

(English version)

Question for written answer E-002652/24
to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Karin Karlsbro (Renew)
(25 November 2024)

Subject: Election interference through social media platforms

The increased use of hybrid strategies and operations by state and non-state actors poses a threat to the security and shared democratic values of the Member States and of our partner countries. These operations include information manipulation and cyberattacks, which pose a threat to the integrity of democratic processes. In recent elections we have seen the growing influence of social media platforms owned by non-EU countries, such as TikTok, through which targeted disinformation is used to manipulate the outcome of elections.

1. Does the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy consider the current legal framework sufficient to address the threat of potential interference with electoral processes in the Member States through social media platforms owned by non-EU countries?
2. What further measures does the Vice-President of the Commission . High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy consider necessary to counter efforts to interfere with elections in the Member States and in our partner countries through social media platforms?

Submitted: 25.11.2024

Answer given by Executive Vice-President Virkkunen on behalf of the European Commission
(29 January 2025)

It is primarily the responsibility of Member States ⁽¹⁾ to lay down the conditions for the conduct of elections and their authorities are the main responsible for elections oversight.

The Commission supports democratic processes with non-legislative tools, such as the European cooperation network on elections ⁽²⁾, sharing information on election-related incidents in cybersecurity networks and by coordinating response, if necessary.

The European External Action Service's tools against foreign information manipulation and interference, with a focus on third countries, include reinforcing detection, awareness-raising efforts ⁽³⁾, information sharing ⁽⁴⁾, diplomatic measures ⁽⁵⁾ and collective responses with international partners such as the G7.

As a legislative tool, the Digital Services Act ⁽⁶⁾ obliges providers of very large online platforms and search engines to assess and mitigate risks to electoral processes, while respecting freedom of expression.

The Commission started non-compliance proceedings against Meta, X and TikTok in this regard. ⁽⁷⁾ If infringements are proven, these may result in fines of up to 6% of global turnover.

The regulation on transparency and targeting of political advertising ⁽⁸⁾ will strengthen public accountability and efforts to counter election interference.

The Code of Practice on Disinformation ⁽⁹⁾ also aims to protect elections including with its Rapid Response System in which signatories ⁽¹⁰⁾ commit to exchange swiftly information on content presenting threats to electoral integrity.

Experience using these instruments and the report on the conduct of the 2024 elections to the European Parliament, will contribute to the European Democracy Shield ⁽¹¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Subject to the principles laid down in Articles 2 and 10 of the Treaty on EU.

⁽²⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/eu-citizenship-and-democracy/democracy-and-electoral-rights/european-cooperation-network-elections_en

⁽³⁾ Such as the website EUvsDisinfo, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>

⁽⁴⁾ Such as the EU Rapid Alert System, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/factsheet-eu-rapid-alert-system_en

⁽⁵⁾ Such as sanctions, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1490

⁽⁶⁾ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market for Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act), OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1-102.

⁽⁷⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/list-designated-vlops-and-vloses>

⁽⁸⁾ Regulation (EU) 2024/900 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2024 on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, OJ L, 2024/900, 20.3.2024.

⁽⁹⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/code-practice-disinformation>

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://disinfocode.eu/signatories-archive/>

⁽¹¹⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf, p. 23.