

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001875/24
to the Commission
Eleonora Meletti (PPE)
(30 September 2024)**

Subject: Verbal violence and online abuse

We have recently seen a dramatic increase in the number of instances of hate speech on social media. Across Europe, more and more people — regardless of age or gender — are becoming victims of sexist, racist and abusive verbal attacks carried out in the name of ‘democracy and freedom of speech’. Unfortunately, hate speech has been on the rise in mass media and on social networks and become endemic in society. Verbal violence and abuse takes an immeasurable toll on the mental health and daily lives of its victims.

These acts are at odds with European culture and education, the principles of respect and dignity and the values of the EU. Given that verbal violence is starting to spiral out of control in all EU countries, can the Commission answer the following:

1. Does it intend to take immediate action and, if so, what measures will it take to combat hate speech in the digital world and to protect victims of verbal violence and their mental health?
2. How does it intend to follow up the initiative ⁽¹⁾ to extend the list of EU crimes so that it finally includes hate speech?

Submitted: 30.9.2024

**Answer given by Mr Reynders on behalf of the European Commission
(18 November 2024)**

The Commission is committed to ensure that there is no place for hate ⁽¹⁾ in the EU, including online. At EU level, the framework Decision 2008/913/JHA ⁽²⁾ obliges Member States to criminalise racist and xenophobic hate speech and hate crimes.

To extend the protection against hate speech and hate crime beyond racism and xenophobia, the Commission presented to the Council, in December 2021, an initiative to include these crimes in the list of ‘EU crimes’ under Article 83(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. This would empower the Commission to propose legislation on the definition and penalties for hate speech and hate crime.

To date, the Council has not reached the needed unanimity. The Commission will continue its efforts towards the adoption of the Council decision.

The Commission is also working to counter hate speech online.

Under the Digital Services Act (DSA) ⁽³⁾, platforms must assess and mitigate the dissemination of illegal hate speech on their service, and provide easily accessible procedures for flagging illegal content and ensure user redress ⁽⁴⁾.

A revised Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online commits signatories to a new set of ambitious voluntary commitments, including on the review of hate speech notifications. The Commission is currently working on the transition of the Code into a DSA Code of Conduct ⁽⁵⁾, making it an integral part of the DSA risk management framework.

Further, the 2023 Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health ⁽⁶⁾ supports efforts to address (online) hate speech and victims of hate. EU funding, in particular the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme, also has a specific priority on combating hate speech and hate crime, including activities in support of victims.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TEXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0777>

⁽¹⁾ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council JOIN/2023/51 final on ‘No place for hate: a Europe united against hatred’ JOIN/2023/51 final.

⁽²⁾ Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating certain forms and expression of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law OJ L 328, p. 55 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32008F0913>

⁽³⁾ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services (Digital Services Act). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj>

⁽⁴⁾ On this basis, the Commission has opened formal proceedings against X, Facebook and Instagram. See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_6709 and https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_2373.

⁽⁵⁾ See Article 45 of the DSA.

⁽⁶⁾ Communication COM/2023/298 final on a comprehensive approach to mental health.