

Vice-President Andrus Ansip's speech at the Mobile World Congress

Ladies and gentlemen

The internet has been an open, fair and neutral platform from the start.

Its online freedom brings endless innovation and a dynamic digital economy.

But so much has changed in a relatively short time:

- quality and speed of access.*
- platforms and website sophistication.*
- sharing files in the cloud.*
- an exponential growth in social media.*
- and of course, 24/7 online shopping.*

It was as long ago as 2000 that the EU's e-commerce Directive came into force.

This sets the basic legal environment for online services in the single market.

It sets liability limits for digital platforms.

It guarantees freedom of expression online.

Both are vital for an open internet.

Europe's rules on net neutrality are the other side of the same coin:

- end-users gain the right to access and distribute the content, applications, services and information of their choice.*
- internet providers must treat all traffic equally. No blocking, throttling or discrimination.*

For me, the idea that all legal internet traffic should be treated equally is the vehicle for innovation that sparked the digital economy in the first place.

It is vital for consumers, business customers and content providers.

Our liability regime and net neutrality rules are two principles that have guaranteed an open internet.

They work, and they should remain.

I think Europe and the United States can agree on the need to preserve the freedom of the internet economy. Where we may differ is how to do it.

I mentioned change. Today, platforms have more influence and market power

than anyone could have imagined.

It is only natural that in this position they will need to become more transparent in their dealings.

Most of them are already.

The same goes for illegal material posted online that promotes terrorism, violent extremism, hate speech. Online platforms have taken measures to combat this.

In a couple of days, the Commission will issue a recommendation dealing with illegal content, in particular terrorism.

It will complement our earlier guidance on detection, take-down and stay-down. It will help platforms to act proactively, urgently and decisively.

If the internet is to remain open – and I believe that it should – then illegal content must be blocked at the source, not in the network. This is also more effective and proportionate.

This recommendation will be built on the e-commerce liability regime, which we will not change. Not today. Not tomorrow.

Why? Because I do not want Europe to become a ‘big brother’ society in online monitoring.

George Orwell aside, I believe everyone has the right to access an open internet, where all traffic should in principle be treated equally. EU law has protected these principles for almost two years.

Since our experiences are positive so far, I will continue to protect and defend net neutrality and an open internet in Europe.

These rules allow space for everybody, for innovation and experimentation. Space for specialised services that come with a certain quality, where necessary.

But this cannot be at the expense of other internet users. I do not want a digital motorway for the lucky few, while others use a digital dirt-track.

Access to the internet is a basic right. It has to stay open for everybody. No discrimination.

I know that you will all have views as well – and that some will be very different to mine. I look forward to the discussion.

Updated weekly schedule of President Donald Tusk

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DECISION n°171 of the Management Board of the European Union Agency for Railways on the opt-out from Commission Decision C(2017) 6760 – employment of contract staff employed by the Commission under the terms of Articles 3a and 3b of CEOS

DECISION n°171 of the Management Board of the European Union Agency for Railways on the opt-out from Commission Decision C(2017) 6760 – employment of contract staff employed by the Commission under the terms of Articles 3a and 3b of CEOS Reference: 171/2018 Publication Date : 26/02/2018 Published by: Management Board Document Types: Decision Keywords: Opt-out, Commission Decision C(2017) 6760, Article 79 § 2 CEOS, employment contract staff, Articles 3a-3b CEOS Description: Adopted by Written Procedure – 26 February 2018 Related documents:

Remarks by Vice-President Dombrovskis at the Roundtable on Cryptocurrencies

Good afternoon,

I would like to debrief you on a roundtable discussion with key authorities, industry representatives and experts who shared their insights and views on cryptocurrencies.

The aim of this roundtable was first and foremost to feed into our upcoming Action Plan on FinTech, and the EU's position for a possible discussion at G20 level. As you know, there is already a joint Franco – German letter on this point.

Crypto-asset markets are global, with worldwide transactions between investors, consumers and intermediaries.

On its own, Europe represents only a small share of global cryptocurrency trading, so we need to work together with our partners in the G20 and international standard-setters.

Today's roundtable focused on three main topics:

- the implications of crypto-currencies for financial markets,
- the risks and the opportunities associated with their use,
- and the recent development of Initial Coin Offerings.

We concluded that:

First, the blockchain technology holds strong promise for financial markets. To remain competitive, Europe must embrace this innovation.

Second, crypto-currencies, which are not currencies in the traditional sense, and whose value is not guaranteed, have become subject of considerable speculation.

This exposes consumers and investors to substantial risk including the risk to lose their investment.

This is why our third conclusion is that warnings about these risks to consumers and investors are important: these must be clear, frequent, and across all jurisdictions.

Fourth, Initial Coin Offerings have become a way for innovative firms in this field to raise substantial amounts of funding.

This is an opportunity, but there are also problems that expose investors to substantial risk, such as the lack of transparency regarding the identity of the issuers and underlying business plans.

Fifth, we need to assess further under what circumstances crypto-currencies and related services are covered by existing regulation.

This depends very much on the facts and circumstances around specific crypto-tokens.

Based on the assessment of risks and opportunities and the suitability of the existing regulatory framework for these instruments, the Commission will determine if regulatory action at EU level is required.

Finally, crypto-assets present risks relating to money laundering and the financing of illicit activities.

That is why the Commission proposed that virtual currency exchanges and wallet providers should be subject to the Anti-Money Laundering Directive.

The co-legislators reached an agreement in December, and we invite Member States to prepare for a speedy transposition of this legislation.

To sum up, the Commission will continue to monitor these markets together with other stakeholders, at EU and international level, including in the G20.

We stand ready to take action based on an assessment of risks and opportunities.

Following upcoming international discussions, we will decide on how to follow up today's roundtable.

Thank you.

[Syria: EU adds two new ministers to sanctions list](#)

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On 26 February 2018, the Council added the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Information of the government of Syria to the list of those targeted by EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime in view of the gravity of the situation in the country. These additions were made to take into account recent ministerial changes, as both ministers were appointed in January 2018.

Today's decision brings to **257 persons** the total number of persons targeted by a travel ban and an assets freeze for being responsible for the violent repression against the civilian population in Syria, benefiting from or supporting the regime, and/or being associated with such persons.

In addition, **67 entities** are targeted by an assets freeze. More broadly, sanctions currently in place against Syria include an oil embargo, restrictions on certain investments, a freeze of the assets of the Syrian central bank held in the EU, export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression as well as on equipment and technology for the monitoring or interception of internet or telephone communications. These measures were last extended on 29 May 2017 and are in place until 1 June 2018.

The EU remains committed to finding a **lasting political solution to the conflict in Syria** under the existing UN-agreed framework. As stated in the EU strategy on Syria adopted in April 2017, the EU believes that there can be no military solution to the conflict and strongly supports the work of the UN Special Envoy and the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva.

The legal acts adopted by the Council, including the names of the persons concerned, are published in the Official Journal of 26 February 2018.

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