

VP Jourová has called on the participants to collaborate with authorities in all the Member States. She informed the companies that there is a strong interest from the Member States to better understand the trends and exchange information to be able to react faster, especially on issues related to health of Europeans. The platforms all claimed that their strengthened cooperation with Member States’ authorities is generally positive even though some gaps still exist.

The participants agreed to be in regular and frequent contact and to discuss these issues again in the coming weeks.