An Open Letter to Susan Wojcicki, CEO of YouTube

15 March 2019

Dear Ms Wojcicki,

After almost three years’ worth of in-depth examinations and negotiations involving the three EU Institutions, 28 Member States, 751 MEPs, and thousands of experts and stakeholders, the European Parliament is about to take a formal decision on the directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market.

The aim of one of the main provisions of this directive – Article 13 – is to ensure that platforms such as YouTube fairly compensate the creators whose works are made available through their services. In other words, to play fair and respect the creators who made YouTube what it is today.

We believe that the Copyright Directive will create a level playing field for the European Digital Single Market, with fair and equal rules for all.

There is ample public debate around this directive and your right to defend your position, as a concerned party, is not in question. Indeed, the positions you have taken in the media or through your own videos against Article 13 are well known and nourish the public debate.

However, since the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly on Sept. 12 to approve its version of the Copyright Directive, YouTube has been actively using its own services to influence public opinion, often with misleading or false information.

You have taken advantage of your considerable influence over 1.8 billion monthly users as the biggest media entity in the world to:

- Circulate your own message to video makers and YouTubers
- Create a uniquely formatted page, similar to SaveYourInternet, on Youtube.com
- Create a portal comprising all videos defending your position on Article 13
- Run banners, pop-ups and push notifications on YouTube defending your point of view and directing traffic to your unique YouTube.com webpage

This is unprecedented and raises ethical questions.

Moreover, YouTube enabled the propagation of misinformation - such as the claims that Article 13 would lead to the shutting down of YouTube channels, kill European startups, put an end to memes and gifs and harm freedom of speech. In other words: change the Internet as we know it. Such scaremongering deliberately ignores the special protections provided in the text and misleads public opinion.
It interferes with the democratic and balanced debate that all European citizens are entitled to. We believe it is totally unfair and unacceptable that your service, which dominates the online market, is exclusively used as a media service to promote your own commercial interests in a debate over European legislation.

You advocate freedom of expression but what we have seen is a media service dedicated to the promotion of its own views, based on false information and scare tactics.

We believe in pluralism and open, democratic debate. We believe our views also need to be voiced to your audience. That is what freedom of speech is all about.

This is why we are asking you to let us, over the week of March 18-24:

• send a message to the same YouTubers so we can share with them our vision of article 13 – the one we promote on our website, www.article13.org,
• publish banner ads on YouTube as you did for the “saveyourinternet” campaign

Acting as a media service requires responsibility and accountability to ensure democratic debate.

Best regards,

EUROPE FOR CREATORS

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