GlobalResearch
Center for Research on Globalization

The War on Media Freedom: Undermining the Independent Alternative Online Media, EU to "Regulate" Internet Search Engines

By Nathan Allonby
Global Research, January 30, 2013

Region: Europe
Theme: Media Disinformation

A new report written for the European Commission recommends regulation of internet news, modifying search engines to control access to "conspiracy sites", the creation of European government news agencies and the training of new "*cadres of professional journalists... for... science, technology, finance or medicine*".

The report also urges EU politicians and leaders of EU institutions to give regular news conferences, to emerge from the shadows and take centre stage as the real leaders of Europe. This marks the beginning of a new era for the EU, and for its control of the media.If you are reading this in USA or Canada, be aware that what comes to Europe could also come to North America, due to the Euro-Atlantic Area of Cooperation. This a process of convergence via which Europe and North America will adopt similar policies on "freedom", justice and security, to be implemented by 2014, which appears applicable to the latest media proposals.

The report (*A free and pluralistic media to sustain European democracy*) was published this month by a High Level Group (HLG), formed by European Commission, which includedLatvia's former president and a former German justice minister.The policy behind this report has been under continuous development for some time. The aims described in 2011 included : – the opportunity to "reconquer" press freedom, with specific target countries including Hungary, France, Italy, Romania and Bulgaria; to increase coverage of the European Union, and to regulate the internet and social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The last of these aims has received EU attention since the London riots. (See *The press in Europe: Freedom and pluralism at risk | EurActiv*)

Some of the key points in the report are listed below: –

- The EU claims legal authority ("*competence*") to regulate the press and news media.
- In this context, the report offers no definition of what constitutes "journalism" and what will be regulated, but instead recommends "*debate among all stakeholders on ... guidance to courts*".
- A large portion of the report relates to the internet, new media and search engines. Internet search engines are proposed to be included within media regulation.
- The report specifically endorses Cass Sunstein's comments on the internet and extremism. The HLG report says that "*Cass Sunstein, for example, raises concerns that the internet will enable people to be less engaged in society, given*

increasing capabilities for personalised filtering and the decreasing presence of ... newspapers... undoubtedly have a potentially negative impact on democracy... we may come to read and hear what we want, and nothing but what we want. ... The concern is people forgetting that alternatives do exist and hence becoming encapsulated in rigid positions that may hinder consensus-building in society." The report continues, "*Information isolation and fragmentation, together with an inability to check and evaluate sources, can have a damaging impact on democracy*".

- To tackle this, search engines are proposed to be included within media regulation. Search engines are highlighted as having a major impact upon content viewed and the prominence in which it is presented: – "*the new media environment increases the importance of 'gate-keepers', digital intermediaries who are the access route to the internet (for example search engines and social networks) ... For these actors, only the EU has the effective capacity to regulate them*"

- Sites reproducing articles ("*news aggregators*" and "*digital intermediaries*") could be subject to new restrictions requiring balanced content. The report says that "*Digital intermediaries, such as search engines, news aggregators, social networks... should be included in the monitoring of the sector. The increasingly important role they play in either improving or restricting media pluralism should be considered, especially as they start producing content. However, care must be taken to distinguish between media that publish original work directly, and services that allow users to republish or link to other peoples' work.*"

- It is proposed that there should be a subsidy supporting responsible journalism, to news media meeting defined criteria – "*There should be streamlining and coordination of support and funding for quality journalism*".

- The report recommends there should be research fellowships to train investigative journalists – "*In order to build up cadres of professional journalists competent to operate in ... investigative journalism, journalistic fellowships should be offered [at] Universities and research centres ... to be funded by the EU. ... The fellowships would be particularly valuable for investigative journalism, or for training journalists to mediate between complex subjects such as science, technology, finance or medicine and the wider public.*"

- The report recommends that "*Media literacy should be taught in schools starting at high-school level. The role media plays in a functioning democracy should be critically assessed as part of national curricula*".

- "[T]*he HLG notes the founding of the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom in Florence in December 2011, entrusted with generating policy studies and papers*" and "*the funding of research projects such as MEDIADEM (European media policies: valuing and reclaiming free and independent media in contemporary democratic systems)*"

- The *European fundamental rights agency* is unveiled as a major actor in the strategy.

- The EU would become a regular presence on the news. It is recommended that "*EU political actors have a special responsibility... in triggering European news coverage. The Presidents of the EU institutions should regularly organise interviews with... national media from across the EU.*"

- It is also recommended that "*funding for cross-border European media networks (including such items as translation costs, travel and coordination costs) should be an essential component of European media policy. Support for journalists*

specialised in cross-border topics should be included in such funding."

The following observations and comments could be made about the above: –

- Many were surprised that Prime Minister David Cameron and the UK government [refused to create](#) a new press regulator [in response](#) to the Leveson Report. Was the reason because they were already awaiting the European HLG report and a coordinated European action plan? It appears that the British government has been pushing for controls on social media since the summer riots of 2011. The British public has become used to *policy laundering*, where the British government pushes the EU to introduce unpopular measures, then blames these on someone else.

- The proposals to control search engines should be regarded as significant. The proposals would control access to information, rather than merely the news media alone.
- The technology to modify search results is already highly sophisticated, having been refined in China for over a decade. Google recently [withdrew](#) anti-censorship functions from its search engine – some allege under pressure from the government of China, which had been reducing access to Google services. Meanwhile Chinese internet controls have greatly [increased in sophistication](#), for example, with the ability to detect and sever connections when Tor, Onion, encryption or Virtual Privacy Networks (VPNs) are in use.
- In respect to "*consensus-building in society*", although the European HLG report says "*It is clearly not possible to force people to consume media they do not wish to*", equally nothing in the report appears to rule out restricting access to certain material or viewpoints.
- The European HLG recommendations should be seen in the context of proposals, in both the EU and the UK, to record internet searches and websites visited. The EU [Telecommunication Data Retention Directive](#) is currently under review and the European Parliament [voted](#) in 2010 for this to be expanded to record all [internet searches](#).

- The HLG report is an outline statement of general principles, with the detail yet to come.
- This report marks the public announcement of a long-term war on media freedom that has been carefully planned in advance, since at least 2011.
- This is only the beginning. The funding of the new *Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom* and of research projects such as *MEDIADEM* will create an industry to generate new proposals and new regulations.

- The EU is set to appear as a regular feature on our news, with the creation of new EU press agencies, media channels, and EU-funded and EU-trained reporters, reporting a new style of "cross-border" European story, featuring the EU and its institutions. EU politicians and leaders of EU institutions are going to be on the news regularly.
- It appears the EU is set to emerge from the shadows and take centre-stage in political coverage, as the real policy-making government of Europe.

- By interesting contrast, the EU has been moving to reduce internal transparency and [access to documents](#), such as legislation in draft. There will be more seen, but less content.

- The proposals for "pluralism" and balance seem likely to significantly affect many internet alternative news sites.
- Sites which include a mixture of both "aggregated" news (links from other sites or articles reproduced from other sites) and original content – perhaps the majority of alternative news sites – appear to fall under new proposed controls on balanced coverage.
- The mention of courts sounds ominous. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has played a significant role in advancing the scope and powers of the EU, and in effect acts as a major law-making body in its own right.

- The report does not mention the significant audience movement away from traditional mainstream news media, such as TV and newspapers, which appears to reflect widespread dissatisfaction with the type of news coverage and content it seeks to advocate.
- The proposal to subsidise such news reflects the fact the public just won't buy it.
- Although unstated, perhaps this is why the report aims to re-educate the public, starting in school.

- There is an obvious conflict between genuine pluralism in the media and the aim of "*consensus-building in society*". The HLG report is concerned with the latter. Welcome to a new form of "pluralism" – one that is regulated, harmonised and politically-orthodox.
- Historically, controls on the press have always suppressed criticism of governments, never increased balance.
- Mainstream media coverage in general features striking bias – pro-government bias, both in terms of the amount of coverage and prominence, relative to opposing viewpoints.
- It would be naive to think that new requirements for balanced coverage would in any way reduce pro-government bias in reporting. For example, do we expect that the report's concern about "*people forgetting that alternatives do exist and hence becoming encapsulated in rigid positions*" is also intended to call for greater coverage of alternative viewpoints critical of the establishment? Is this likely to mean that mention of the events of 9-11 should in future be balanced by mentioning that a significant proportion of the population disputes the official account? Would reporting on new counter-terrorism security measures be balanced by reporting that the majority of the population does not agree they are justified? Would reporting of the debate in Parliament be balanced by mentioning that certain issues are prohibited from discussion, or that both government and opposition are led by Bilderbergers who hold similar views to each-other and support similar policies?
- Even-handed balance is not practiced by the mainstream media – for example, they have not presented the version of events from viewpoint of the Gaddafi government in Libya or Assad in Syria, despite some reasonable justification for this. Reporting in the run-up to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq was not even-handed, with considerable grossly non-factual reporting, such as the

fantasies about bin-Laden's caves at Tora-Bora. However, it is not this type of reporting that governments are seeking to change.

- The creation of new "*cadres of professional journalists... for... science, technology, finance or medicine*" suggests these are key areas where European Commission has been unhappy with the presentation or wants to take control of the debate. Think of alternative medicine, GM crops, global warming, nuclear power and the banking crisis, to mention a few. These are fields in which the alternative media has had significant impact.

How should we respond to this?

The main thing is not to be passive – these are still only proposals and have yet to be formally accepted by the European Commission. Now is the time for protest and opposition.Developments in the United Kingdom are worth watching because the UK is believed to be bidding to lead cyber-security and policing in Europe. There is overwhelming public disapproval of internet surveillance proposals – parliamentary consultation on the legislation received 19,000 emails against, 0 in favour.However, although the legislation may have stalled (temporarily), the £ multi-billion investment in the internet surveillance programme has not. It appears the government approach to democracy has reached the stage of "So, how are you going to stop us?" They have realised that the opposition may be vocal, but is also disorganised and has no strategy against implementation without public consent.One factor the government may have overlooked is that the British government internet surveillance strategy requires a public-private partnership and the active cooperation of commercial operators such as search engine providers (e.g. Google) and social networks. Although the government may not be moved by public opinion, it seems extremely likely that commercial organisations would be deeply affected by bad publicity and falling sales. Coordinated consumer pressure could easily provide a major set-back to government plans, and probably set the scene for a complete roll-back – if only opposition could be coordinated.Unfortunately, this aspect of the government analysis is correct – public opposition is disorganised and largely ineffective. This is mainly due to passivity and complacence. As an adjunct to a previous survey of the introduction of ID cards worldwide, the author of this article also read about any opposition to these schemes, nation-by-nation. Although introduction of these schemes was being organised and coordinated globally, opposition was disorganised and rarely organised even at a national level – the globalist side had almost completed its victory before the general public had even woken up. Despite the article being read by hundreds of thousands of people and translated into several different languages, barely a handful of people responded to the invitation to contact the author. This is reflective of the level of passivity which has hampered the organisation of real opposition.

If there is ever going to be any opposition, this is the time to establish contact with others, to get a trans-national opposition off the ground. We have to build real bridges between people – direct, human contact, face-to-face where possible – before the EU begins to monitor, regulate and close access to the internet. At present, it is relatively easy to read and publish articles, to find and link up with people who disagree with the mainstream, globalist agenda – soon, this could be much more difficult, when we can no longer communicate easily.

This is also the time to download and save information from the internet, particularly valuable knowledge about subjects such as alternative medicine, science and the real

history of our society. Store it permanently, on disc or better still on paper. Let's make sure they can't take it away from us.

This is the time to establish an alternative internet, which they can't control. Three main strands have been mentioned in articles recently: –

- setting up alternative, independent [internet networks](#) – via [PirateBox](#) , [Freedom Box](#) or similar devices
- the "[Dark Net](#)" or "[Deep Web](#)" of hidden webpages not listed by search engines
- untraceable email via [pseudonymous remailers](#), such as [Mixmaster](#) and [Cypherpunk](#), to beat attempted state mass-surveillance of communications

It is also worth implementing anti-surveillance measures, such as described in this – [Techniques For Avoiding Surveillance And The Censor](#).

We don't know how much time we have – let's not waste it.
(You are invited to [contact the author](#).)

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Nathan Allonby](#), Global Research, 2013

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Nathan Allonby](#)