

Report of videoconference between Anthony Whelan, Digital Policy Adviser at the Cabinet of the President, and Karan Bhatia, Google Vice President, 10 February 2021

Attendees

- Karan Bhatia, Vice President Government Affairs & Public Policy at Google (Washington DC)
- [REDACTED] at Google (Brussels)
- Anthony Whelan, Digital Policy Adviser, President's Cabinet
- [REDACTED] (SG)

The meeting took place on the initiative of Google, focusing in particular on: the transatlantic digital cooperation, 6/01 Capitol events, Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act (DSA/DMA), Covid-19, and artificial intelligence (AI).

On transatlantic cooperation Google underlined their full support for the concept of Transatlantic Trade and Tech Council, as such deeper dialogue on tech issues would be very much welcome. This cooperation should hopefully gather speed as soon as the various levels of the new US administration are fully in place. In the opinion of Google such a EU-US convergence would give a strong momentum and sense of direction also for the rest of the world. In the opinion of Google currently numerous governments engage into policy actions that are often not aligned neither with the US nor EU positions. On his side Mr Whelan noted positive signs of policy engagement on the US side, especially as regards the post-Schrems II case and digital taxation.

DMA/DSA/content moderation. Following the 6/01 events that took place in the Capitol building in Washington DC Google temporarily suspended the YouTube account of President Trump. Taking down a channel of a sitting President has been a very difficult decision for the company, and Google considers that such decisions should not be left to private companies. Google is supportive of the DSA, and hopes that it will reverse the trend of emerging national initiatives in this area. Similar trend is also visible in the US, where in the absence of federal action individual States start looking at possible state-level regulations. Dealing with such regulatory fragmentation will be difficult to deal with even for a big company like Google, and might be prohibitively costly for smaller operators. On DMA Google hoped that the legislation will not limit the industry's ability to innovate and develop new consumer-benefiting products. Without questioning the rationale of the proposal, the co-legislators should avoid any unintended consequences that new legal provisions could potentially bring about.

In this context Mr Whelan highlighted that the Commission is looking carefully at the various national initiatives such as those in DE, FR, HU, PL, AT and DK. Whatever their substantive merits, they would not contribute to the internal market objective which is at the core of the DSA proposal. When queried by Google on his expectations for the DMA/DSA Mr Whelan hoped that the Parliament's internal competence discussions will be rapidly resolved and pointed at the stated goals of the forthcoming French Council Presidency to complete the negotiations on both files in the first half of 2022.

On Covid-19 Google recalled its' ongoing cooperation with authorities developing contact tracing apps. Google has also an ongoing programme, developed together with the EIF, to help small European companies with access to capital. Moreover, in a global cooperation with the WHO Google is working with governments offering free advertising on COVID health subjects such as vaccines, and has contacted DG COMM in this regard, however with no reply yet. Mr Whelan vowed to look into this issue internally.

As concerns AI, Google is supportive of the forthcoming European initiative. In this context Mr Whelan confirmed that the new legislative proposal is due in April and will likely focus on addressing high risk applications.

Google also reiterated its' hopes for a future meeting between the President and CEO Pichai, or a broader group of tech CEOs. Mr Whelan noted the request, while pointing to the President's current strong focus on public health matters.