(English version)

Question for written answer E-001663/25
to the Commission
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(24 April 2025)

Subject: Risks relating to multi-million EU funding of centralised (and often left-leaning) fact checkers

The Commission recently launched a EUR 5 million call ([1]) under the Digital Europe Programme to strengthen the European Fact-Checking Standards Network ([2]).

Objectives covered by the funding from Brussels include expanding fact-checking capacity, developing sustainable business models and protecting fact checkers from harassment while providing them with legal and relocation support. The further funding of such centralised structures risks consolidating influence among a limited number of actors who lack democratic legitimacy and political neutrality. Unlike the transparent and consensus-based model used in Community Notes on X — now being adopted by other platforms such as Facebook and Instagram ([3]) — the Commission's approach relies on opaque selection and review processes. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg has pointed out that fact checkers often exhibit a left-leaning bias.

The current US presidential administration has criticised centralised fact-checking as undemocratic. Continued EU reliance on such models may undermine free speech and further strain transatlantic ties.

Bearing in mind what has been said above:

1. Why has the Commission adopted a critical view of relatively more transparent and open-source alternatives to fact-checking, such as Community Notes?

2. Has the Commission assessed the risk of its model being perceived as institutionalised censorship, with negative implications for public confidence and EU-US relations?

3. How will the Commission evaluate fact checkers' independence and neutrality when offering them legal and relocation support under the proposed fact checkers protection scheme?

Submitted: 24.4.2025

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

As referred to in the response to PQ 853/2025, the Digital Services Act (DSA) ([1]) requires designated providers of very large online platforms and very large search engines to put in place reasonable, proportionate and effective mitigation measures tailored to systemic risks stemming from the functioning, design and use of their services.

The choice of the mitigation measures is with the providers, as long as the measures are reasonable, proportionate, effective and tailored to the specific risks identified.

This standard applies to centralised fact-checking and decentralised initiatives such as community notes. When implementing such measures, providers are required to consider their actual or foreseeable effects on freedom of expression.

In the EU's multi-faceted approach to countering threats related to civic discourse and electoral integrity relies on a broad range of independent stakeholders and fully upholds the freedom of expression. In this approach, fact-checking is only one of many elements, next to regulatory and co-regulatory measures, support for media literacy, strategic communication, and research.

In support for stringent standards of integrity and accountability for fact-checking entities, the EU has supported the creation of a code of standards ([2]), which amongst other objectives aim to ensure non-partisanship, impartiality and financial transparency.

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1 [1]European Commission, EU Funding & Tenders Portal, Call for proposal: European Network of Factcheckers, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS?isExactMatch=true&status=31094501,31094502,31094503&frameworkProgramme=43152860&order=DESC&pageNumber=1&pageSize=50&sortBy=startDate.

2 [2]European Commission, Digital Europe Programme: Call for proposals — Accelerating the Best Use of Technologies, 1 April 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/digital/wp-call/2025/call-fiche_digital-2025-bestuse-08_en.pdf.

3 [3]Meta, 'More Speech and Fewer Mistakes', 7 January 2025, https://about.fb.com/news/2025/03/testing-begins-community-notes-facebook-instagram-threads/.

([1]) 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).

([2]) See https://efcsn.com/code-of-standards/. The project that led to the creation of the Code of Standards was funded in the course of the Integrity of Social Media call for proposals, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/funding/call-proposals-integrity-social-media.

The call for proposal referred to by the Honourable Members requires the participation of a fact-checking organisation certified as independent by such standards as part of the successful consortium and the call's activities will contribute to promoting and upholding the highest standards for transparency and independence throughout all Member States.