European Union demands Google, Facebook step up Internet censorship

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In a new attack on free speech, the European Union (EU) is calling on major social media and Internet firms including Facebook, Twitter and Google to automatically and immediately censor online material.

On March 1, the EU Commission called on companies and EU states to ensure "the detection and removal of illegal content through reactive (so called 'notice and action') or proactive measures." It also identified a vast amount of material targeted for censorship. According to the Commission, its recommendations apply to all forms of "content ranging from terrorist content, incitement to hatred and violence, child sexual abuse material, counterfeit products and copyright infringement."

"Considering that terrorist content is most harmful in the first hours of its appearance online, all companies should remove such content within one hour from its referral as a general rule," it said.

The measures the EU is discussing would force companies to create programs, answerable to no one, to trawl the Internet and delete users' content. This would consolidate censorship measures the EU proposed last year via the EU Internet Forum, which called on tech firms to work to develop automatic removal of online content.

The EU hailed moves in this direction that have already taken place. According to the EU, "Twitter reported that three quarters of the 300,000 accounts removed between January and June 2017 were deleted before posting their first Tweet. According to YouTube, more than 150,000 videos have been removed since June 2017. Once aware of a piece of terrorist content, Facebook removes 83 percent of subsequently uploaded copies within one hour of upload."

The EU justified its policy with shopworn claims about the fight against terrorism. "While several platforms have been removing more illegal content than ever before ... we still need to react faster against terrorist propaganda and other illegal content which is a serious threat to our citizens' security, safety and fundamental rights," said Digital Commissioner Andrus Ansip.

Press accounts of the latest EU demand for censorship cited the need, as the *Guardian* put it, to fight "extremist content on the web" that "has influenced lone-wolf attackers who have killed people in several European cities after being radicalised."

The argument that EU censorship is aimed at so-called lone-wolf terrorists is a lie, above all because lone-wolf terrorists are largely a political fiction. The major terror attacks in Europe were carried out not by isolated individuals, but by members of Islamist networks active in NATO's proxy wars in the Middle East, and who were actively watched and protected for that reason by European intelligence.

The organizers of terrorist attacks in France in 2015 and in Belgium in 2016 were well known to the intelligence services. The Kouachi brothers who led the Charlie Hebdo attack, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the leader of the 13 November 2015 attacks in Paris, and the El Bakraoui brothers who carried out the 22 March 2016 Brussels attacks were all well known to European intelligence. They were allowed to travel freely and prepare their attacks, as their networks were intelligence assets operating under state protection.

Similarly, the links of the Islamic State militia to Berlin Christmas market attacker Anis Amri and Manchester bomber Salman Abedi were well known to German and British intelligence, respectively, before they attacked. These attacks were seized on by the EU powers to intensify police-state measures that shred

basic democratic rights, such as the state of emergency in France.

Now, the red herring of the fight against "lone-wolf" terrorists is serving as a pretext for yet further attacks on Internet freedom and freedom of speech.

These attacks are well advanced. The EU wants the same IT companies that work closely on Internet censorship with a wide variety of states, above all Washington and the US intelligence agencies, to use similar methods to trample on freedom of speech and other democratic rights in Europe. This is what emerged from recent remarks by Julian King, the EU Commissioner for Security.

Censorship like that being proposed by the EU, King said, is "not only possible, it's being done already by a number of the larger platforms." He called for "proactive measures to identify and remove illegal content, including automated means such as upload filters, where this is appropriate." He also called on IT firms to cooperate with EU "member States, trusted flaggers and among themselves to work together and benefit from best practices."

Such remarks are a warning. US politicians and IT firms have openly declared that they are seeking to carry out politically targeted censorship, aiming to promote "trusted" news outlets that function as little more than state propaganda outlets. Above all, these censorship measures are being implemented to restrict access to socialist and antiwar publications, such as the *World Socialist Web Site*, amid rising opposition to war and austerity among American workers and youth.

Last summer, the WSWS identified that a dramatic decline in its readership, together with that of other socialist, antiwar, and progressive web sites, resulted from Google's implementation of a new algorithm aiming to promote "authoritative" news sources over "alternative" sources of information.

Now, under the guise of fighting "terrorist content," the EU is similarly seeking to implement repressive measures to censor the Internet that are squarely aimed at rising social and political discontent internationally. Major European powers are already enacting similar censorship laws at the national level. Since January 1, the German Network Enforcement Law has been in effect, enabling Berlin to regulate and censor the Internet along similar lines as the Trump administration and its attack on net neutrality in the United States.

In the name of fighting "illegal" content, the EU aims to target any oppositional views that challenge its plans to slash social spending to finance remilitarization and wars abroad.

As the German ruling elite prepares a new coalition government between the Social Democrats and Christian democrats, the parties involved in the new government have called for strengthening the German armed forces and German influence worldwide, as well as major increases in military spending.

In France, President Emmanuel Macron has announced €300 billion in military spending over the next 6 years, as well as calling for deep cuts in basic social programs and a return of the draft.

It is in this context—amid deep popular opposition to EU austerity and militarism, amid recent strikes across Europe, from German metalworkers and British rail workers to Romanian autoworkers—that the EU is seeking to set up the censorship of the Internet and social media.

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