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Internet Access

Russia: Authorities test full Internet disconnection

- Russian authorities and major Internet providers are [planning](#) to disconnect the country from the Internet as part of a planned experiment.
- The test will allow Russian authorities to check the feasibility of a proposed law introduced in the Russian Parliament in December 2018 mandating that their providers be capable of ensuring the independence of Russian Internet space (Runet) in the case of a large-scale foreign attack disconnecting the country from the rest of the global network.
- The experiment is expected to take place before April 1 and was agreed during a session of the government's Information Security Working Group at the end of January. The Group includes major Russian telecom companies such as MegaFon, Beeline, MTS, RosTelecom and is chaired by Natalya Kaspersky, co-founder of Kaspersky Lab.
- Russian Internet providers [agreed](#) with the law's goals but dissented on its technical implementation, complaining that it could cause major disruptions to Internet traffic.
- The project has been in the pipeline for several years, with the Russian authorities first testing their own local backup of the Domain Name System (DNS) in 2014. In 2017, officials said they [plan](#) to route 95 percent of all traffic locally by 2020.

EU: The Commission should increase its minimum speed thresholds for broadband, says German MEP

- In a parliamentary [question](#) sent by [Sabine Verheyen](#) (EPP, Germany) to the European Commission this week, the MEP asks the Commission why it does not increase the threshold for inclusion, explaining that this would allow for a more effective provision of coverage.
- She reminds that EU state-aid rules already create a restrictive environment for broadband investments, only allowing the deployment of broadband networks in underserved areas, so-called 'white areas', and, after careful consideration, in 'grey areas' in which one network operator is present and another network is unlikely to be developed.
- The EU's Digital Agenda sets out a target for broadband coverage of at least 30 Mbps (megabits per second) throughout the region by 2020. The threshold for inclusion in the deployment of broadband networks is therefore a download speed of 30 Mbps.

- The German MEP, particularly active on EU audio-visual policy, calls on the EC to put in place measures that will help it reach its targets by ensuring higher transmission speeds.

EU: Political agreement struck on “Digital Europe” programme for 2021-2027

- EU negotiators [reached](#) a provisional political agreement this week on the “Digital Europe” programme, the EU’s first ever programme dedicated to the deployment of new technologies that is fully funded out of the EU budget.
- The DEP sets aside money to fund five areas. It is focused on deploying, as opposed to trialling or testing, new technologies in High Performance Computing, Artificial Intelligence, cybersecurity, interoperability and eGovernment, as well as educational programmes supporting Digital Skills.
- The agreement will now go to the COREPER committee for endorsement by the EU’s Ambassadors, following this, the Parliament will vote on the agreement in Plenary before final adoption at a ministerial meeting in the Council of the EU, possibly between April-May 2019.
- With the political agreement secured, negotiators can now discuss the exact funding level of the DEP as Member States decide during separate negotiations around the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) whether to confirm or reduce the EC’s proposed €9.2bn allocation for the “Digital Europe” programme.
- These negotiations are expected to continue well into the next mandate of the new Commission and possibly as late as December 2019.

Trust

EU: Copyright Directive deal reached

- After two and a half years of negotiations and intense lobbying, EU policy-makers finally reached an agreement on the Copyright Directive with a complex compromise struck early evening in the European Parliament in Strasbourg.
- Large platforms like Google will now have to negotiate licensing agreements with right holders (record companies, collecting societies and media companies) in order to publish their content on YouTube and Google News.
- Among those reaping the largest rewards from the reform is the music industry, whose record companies successfully argued in favour of a correction to what they name the “value gap” between the music industry’s diminishing revenues and the ad-generated profits made by platforms hosting content online. This concept is now reflected in the copyright rules.
- Authors, songwriters, film and movie directors also succeeded in adding to the text a “principle of appropriate and proportionate remuneration” meaning they will be able to seek compensation for the exploitation of their work in proportion to the revenues generated by their material online, rather than based on a flat rate. Press publishers also secured a win with the inclusion of an “EU-wide neighbouring right”, meaning Google News will have to strike licensing deals in order to display their content.
- Among those critical of the agreement was the CCIA, a trade body representing Facebook and Google, which [argued](#) the deal was a lost opportunity to create “future-proof reform” and would harm online innovation, scale-ups & “restrict online freedoms in Europe”.

EU: 60% of Europeans don’t trust their government to deliver on digital, says Vodafone/IPSOS study

- A new study by the Vodafone Institute for Society and Communications finds trust lacking among a high number of Europeans who don’t believe their national governments have the will to advance digitisation in their countries.
- The study entitled “[The Tech Divide: Politics](#)”, covering 9,000 people in 9 countries globally, is the third part of a wider project by the Vodafone Institute on technological acceptance.
- Other survey results stress the importance of governments as the best entity to police unethical behaviour, while just 15% believe it should be technology companies. On data protection, only 28% of European respondents felt their

government adequately protects their data, while 51% agreed that governments should cooperate with IT specialists and the private sector to upskill and expand the digital competencies of the public sector.

EU: Negotiators agree on new rules to regulate online platforms

- On 14 February, policy-makers from the European Parliament, Council and Commission [reached](#) a political deal on the Regulation on fairness and transparency in online platform trading, the first-ever EU-wide rules aimed at improving the transparency of business relations between platforms and “brick-and-mortar” companies.
- The Platforms-to-Business Regulation includes a ban on certain unfair practices like sudden account suspensions or unintelligible and complicated terms of service with short notices for change, and introduces rules on mandatory disclosure for a range of business practices, forcing platforms to reveal some of the parameters used to rank goods and services on their site.
- The regulation also introduces new avenues for dispute resolution, forcing all platforms operating in the EU to set up internal complaint-handling systems to better assist business users.
- The agreed deal must now be formally approved by the European Parliament and Council of the EU. The new rules will apply 12 months after their adoption.
- In a public [statement](#), Siada El Ramly, the Director General of EDiMA, the lobbying association representing online platforms in Brussels, accepted the agreement saying it was “balanced” and “[took] account [of] the diversity of the European online ecosystem”.

EU: MEPs propose the creation of an AI regulatory agency

- The European Parliament (EP) plenary session this week adopted the own-initiative [report](#) authored by Ashley Fox MEP (ECR, UK) on a “comprehensive European industrial policy on artificial intelligence and robotics” with 572 votes in favour, 54 against and 45 abstentions.
- The non-binding report has no legislative significance but sends a political message from the EP to the Commission (EC) on its desired approach to foster trust in the development of European AI.
- The report is largely supportive of the EC’s existing approach, aimed at fostering a human-centred approach to AI. The report does however go further by suggesting the creation of a “European regulatory agency for AI and algorithmic decision-making.”
- This agency would be in charge of setting standards, assessing the risks of AI, advising other regulators and investigating “suspected cases of rights violations by algorithmic decision-making systems.”
- Speaking during the debate, MEP Fox complained however about the “shameful” waste of time which was spent arguing over which Committee should be the lead on the topic, recalling that the Parliament had initially agreed to prepare a report on the subject in April 2018 but only managed to start work in October.

France: Social media law to be published before summer

- Prime Minister Edouard Philippe [announced](#) on Tuesday that his government will present new legislation in the coming months to regulate social media content.
- The government wants to go beyond the “old classification” of editors on the one hand and platforms on the other, said Edouard Philippe, referring to the current liability regime for large social media companies.
- According to the EU’s 2000 eCommerce Directive, platforms are not legally responsible for the content they host, but they must take down any harmful or dangerous online posts, images and videos once they have been flagged.
- The French government wants this to change, advocating a “third status” for companies that are not media but are also “not merely” hosting services and therefore have a responsibility to control the content placed on their platforms.