



**Permanent Select Committee
on Intelligence
U.S. House of Representatives**

May 16, 2022

Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Meta Platforms, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

In April, Members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (“the Committee”) traveled to Bratislava, Slovakia, to discuss the ongoing war in Ukraine. During meetings with the delegation, Slovak government officials and civil society groups described with alarm the substantial pro-Russian, harmful disinformation on Slovak Facebook – a problem which only has grown more acute in recent weeks. Slovak government officials confirmed that they have, on multiple occasions, shared this content with Facebook’s staff. And, Facebook staff confirmed to ours that US government officials have also brought the matter to Facebook’s attention, but to our knowledge, the company has not yet taken appropriate action. The Committee is deeply concerned by the continued presence of harmful disinformation and pro-Russian propaganda on Slovak Facebook, and urges Facebook immediately to ensure that all pro-Russian disinformation is quickly evaluated, fact-checked, and labeled, downranked, or removed in accordance with Facebook’s public pledges and stated policies.¹

Facebook is powerful in Slovakia. It is the most widely used social media platform in the country², with approximately 2.7 million active members³, or approximately 49 percent of the Slovak population. For many years, a group of identifiable pro-Russian actors repeatedly has spread disinformation on Slovak Facebook, including during elections and throughout the

¹ Natalia Antelava, *How Silicon Valley is Helping Putin and Other Tyrants With the Information War*, CODA STORY (Apr. 14, 2022) <https://www.codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/facebook-authoritarians-information-war/> (“We’re taking significant steps to fight the spread of misinformation on our services related to the war in Ukraine. We’ve expanded our third-party fact-checking capacity in Russian and Ukrainian, to debunk more false claims. When they rate something as false, we move this content lower in Feed so fewer people see it, and attach warning labels. We also have teams working around the clock to remove content that violates our policies.”).

² *Between East and West: Democracy, Disinformation, and Geopolitics in Central and Southeastern Europe*, NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE (July 2021) <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/REAPPS2021researchpublicversion.pdf>.

³ *Slovak parliamentary election 2020: Liberalism as a threat, Facebook as a battlefield*, GLOBSEC (2020) <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Slovak-parliamentary-election-2020.pdf>.

COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ These same, identifiable actors are now weaponizing vast amounts of pro-Russian disinformation about the war in Ukraine.

The Slovak government is rightly troubled by these developments. One senior Slovak defense official described Facebook as “the main arena for Kremlin propaganda.”⁵ Yet despite Facebook’s awareness of the issue, the pervasive and false content seems to remain on Facebook’s platform. Moreover, despite Facebook’s pledge to provide “significant resources to fact-checkers covering Eastern Europe,”⁶ public reports suggest that Facebook has only one fact-checker dedicated to Slovakia.⁷ That is wildly inadequate given the magnitude of the threat.

In light of Facebook’s continued passivity, we request that Facebook by June 1, 2022 brief the Committee on: (1) the content the Slovak government has brought to Facebook’s attention as harmful disinformation and the status of that content; (2) any investigation Facebook has undertaken into the actors identified as spreading pro-Russian disinformation about the war on Slovak Facebook, the types of pro-Russian disinformation content spread by those actors and others, and actions taken by Facebook in response; (3) Facebook’s plan for proactively identifying harmful disinformation in Eastern Europe going forward; and (4) the specific number of fact-checkers, personnel, and other resources Facebook will devote to identifying harmful disinformation on the war in Ukraine in Eastern Europe, broken down by country, and including the language capabilities of the fact-checkers and other content moderation personnel.

⁴ Gerulata Technologies presentation to Members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (Apr. 2022); see also *Slovak parliamentary election 2020: Liberalism as a threat, Facebook as a battlefield*, GLOBSEC (2020), <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Slovak-parliamentary-election-2020.pdf>; *Character Assassination, Conspiracies and Manipulation: Slovak presidential election through the lens of disinformation channels on Facebook*, GLOBSEC (2019) [HTTPS://WWW.GLOBSEC.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2019/04/PRESIDENTIAL-ELECTION-MONITORING-REPORT.PDF](https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/PRESIDENTIAL-ELECTION-MONITORING-REPORT.PDF); Miroslava German Sirotnikova, *Pandemic Pushes Slovakia to Finally Target Disinformation*, REPORTING DEMOCRACY (Oct. 20, 2020) <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/10/20/pandemic-pushes-slovakia-to-finally-target-disinformation/>.

⁵ Andrew Higgins, *He Was a Penniless Donor to the Far Right. He Was Also a Russian Spy*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 20, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/20/world/europe/russian-spies-europe-ukraine.html>.

⁶ Naomi Nix, *In Ukraine, Facebook fact-checkers fight the war on two fronts*, THE WASHINGTON POST (April 12, 2022) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/04/12/facebook-fact-checkers-misinformation-ukraine-war/>.

⁷ Michael Trnka, *How successful is Facebook at removing COVID-19 disinformation*, GERULATA TECHNOLOGIES (June 25, 2021) (“...it is publicly known that [Facebook] only has a single fact-checker for the whole country...”); see also *Slovak parliamentary election 2020: Liberalism as a threat, Facebook as a battlefield*, GLOBSEC, 13 (2020) <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Slovak-parliamentary-election-2020.pdf> (“A Slovak fact-checker was established only a few weeks prior to the election. French Press Agency (AFP) has been assigned as a responsible entity for fact-checking in Slovakia and has only one Slovak-speaking person dedicated for this role...”); Nina Hrabovska Francelova, *Slovakia’s sole AFP fact-checker: Disinformation peddlers lack originality and creativity*, THE SLOVAK SPECTATOR (Sept. 2, 2021).

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff
Chairman



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress



Jason Crow
Member of Congress