

**From:** Morning Tech Europe [morningtech@politico.eu]

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**To:** Nicholas Hirst

**Subject:** POLITICO Pro Morning Tech, presented by Sky: Google professor — Uber day — Brexit/GDPR

By [Laurens Cerulus](#), with help from [Nicholas Hirst](#), [Joanna Plucinska](#), [Mark Scott](#) and [Cat Contiguglia](#)

**GOOGLE FUNDING:** The College of Europe recently announced its appointment of scholar Andrea Renda to a [new Google Chair in Digital Innovation](#). Cue outrage among some of [Google's critics in Brussels](#) and [further afield](#). But is it justified?

Renda heads up the [regulatory policy unit](#) at the well-regarded Centre for European Policy Studies. Google's rivals point to publications like "[Searching for Harm or Harming Search](#)," a 2015 paper in which he identifies a number of "rather dark shadows on the reasoning of the European Commission" in its Google Search probe. The implication is he will push a pro-Google, laissez-faire message on the Eurocrats of the future.

**Not so says Google**, which is providing "financial support" for the chair, and Angela O'Neil, a spokesperson for the College of Europe, which is known for molding EU-types (including our own Nicholas Hirst): "The College chooses its professors and students on an objective basis. I have never known interference from third parties. The academic council would not allow that."

**Corporate money:** The appointment is probably more about Google wanting to ingratiate itself with eurocrats than trying to manipulate the EU's agenda. Microsoft, which has had its fair share of regulatory problems, also works with the College of Europe. But the move does raise questions about the role of corporate money in research and academia. Over past months, Google has unwittingly fueled this debate amid revelations it funded academics widely, allegations (contested) they did not always reveal that funding, and accusations it had [scholars sacked from the New America Foundation](#). By accepting Google funding, the Bruges and Krakow-based College has brought another eminent teacher to its students — but it has also [waded into that debate](#), which is taking place across the Atlantic but also in the EU.

**Reality check:** OK, the College already has [other corporate funders](#). Microsoft funds scholarships, the energy chair is funded by a foundation associated with Alcoa, a producer of aluminium, and Inbev, a beer giant from Belgium which is now part of AB InBev, is another previous sponsor. But the latest chair doesn't make for great optics: Though one of the world's most innovative companies, Google's power over online markets, its privacy stance and its effect on news, and yes, democracy, is increasingly controversial. The Guardian made the following observation in the wake of the New America Foundation revelations: "If you control the research that happens, you change the entire tack of the conversation. Furthermore, you change the perception of reality itself." Institutions that take money from companies need to be very transparent about how they insulate themselves from influence.

**A spokesperson for Google** told us: "Ever since Google was born at Stanford University, we've maintained strong relations with universities and research institutes, and have always valued their independence and integrity ... We sponsor the chair, but are not involved in selecting the academics involved, nor in defining research areas or outcomes."