

European Union intensifies internet censorship

Justus Leicht, Johannes Stern
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Two months before the European elections, the European Parliament has voted to massively escalate internet censorship. Yesterday, the majority of MEPs voted in favour of a directive which, under the guise of copyright reforms, would enforce the use of so-called upload filters in social media, thus further restricting the internet.

According to Article 17 (formerly Article 13) of the Directive, internet platforms must now ensure that works protected by copyright are not uploaded without permission. This could only be enforced through upload filters, which automatically filter and censor content. The consequences are clear: internet giants such as YouTube and Facebook, which cooperate closely with the secret services and governments and already censor left-wing and progressive content on a massive scale, are being urged to delete articles, videos or other postings even before they are uploaded.

So far, platforms such as YouTube and Facebook have had to delete copyrighted works from their sites as soon as they receive a complaint. According to Article 17 of the new directive, operators must ensure that copyrighted works are not uploaded without permission. Alternatively, they must seek licences for the material uploaded by third parties and, in principle, develop mechanisms to prevent works from being made available in the first place where the rights holders have proven their claims.

In practice, given the amount, variety and speed with which new content is uploaded, this could only be achieved by automatically scanning and filtering all content in advance. Anyone who inserts images, excerpts from texts, videos or music to their own content, or modifies such content to create new content from it, can fall victim to the upload filters just as much as someone actually violating copyright law. In

addition, upload filters can be politically manipulated so that, for example, texts or videos that are directed against austerity, militarism and war, report on labor disputes and strikes or contain terms such as socialism or “Marxism” are censored.

None of this is the result of an oversight, but is the real purpose of the “reform.”

The European governments and giant tech companies fear growing social opposition and are already censoring left-wing and progressive content on a massive scale. Facebook regularly deletes accounts that oppose war and police violence. In Germany, tens of thousands of posts have been deleted since the so-called Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) came into force. Google, in consultation with German government circles, has modified its search algorithms in order to suppress left-wing and progressive websites—including, above all, the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Faced with the “Yellow Vest” protests in France, the mass protests in Algeria and the growth of class struggle internationally, the ruling class is feverishly seeking ways to suppress all independent opposition. Already last autumn, the EU agreed to intensify internet censorship and threatened opposition parties with sanctions and punishments. This most recent authoritarian measure has been pushed through in direct opposition to the expressed will of the population.

On the weekend before the vote, more than 100,000 across Europe took to the streets against the new directive and the infamous upload filters. More than 40,000 people demonstrated in Munich on Saturday and more than 10,000 in Berlin. Further protests took place in Malmö, Helsinki, Amsterdam, Bucharest, Krakow, Lisbon and Thessaloniki. An online petition on change.org, “Stop the censorship machine—Save the internet,” was signed by more than 5.1 million people.

Last Thursday, the German Wikipedia site went offline for a day in protest.

Immediately after the vote on Tuesday evening, spontaneous demonstrations with several hundred participants each took place in Cologne, Karlsruhe, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Dresden and Leipzig. Further protests are planned for the next few days. The directive must be approved by the European Council before it can officially enter into force. According to media reports, this will take place in a vote on 9 April.

The MEPs who voted against the reform—including the majority of SPD, Linkspartei and Green MEPs from Germany—fear above all the growing radicalisation among students and young workers. Julia Reda, a member of the Green/European Free Alliance (EFA) parliamentary group, warned that the directive would “rob an entire generation of confidence that politics will represent the interests of the population.”

In fact, the vote showed that all the establishment parties support censorship and the construction of a European police state. Representatives of all factions—from the European Left (GUE/NGL), the Greens, Liberals (ALDE), Social Democrats (S&D) and Conservatives (EPP and ECR) to the extreme right (ENF and EFDD)—voted in favour of the new censorship law.

In implementing their reactionary plans, EU politicians are resorting to bald-faced lies. A few days before the vote, conservative European politician Daniel Caspary (CDU) denounced the anti-censorship protests in the *Bild* newspaper as “bought demonstrators” who would “endanger democracy.” EU Justice Commissioner Věra Jourová told *Netzpolitik* that upload filters and short deletion periods for online platforms could have prevented the right-wing terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand and the radicalisation of the perpetrator. She wanted “100 percent certainty” that “terrorist content... would not remain on the net.”

Such statements turn reality upside down. It is not the internet and demonstrators who are responsible for attacks on democratic rights or the radicalisation of right-wing terrorists like Brenton Tarrant, but EU politicians like Jourová herself. She is a member of the Czech governing party ANO 2011, which advocates a restrictive immigration policy and denounces Muslim refugees as potential terrorists. How openly and

shamelessly leading European politicians are tying in with Nazi traditions was demonstrated by a statement made by the head of the conservative EPP parliamentary group, Manfred Weber (CSU), at the beginning of 2018. “The central European issue” was “the final solution to the refugee question,” he declared.

One year later, European governments openly consider fascist methods to implement their reactionary policies. Ahead of protests by the “Yellow Vests” last weekend, the Paris military governor announced that the soldiers of an elite unit were ready to open fire on demonstrators with live ammunition if necessary.

Workers and youth must draw the necessary conclusions. The struggle against internet censorship—as well as the struggle against social inequality, fascism and war—requires a political struggle: that is, the mobilization of the international working class on the basis of a socialist program.



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