



Brussels, 5 June 2019,

Dear European Commission President Juncker, European Council President Tusk,
European Parliament President Tajani,

In the run up to the European Parliament elections, the role of technology companies has been assessed sporadically. The Code of Practice was intended to see decisive action to prevent the spread of disinformation and other malign activities, and to ensure more transparency for consumers on political ads. Companies, for example, vowed to avoid the sharing of political ads from other countries. Some companies signed onto the Code voluntarily, others did not.

We now know from the digital rights organization Bits of Freedom, that mere days before the European Parliament election, it was remarkably simple to buy Facebook ads from The Netherlands targeting CDU and AFD supporters in Germany. This is one indication that promises made did not lead to sufficient improvements. Meanwhile, the company has taken down billions of fake accounts, and not a day goes by without new information about malicious actors (ab)using tech platforms, to undermine democracy. Realistically, there is a lot of information unknown to the public.

Still, we conclude that 1) self-regulation is insufficient 2) new reports of fake accounts, bot-driven amplification, the use of deep fakes and other new challenges emerge on a daily basis 3) a lot of information regarding the detailed impact of political ads, data-collection, micro-targeting, bot networks and coordinated disinformation campaigns, remains solely in the hands of private technology platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Google. Oversight and accountability need to improve, not only leading up to elections, but in the interest of preserving the democratic rights of Europeans, and the rule of law in Europe, more broadly.

In order to ensure this public oversight, we call on you to organize coordinated European inquiries into the impact of technology platforms on democracy and elections. A new format is needed given the exclusive mandate of national parliaments to organize parliamentary inquiries, and to hear witnesses under oath, as well as the specific election laws that differ from country to country. These national competencies should be combined with the clear European dimension including the effect of GDPR.

We propose you initiate an ad hoc committee of parliamentarians from national parliaments and the European Parliament. This ad hoc committee would be able to take testimony from witnesses in national parliaments and would be encouraged to engage with civil society, technology, researchers and other experts towards meaningful results on the national and European level. These inquiries should deliver detailed information and evidence, that will also help inform future steps and possible regulations, towards accountability and oversight.

Europe has no time to lose to learn the details of how malicious actors used technology platforms during the European Parliament election campaign, and whether these companies reacted responsibly. The EU is now in a unique position to obtain the needed transparency, and then to propose policies to ensure oversight and to make democracy more robust.

We are ready to cooperate with you to achieve parliamentary inquiries into the impact of the use and abuse of technology platforms on democracy and elections.

Sincerely,

Members of European Parliament

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**Transatlantic Commission on Election
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