Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 20th, 2022

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

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

We write to you regarding our serious concern with Meta's (formerly Facebook's) lack of progress addressing the pressing issue of Spanish-language disinformation across its platforms. Since the beginning of the year, Russian state-controlled outlets have made a concentrated effort to target Spanish-speaking communities to spread false-narratives leading up to, and in the aftermath of, the invasion of Ukraine. The viral spread of these narratives stands in stark contrast to assurances that Meta made to the public and Members of Congress that it is prioritizing the pressing needs of Hispanic communities in the United States.

In July, twenty-six members of Congress publicly asked Facebook to provide proof of investment in its efforts to combat Spanish and other non-English language misinformation and disinformation on the platform. Facebook did not directly answer the questions provided, and primarily attributed the increased rate of hate-speech takedown globally to "…a whole package of AI technologies [that] made leaps forward in the past year."

Despite your purported progress in combatting Spanish-language disinformation, "Kremlin-owned outlets are winning the information war with Spanish speakers."[1] In the last week of February, the RT en Español Facebook page saw "nearly double the engagement than its daily average."[2] According to research, Russian state-owned media outlets continue to publish significantly more content referencing Ukraine in Spanish compared to many other leading Spanish language news sites, resulting in 1,600 posts that referenced Ukraine.[3] Russian

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[1] Russia has taken over Spanish-language airwaves on Ukraine https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/09/russia-spanish-ukraine-media/
[2] Ukraine will steal Biden's SOTU spotlight https://www.politico.com/newsletters/the-recast/2022/03/01/ukraine-russia-joe-biden-state-of-the-union-spotlight-00012874
[3] Russia has taken over Spanish-language airwaves on Ukraine https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/09/russia-spanish-ukraine-media/

government outlets also saw their Spanish-language efforts outperform U.S. counterparts on audience engagement by a ratio of more than 3 to 1 in the last two weeks of January. [4]

RT en Español's Spanish-language disinformation and propaganda misleads their more than 18 million Facebook followers. Following Putin's invasion of Ukraine, RT en Español's articles spread inaccurate information by reporting Putin's false justification for unwarranted acts of aggression against Ukraine to RT's Spanish-speaking audience and downplayed the invasion as a "special military operation" with the intention to protect Ukrainians.[5]

These lies are designed to undermine a resolute global response necessary to stand against the Russian government's aggression. Facebook has continuously failed to show it is adequately addressing this problem for Spanish-speaking communities, and the success of Russian-sponsored outlets in crowding out the information ecosystem for Spanish speakers serves as proof to this fact. In addition, Spanish-language disinformation and propaganda regarding the invasion of Ukraine is not mentioned once in Facebook's Quarterly Adversarial Threat Report released on April 7th, 2022[6]. The spread of these narratives demonstrate that Meta does not see the problem of Spanish-language disinformation in the United States as a critical priority for the health of our democracy.

The lack of Meta's action to swiftly address Spanish-language disinformation globally demonstrates the need for Congress to act to ensure Spanish-speaking communities have fair access to trustworthy information.[7] We request you answer the following questions to ensure Congress has the most relevant information while evaluating solutions to this pressing issue:

1) What steps will Meta take regarding the availability of Spanish-language outlets of Russian state-controlled media on its platforms? How has Meta's efforts to proactively detect and address Russian disinformation across languages changed after Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

2) How is Meta preparing to proactively detect and address foreign disinformation operations targeted at Spanish-speaking communities for future elections within the United States, including the 2022 primaries and general election?

3) Since the original July letter, what new steps has Meta taken to ensure the effectiveness of its algorithmic content detection policies to address disinformation and hate-speech across different languages?

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[4] Russia has taken over Spanish-language airwaves on Ukraine https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/09/russia-spanish-ukraine-media/

[5] Kremlin-funded news outlet is mainlining Putin's falsehoods to Spanish speakers https://www.mediamatters.org/russias-invasion-ukraine/kremlin-funded-news-outlet-mainlining-putins-falsehoods-spanish-speakers

[6] https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Meta-Quarterly-Adversarial-Threat-Report_Q1-2022.pdf

[7] Misinformation online is bad in English. But it's far worse in Spanish https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/10/28/misinformation-spanish-facebook-social-media/

4) How does Meta report engagement with content that it eventually takes action on for violating its policies? Are these metrics broken down by language?

5) What elements from Meta's Community Standards and Transparency Report are available to the public broken down by language? Are there any technical barriers that would prevent Meta from providing all transparency reporting on a per-language basis?

6) Will Meta incorporate any transparency regarding the staffing levels, training, and employment status (full-time, vs. contract basis) for its content moderation staff? Are there any technical barriers to providing full reporting on its staffing levels for its content moderation staff according to their language proficiency and cultural context?

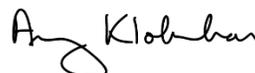We look forward to your prompt response and action.

Sincerely,

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Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

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Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator

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Robert Menendez
United States Senator

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Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

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Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

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Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

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Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

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Alex Padilla
United States Senator

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Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

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Nydia M. Velázquez
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Lucille Roybal-Allard
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Adriano Espaillat
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Lori Trahan
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Jim Costa
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Adam Schiff
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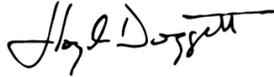
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Sean Casten
Member of Congress

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Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

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Ruben Gallego
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James P. McGovern
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Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

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Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress