

Press release – Digital Services: managing harmful content while protecting freedom of expression



The [legislative initiative](#), adopted with [22 votes in favour and 1 against](#), will contribute to the upcoming Commission's Digital Services Act (DSA) package.

The text calls for EU-wide standards on how hosting platforms should moderate content and apply the so-called "notice and action" mechanisms. These new rules on content moderation, in addition to judicial redress, should provide legal clarity for platforms and guarantees for fundamental rights of users, MEPs say.

When content is flagged or taken down, users should be notified and able to seek redress through a national dispute settlement body. However, a final decision should be taken by an independent judiciary and not fall on private undertakings. "We do not want private companies to police the internet", said rapporteur Tiemo Wölken (S&D, DE) after the vote.

To ensure platforms comply, the Commission should assess options for a European entity to monitor and impose fines, such as an EU body or a coordinated network of national authorities, MEPs propose.

Limiting harmful content

The Legal Affairs Committee urges the Commission to draw a clear distinction between illegal and harmful content. Future rules on content management should also address the spread of harmful content that is not illegal and protected under freedom of speech rules, such as fake news or disinformation.

When it comes to self-regulation, MEPs are firm that platforms should not employ upload filters or any form of ex-ante content control for harmful or illegal content.

“Make users less dependent on algorithms”

“We need to address the business practice of selling personalised targeted ads and the impact this has on the spread of harmful content”, [said Mr Wölken at a press conference](#), by providing users with more control over what they see online, including the possibility to opt-out of content curation altogether. “The idea is not to censor unwanted content, but to make users less dependent on the algorithms that reward attention-seeking content, thus increasing their freedom of information”, he said.

Targeted advertising must be regulated more strictly in favour of less intrusive, contextualised forms of advertising that require less data and does not depend on previous user interaction with content. Being shown personalised advertising should depend on users’ free, informed and unambiguous consent.

The upcoming DSA should introduce transparency rules on the terms for accumulation of data for this purpose and provide for the right to use digital services anonymously whenever possible.

For more details on these and additional recommendations, see the [compromise amendments](#) approved by the Legal Affairs Committee on Monday.

Next steps

The vote in plenary is scheduled for the 19-22 October plenary session. This legislative initiative, along with recommendations from the [Internal Market](#) and Civil Liberties committees, will feed the upcoming Commission’s Digital Services Act package, expected before the end of the year.

[Press release – “Unequivocal support” for the people of Bulgaria in their](#)

Legitimate demands



The Civil Liberties Committee approved, with 35 votes in favour, 30 against and one abstention, a [draft resolution](#) on the “significant deterioration of respect for the principles of rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights, including the independence of the judiciary, separation of powers, the fight against corruption and freedom of the media” in Bulgaria.

MEPs highlight the need for the Bulgarian Government to ensure stricter control of the way EU funds are spent and to address immediately the concerns that taxpayers’ money is being used to enrich those associated with the ruling party.

The text focuses also on persisting systemic issues in the judiciary, especially the lack of a framework in place to hold the Supreme Judicial Council and the Prosecutor General accountable and the failure to comply with over 45 European Court of Human Rights judgments by carrying out effective investigations.

MEPs are further concerned about a series of developments, including:

- the announced constitutional reform, which should be preceded by proper consultations and be in line with international standards
- potential changes in electoral legislation, close to the next parliamentary elections
- the hasty adoption of legislation by the governing majority
- investigations into high-level corruption not yielding tangible results and “corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of accountability”
- the serious deterioration of media freedom and working conditions for journalists in Bulgaria over the past decade
- allegations against the Bulgarian police regarding the use of force against women and children and journalists during demonstrations
- the state of fundamental rights in Bulgaria, e.g. as regards hate speech, gender and sexual discrimination, and the rights of Romani

people and asylum seekers.

Quote

“European law matters; the rule of law matters. The rule of law is linked with defending the interests of the EU and fighting against corruption. Mapping corruption shows clearly that member states with structural deficiencies on rule of law are those most prone to resort to corrupt practices when managing EU budget and funds. That has to come to an end”, said rapporteur [Juan Fernando López Aguilar](#) (S&D, ES).

Next steps

The resolution is set to be voted on by the full house on 8 October.

Background

Protests in Bulgaria erupted on 9 July, with demonstrators calling for Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and chief prosecutor Ivan Geshev to resign, based on allegations of corruption and state capture. Citizens took to the streets following two incidents that have added to the public’s growing frustration over systemic political corruption.

[Article – Sassoli on budget negotiations: Parliament is not obstructing anything](#)



The President of the European Parliament spoke at the start of a special EU summit on 1-2 October. In his speech, he stressed the need for a Europe that meets the expectations of Europeans.

“We are starting out on a path to creating a different, more responsive, more inclusive and fairer Europe, one which delivers tangible benefits to our citizens. It is incumbent on us to stay the course and not waver,” President Sassoli told EU leaders.

He mentioned the need for actively working to restore the single market in the wake of the [coronavirus crisis](#), rebuilding the economy and creating jobs, as well as addressing social and economic inequalities and meeting the needs of those who have suffered most.

As one of the causes of widening inequality, he mentioned lack of internet access: “In the world which is now taking shape, access to the internet should be seen as a new human right,” he said. “The challenge the EU faces is to be a pioneer and to lead by example in the democratisation of the digital world.”

He also called out EU leaders for “unacceptable delays in decision-making” when it comes to [migration](#). He described the Commission’s pact on migration and asylum presented on 23 September as “a step forward” and stressed that Parliament is open to negotiations with the Council and German presidency on the matter.

On the ongoing [long-term budget negotiations](#), the President stated the need for proposals on the table, because “for the moment, the proposals under

discussion are those put forward by Parliament”.

“I want to be very clear, because some aspersions being cast are entirely unacceptable: Parliament is not obstructing anything. Our demands are in the interests of European citizens. The delays are due to a lack of counter-proposals from the Council,” he said.

He called on the German presidency to make constructive proposals on three main issues: guaranteeing the funding of strategic programmes, ensuring that the cost of the recovery plan is met by [new EU revenue sources](#), and not by citizens, and incorporating an effective conditionality mechanism linked to respect for the rule of law.

President Sassoli expressed support for those in Belarus fighting for democracy and called for immediate sanctions from the EU against perpetrators of electoral fraud, violence and repression.

Commenting on tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, Parliament’s President said: “We are unwavering in our resolve to show solidarity with Greece and Cyprus”. He called for dialogue with Turkey that can lead to a lasting settlement of the conflict.

Mr Sassoli underlined the need for a quick start of a Conference on the Future of Europe in Strasbourg. “Our citizens deserve an EU which has the courage of its convictions and is ideally placed to tackle the challenges ahead, and which does not rely solely on outdated methods,” he concluded.

[European Council conclusions on external relations, 1 October 20](#)



II. External relations

Eastern Mediterranean

15. The EU has a strategic interest in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey. Pursuing dialogue in good faith and abstaining from unilateral actions which run counter to the EU interests and violate international law and the sovereign rights of EU Member States is an absolute requirement in this regard. All differences must be resolved through peaceful dialogue and in accordance with international law. In this context, the European Council reiterates its full solidarity with Greece and Cyprus, whose sovereignty and sovereign rights must be respected.

16. The EU welcomes the recent confidence building steps by Greece and

Turkey, as well as the announcement that they will resume their direct exploratory talks aiming at the delimitation of the Continental Shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone of the two countries. These efforts need to be sustained and broadened.

17. At the same time, the European Council strongly condemns violations of the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus which must stop. The European Council calls on Turkey to abstain from similar actions in the future, in breach of international law. The European Council underlines that delimitation of the Continental Shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone should be addressed through dialogue and negotiation in good faith, in full respect of international law, and calls on Turkey to accept the invitation by Cyprus to engage in dialogue with the objective of settling all maritime-related disputes between Turkey and Cyprus.

18. The European Council supports the speedy resumption of negotiations, under the auspices of the UN, and remains fully committed to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem within the UN framework and in accordance with the relevant UNSC resolutions, including UNSC resolutions 550 and 789, and in line with the principles on which the EU is founded. It expects the same of Turkey. The EU stands ready to play an active role in supporting the negotiations, including by appointing, upon resumption, a representative to the UN Good Offices Mission.

19. Provided constructive efforts to stop illegal activities vis-à-vis Greece and Cyprus are sustained, the European Council has agreed to launch a positive political EU-Turkey agenda with a specific emphasis on the modernisation of the Customs Union and trade facilitation, people to people contacts, High level dialogues, continued cooperation on migration issues, in line with the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement. The European Council invites its President, in cooperation with the President of the Commission and with the support of the High Representative, to develop a proposal for re-energising the EU-Turkey agenda to this effect.

20. Recalling and reaffirming i.a. its previous conclusions on Turkey of October 2019, in case of renewed unilateral actions or provocations in breach of international law, the EU will use all the instruments and the options at its disposal, including in accordance with Article 29 TEU and Article 215 TFEU, in order to defend its interests and those of its Member States. The European Council will continue to closely monitor developments and will revert accordingly and take decisions as appropriate at the latest at its December meeting.

21. Finally, the European Council calls for a Multilateral Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean and invites the High Representative to engage in talks about its organisation. Modalities such as participation, scope and timeline will need to be agreed with all involved parties. The Conference could address issues on which multilateral solutions are needed, including maritime delimitation, security, energy, migration and economic cooperation.

China

22. The European Council welcomes the oral report on the EU Leaders' meeting with President Xi Jinping on 14 September as well as the signing of the agreement on Geographical Indications. It stresses the need to rebalance the economic relationship and achieve reciprocity. It recalls the goal of finalising, by the end of this year, negotiations for an ambitious EU-China Comprehensive Investment Agreement (CAI) that addresses the current asymmetries in market access, contributes to a level playing field, and establishes meaningful commitments on sustainable development. It also calls on China to deliver on previous commitments to address market access barriers, to make progress on overcapacity and engage in negotiations on industrial subsidies at the World Trade Organization.

23. The European Council encourages China to assume greater responsibility in dealing with global challenges. This includes, in particular, taking more ambitious action on climate in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement and on biodiversity, and supporting multilateral responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, notably as regards treatments and vaccines, the independent review of the international health response, and debt relief as a necessary condition for recovery from the pandemic, particularly in Africa. The European Council welcomes, as an important step in the right direction, the statement of President Xi Jinping, following the Leaders' video conference, that China will aim to achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

24. The European Council underlines its serious concerns about the human rights situation in China, including developments in Hong Kong and the treatment of people belonging to minorities, as expressed at the EU-China summit in June and the Leaders' meeting held on 14 September.

25. The European Council reaffirms the policy approach towards EU-China relations as set out in the Joint Communication of the Commission and the High Representative 'EU-China: A Strategic Outlook' of March 2019 and calls for further coherent efforts to implement it. It invites the Commission and the High Representative to present a progress report by March 2021. It looks forward to a meeting of all its members with President Xi Jinping in 2021.

Belarus

26. The European Council condemns the unacceptable violence by Belarusian authorities against peaceful protesters, as well as intimidation, arbitrary arrests and detentions following the presidential elections, the results of which it does not recognise. The European Council fully supports the democratic right of the Belarusian people to elect their President through new free and fair elections, without external interference. The European Council calls on the Belarusian authorities to end violence and repression, release all detainees and political prisoners, respect media freedom and civil society, and start an inclusive national dialogue. It agrees that restrictive measures should be imposed and calls on the Council to adopt the decision without delay. The European Council also encourages the European Commission to prepare a comprehensive plan of economic support for democratic Belarus.

27. With regard to the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant Ostrovets, the European Council reiterates the importance of ensuring nuclear and environmental safety.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

28. The European Council calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities and urges parties to recommit to a lasting ceasefire and the peaceful settlement of the conflict. The loss of life and the toll on the civilian population are unacceptable. There can be no military solution to the conflict, nor any external interference. Azerbaijan and Armenia should engage in substantive negotiations without preconditions. The European Council expresses its support for the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and asks the High Representative to examine further EU support for the settlement process.

Alexei Navalny

29. The European Council condemns the assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny with a military chemical nerve agent from the 'Novichok' group. The use of chemical weapons constitutes a serious breach of international law. The European Council calls upon the Russian Federation's authorities to fully cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to ensure an impartial international investigation and to bring those responsible to justice. The European Council will return to the matter on 15-16 October 2020.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

[European local and regional leaders call for EU support to deliver Local Green Deals](#)



□□*President Tzitzikostas at local leaders conference in Mannheim: "Cities and regions need direct access to EU funds to turn green words into green actions"* □

The city of Mannheim virtually welcomed the [9th European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns](#) organised by ICLEI with the support of EU institutions, including the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). Hosted by the Mayor of Mannheim and CoR member Peter Kurz, local leaders gave support to the [Mannheim Message](#), a collective call for cities and regions to be key partners in the EU's path towards climate-neutrality and a joint commitment to develop Local Green Deals.

The [Mannheim 2020](#) conference was held virtually from 30 September to 2 October in a difficult social and economic context due to the COVID-19. Five CoR's prominent members took part, including President Apostolos Tzitzikostas, calling for cities and regions to be placed at the heart of the design and implementation of the EU's recovery plans, ensuring every territory becomes more sustainable, inclusive and resilient.

[Apostolos Tzitzikostas](#), CoR President and Governor of the Region of Central Macedonia intervened saying: *"To reach climate neutrality by 2050 and deliver a sustainable future for our citizens, regions and cities need to be part of the development, delivery and monitoring of EU recovery policies. As local and regional governments, we need to take ownership of the Green Deal, shape our own national investment and climate plans and have direct access to EU funds to make the Green Deal tangible in our communities. We must turn nice green words into real green action. If the Green Deal is not built and delivered with our cities and regions, it will not happen at all".*

The CoR member and Mannheim Lord mayor [Peter Kurz \(DE/PES\)](#) declared: *"The Mannheim Message underlines how important cities and local authorities are as key actors for Europe's future. We are committed to Local Green Deals designed in cooperation with our citizens and key stakeholders. We aim to build the strong foundations for the implementation of the Green Deal in Europe, and to accelerate the transformation to carbon-neutral, sustainable and inclusive societies. However, the Mannheim Message also stresses that we do not want to be merely implementation partners for programmes, measures and regulations. We want to be truly involved in co-creating Europe's future for the well-being of our citizens today and for future generations".*

The Mayor of Seville, [Juan Espadas \(ES/PES\)](#), Chair of the CoR's ENVE commission and [Green Deal Going Local](#) Working Group, congratulated the Polish city of [Katowice](#) for winning the [2020 Transformative Action Award](#). Mayor Espadas said: *"Our cities and regions need to undergo a deep economic and societal transformation to address the current COVID-19 crisis, but also the upcoming climate and biodiversity crises. A Europe made by smart revolutionary actions that have the capacity of changing the face of our territories, restoring ecosystems, contrasting climate change and moving towards healthier and more inclusive societies is indeed possible. Congratulations to Katowice that through its action aims to increase civic participation and to encourage residents to help make the city more sustainable."*

[Rafał Trzaskowski](#) (PL/EPP), Mayor of Warsaw, said: *"the Climate Pact is, first of all, a bottom-up process in which local communities make public their commitment to the European climate neutrality by 2050. But it is also a catalyst for social innovation, enabling mutual inspiration on the methods, ways and tools that are used to transform our societies towards a climate neutral Europe as quickly and equitably as possible. Cities across Europe desperately look forward to some new, bold financing schemes. Already a year ago, Warsaw, together with the other signatories of the Pact of Free Cities, called for more European funds to be directly accessible for cities. Such funds would boost investment in new, sustainable transport infrastructure, renewable sources of energy, greenery, deep retrofit of buildings and power-*

saving measures.”

[Roby Biwer \(LU/PES\)](#), Member of the Bettembourg Municipal Council, Head of the delegation of Luxembourg at the European Committee of the Regions took the floor at the session ‘Designing Just Green Cities through Urban Greening Plans’. The CoR rapporteur on various biodiversity opinions declared: *“One of the key learnings from COVID-19 is that cities have to rethink their urban development plans. There is a higher expectation by the bulk of the population to breathe a better air and get greener areas in their neighbourhoods. We need to integrate nature and biodiversity in our lives to build a better future. The European Urban Greening Plans have the potential to bring nature back to cities and reward community action to restore and protect biodiversity in urban and peri-urban areas, by also allowing cities to exchange planning tools. Let’s be the leaders of biodiversity conservation, not victims of it.”*

Additional information

Contact: david.crous@cor.euopa.eu / +32 (0) 470 88 10 37