(English version)

Priority question for written answer P-000143/25
to the Commission
Valérie Hayer on behalf of the Renew Group
(15 January 2025)

Subject: Enforcement of the Digital Services Act (DSA) vis-à-vis large social network platforms in the light of recent allegations of algorithmic bias and foreign interference

Recent developments on major social media platforms demonstrate the inadequacy and delays in the Digital Services Act's (DSA) enforcement. In particular, reports of algorithmic bias and public statements by certain platform owners, including X's Elon Musk, allegedly boosting extremist or far-right political parties, have prompted fears of foreign interference in elections in Europe. The situation raises doubts about these platforms' compliance with the DSA's requirements, which aim to protect democratic processes, civic discourse and electoral processes, and requires an urgent reaction from the Commission.

In the light of this:

1. How and when does the Commission intend to ensure full and swift enforcement of the DSA's obligations — particularly those concerning algorithmic transparency, systemic risks, adoption of mitigation measures and the removal of illegal content — when large social network platforms appear unwilling to cooperate?

2. What enforcement tools has the Commission deployed so far to address potential foreign interference and biased algorithms in recent elections, and how does the Commission intend to accelerate its investigations, in particular into X, and to strengthen its supervisory, investigation and enforcement powers ahead of upcoming elections to safeguard democratic integrity?

3. How will users and researchers get adequate access to data to verify compliance with the DSA?

Submitted: 15.1.2025

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

Democracy is a core value of the EU, with free and fair elections at its heart. Member States are responsible for organising elections according to national constitutional rules, legislation, international obligations, and EU law.

The Commission supports Member States and competent authorities in election matters ([1]). For example, ahead of the German federal election in February 2025, the Bundesnetzagentur and the Commission organised an election roundtable ([2]) and a stress test ([3]), with very large online platforms (VLOPs) and very large online search engines (VLOSEs), German authorities, and civil society organisations.

Signatories of the EU Code of Conduct on Disinformation, which also contains commitments related to elections, also activated the Rapid Response System (RRS) for the German elections ([4]).

The Commission has opened four proceedings ([5]) to address risks to civic discourse and elections focusing on the design and functioning of online platforms' systems.

The Commission recently ordered the provider of X ([6]) to preserve documents on future changes to the design and functioning of its recommender algorithms for information on past changes and access to certain technical interfaces to allow fact-finding on content moderation and virality of accounts.

The Digital Services Act (DSA) requires providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs to give researchers access to public data and more far-reaching data to identify systemic risks. For the latter, the Commission is preparing a delegated act ([7]).

([1]) The Commission has published guidelines for providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs on the mitigation of systemic risks for electoral processes, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/guidelines-providers-vlops-and-vloses-mitigation-systemic-risks-electoral-processes
([2]) https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/digital-services-coordinator-germany-hosts-roundtable-online-platforms
([3]) https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/german-digital-services-coordinator-tests-platforms-readiness-under-digital-services-act
([4]) Previously used in EU, French and Romanian elections, the RRS allows non-platform signatories to swiftly report time-sensitive content, accounts, or trends that they deem to present threats to the integrity of the electoral process and discuss them with the platforms in light of their respective policies.
([5]) https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/list-designated-vlops-and-vloses
([6]) https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-addresses-additional-investigatory-measures-x-ongoing-proceedings-under-digital-services
([7]) Pursuant to DSA Article 40(13).