Consultation response: Measures to further improve the effectiveness of the fight against illegal content online

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Allied for Startups commends the European Commission for seeking to ensure the digital sphere as an open, safe and accessible space. Startups are at the forefront of developing and testing new solutions, services and experiences for the benefit of our societies. Often, this brings startups at the forefront of new technologies and phenomena connected to those. Usually not yet at an overwhelming scale but always one step ahead of the mainstream.

For a good reasons startups have developed, and are known for, a new way of innovation. Lean, iterative, user-centric, and fast. That's why startups are driving new applications around artificial intelligence or blockchain and create jobs faster than the rest of the economy. We want startups to be the way they are also to be the drivers of innovation in traditional and established industries. The collaboration between corporates and startups has become the most effective and efficient way of digitising our industry.

Startups also have taken an increased interest in public policy and the European Union. Usually from a younger generation, our entrepreneurs think across borders by nature and have an overwhelming interest in how their European Union should look like. Also this is a desired effect because Commissioners, MEPs and policy makers don't want to be known for talking about startups but with startups.

New forms of innovation and with startups as a different breed of company we also need to adapt the way we make public policy. We cannot expect startups to be lean on innovating but heavy on public policy. It is not enough for the Commission to claim transparency while basing their actions on wide ranging and complex and non-standardised consultations. We simply cannot expect startups to hire policy experts instead of developers. Public institutions have a greater responsibility to meet entrepreneurs and innovators where they are rather than waiting for them in Brussels.

This is in the interest of entrepreneurs and the European Institutions equally. The EU is driving complex and groundbreaking policies around privacy but also ethics in ai, many of which may become a global standard. In order to ensure success of these policies, they should be designed together with its early adopters. When policies are too complex and oriented along capacities and practises of large corporations we establish barriers to market entry as well as barriers to innovation. The strengths of startups and the reasons we desire them in our economies and societies is hampered from day one. Rather than thinking the unthinkable and reimagine what is possible, we encourage entrepreneurs to stay in a box.

We fully share the goal of fighting terrorist content in the most effective way. As a global network we support the work of Tech Against Terrorism and encourage our members regularly to make use of their support. As a self regulatory tool the initiative has shown extremely useful, especially for those companies that have few own resources to cope with complex issues of controversial content.

Regarding this consultation however we miss to grasp the context and background of this initiative. Firstly, the scope of the consultation is extremely wide and seems to concern various aspects relating to online platforms which itself is a broad term. Secondly, we see, and raised concerns about, already ongoing legislative initiatives in this field. Technologically unsavvy and from a fundamental rights perspective highly questionable proposals are driven to protect commercial interests and specific business model. Are we to expect more intrusive and destructive proposals for other types of content?

Further we see a broad interest in shifting the balance between users, platforms and businesses. Established by the e-commerce directive, our current liability regime proves stable, easily understandable and technologically adaptive since its adoption in 2000. In the transition between the 3rd and 4th industrial revolution it seems appealing to a few policy makers to shift responsibility away from the executive branch. The next best actors in our digital economy seems to be online platforms which are being made responsible for whatever happens online - irrespective of their role, architecture, size or involvement. Every startup uses platforms but more importantly, most are platforms themselves. All policy considerations should hence take full account of this variety and aim to avoid all unnecessary and unintended consequences.

Allied for Startups represents more than 35 European startup communities and has worked with them over the years on several dossiers of the Digital Single Market. As European policy makers we urge you to take full stock of our digital economy before jumping to action. Many global platforms seem to be on the minds of decision makers and, sometimes for good reasons, trigger reactions aiming to curb those players specifically. Such reaction often fall short of addressing the real problems effectively but cause far reaching and unintended consequences on startups. We want to encourage all policy makers to engage in a positive and supportive dialogue with their regional and local entrepreneurs rather than to focus too much on individual business models or companies.

Lenard Koschwitz
Director Public Policy, Allied for Startups

Allied for Startups is a global network of 42 organisations representing startup communities from more than 35 countries and 4 continents. We are the voice of startups in politics and governments and are working together to create consensus on policies that can positively impact startups and grow digital entrepreneurship and the digital economy at large. Our mission is to ensure that the voices of Startups are heard in Government and politics.