

Spain: Facebook to install its “Ministry of Truth” in Barcelona

By Alejandro López
14 May 2018

Facebook, the world’s largest social media company, is looking to open an “internet content control center” in the iconic Torre Glòries in the Spanish city of Barcelona. This modern-day iteration of Orwell’s Ministry of Truth will implement Facebook’s latest “community guidelines” to censor content on the social media platform under the catch-all phrase of “combating fake news.”

Two weeks ago, the Competence Call Center (CCC) rented 9,000 square meters in eight floors of the towering emblematic building. The company, used by Facebook to implement its censorship guidelines, had already opened another censorship center in Germany in Essen, a model it will now replicate in Barcelona, according to Spanish economic newspaper *Cinco Días*.

The same daily announced the new offices will be staffed by around 500 employees. A source at real estate consulting company Engels & Völkers told EFE that the Barcelona branch of the Competence Call Center, Holding GmbH, will have Facebook employees assigned to its premises.

Barcelona was chosen by Facebook after reaching an outsourcing agreement with CCC, the sources told EFE.

Although the direct tenant will not be Facebook, which has not made any statements, CCC sources assured *El Periódico* that the task of the new staff in Barcelona will be to delete videos, publications and photos that violate the rules of the social network.

The announcement comes weeks after Facebook spelled out its new “community guidelines.” Purely at its own discretion, and with no legal oversight or recourse, Facebook will target any critical political view deemed to be violent, defamatory, “extremist,” “bullying” or “fake news,” and flag such material for removal or undetectable censorship.

In its new guidelines, Facebook users will not even know their content is being blocked from distribution as “fake news” because such censorship is a “sensitive issue,” i.e., it would infuriate users aware that their democratic rights are being violated.

The new 500 employees will join Facebook’s 20,000

censors working for the company’s “security” and “moderation” departments.

The Catalan political elite has not waited to celebrate Facebook’s entry in Barcelona.

The local government of Barcelona, controlled by the pseudo-left *Barcelona en Comú* (Catalan for Barcelona in Common), welcomed Facebook’s announcement. The Councilor for Tourism, Trade and Markets of Barcelona, Agustí Colom, said that the city council will contact the company to help and facilitate its “landing” in the city. He added that “it’s great news that goes in line with the economic growth of the city which has not stopped attracting investment in recent years.”

The spokesperson of the opposition Catalan separatist Democratic European Party of Catalonia (PDeCAT) said that “this is good news for Barcelona and Catalonia,” adding that it showed the viability of Catalan independence.

The other political parties also welcomed the arrival of Facebook, with a Socialist Party representative declaring this would create “quality jobs.”

Alongside nakedly financial considerations, faced with growing social opposition, the contending political forces on both sides of the divide over Catalan independence agree that political discourse should be controlled and censored by Facebook—which works with the military and intelligence apparatus all over the world to suppress critical news outlets.

The day before it was announced that Facebook would be “landing” in Barcelona, an event to discuss “fake news” was organized by Spain’s daily *El País* and other European media outlets from the Leading European Newspaper Alliance (LENA).

The conference was attended by representatives from Google and Facebook, Members of the European Parliament from major European political parties, and the eight editors-in-chief from the LENA newspapers: *EL País*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Soir*, *Die Welt*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *La Repubblica*, *Tages-Anzeiger* and *Tribune de Genève*.

The tone was set by Jaume Duch, the spokesperson of the European Parliament and its Director-General of

Communication. Duch said that within the European institutions “there is a real concern about a possible negative impact of the ‘fake news’ and the interventions of third parties in the next year,” in a reference to Russia.

Pilar Castillo from Spain’s right-wing governing Popular Party called for a system to “abort the consequences of fake news arrivals that aim to impact the elections to the European Parliament.” In her view, this system should be developed as soon as possible by the European institutions in the form of “preventive shock therapy” because “it would take a long time” to develop legislation on the matter.

The social democratic Member of the European Parliament, Iratxe García, advocated the adoption of legislative measures.

Maite Pagazaurtundúa, a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), referred to fake news as “a transnational problem” and called for the adoption of measures to “avoid something catastrophic in the next elections.”

The message stemming from the conference was clear. Bourgeois politicians and the media of all stripes are preparing the next pretext to clamp down on the Internet and democratic rights: Russian interference in the 2019 European elections.

This was made clear the following day by an editorial in *El País*:

“Stopping anti-European messages from gaining ground requires the cooperation of tech companies such as Google and Facebook. The first, albeit insufficient, step is for tech companies to change their algorithms so that fake news is given a lower ranking and is harder to find online, and quality content is given greater visibility. It is also important to educate people so that they develop a social and critical awareness that is able to see through deceptive arguments ...

“Adopting these measures from a global perspective, in which all European states are involved, is the only way the EU will be able to successfully fight against the challenges posed by disinformation.”

This comes from a newspaper which four months ago was forced by a court to publish a correction for a fraudulent and demagogic article on Catalan public television TV3. The article concocted a list of false “facts” to back its argument that one of the reasons behind the growth of Catalan nationalism is the role played by Catalan public television. *El País* also sacked its regular collaborator, John Carlin, for having published a piece in *The Times* critical of the Spanish government and the king’s roles with regard to the situation in Catalonia.

On December 19, a UK Parliamentary Select Committee began an inquiry into Russian interference in foreign elections. Among those invited to give their expert opinion

was a Spanish delegation comprising David Alandete, managing director of *El País*. The daily has published over 50 articles talking about Russian “interference” in the Catalan referendum on independence last October.

Under questioning from Members of Parliament, Alandete and others in the Spanish delegation were forced to admit that they did not actually have any evidence that Russian news sources had influenced the Catalan referendum result. In other words, all the articles were fabrications.

Rather than denounce the hypocrisy of this and the role played by the bourgeois media in promoting “fake news” to defend austerity, war and attacks on democratic rights, the pseudo-left Podemos is colluding in this process.

Miguel Urbán, MEP for Podemos and a leading Pabloite, participated in the fraudulent conference organized by *El País*. Advising his fellow politicians, he said that it was necessary to improve “digital literacy and transparency” and that he was opposed to “laws [passed] on the spur of the moment.”

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