

# Inside the far-right network targeting Europe's digital rules

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TECH

The Trump administration and a network of far-right think tanks are increasingly targeting the EU's digital regulations and rules on content moderation. Far-right MEPs have taken over these narratives, while tech companies are hoping to exploit the opportunity.

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In December 2025, Elon Musk called on X for the abolition of the EU, comparing it to Nazi Germany. This followed the European Commission fining Musk's social media platform for a lack of transparency regarding its algorithms, as well as for the misleading use of the blue check verification mark. A few days later, in retaliation, former European Commissioner Thierry Breton and four NGO members combating hate speech were barred from entering the United States.



Together with its Big Tech allies, and far-right think tanks, the Trump administration has launched a full-scale attack on the EU's digital rules

This was only the latest in a series of wide-ranging attacks by the Trump administration, its tech sector allies, and US far-right think tanks on EU digital regulations, especially on the Digital Services Act (DSA), which sets out a framework for content moderation on social media. These attacks are supported in Brussels by conservative organisations close to the Hungarian government, Christian fundamentalists and by far-right MEPs. On 2 and 3 February this year, the Patriots for Europe group, chaired by Jordan Bardella, co-hosted a transatlantic summit in the European Parliament with several figures from the MAGA sphere and the international far-right discussing what they describe as threats to “free expression”.

### **Online moderation: from consensus to attacks**

The objectives of the DSA are widely supported and no significant objections were raised when it was adopted. According to an October 2025 YouGov opinion poll, 53% of French respondents said that social media are not sufficiently regulated, while only 6% felt they are unduly restricted. Over the past years, there have been numerous social media scandals, including the sale of child-like sex dolls by the Chinese e-commerce giant Shein, online harassment, pictures of people being undressed by the AI chat-bot Grok, and harmful TikTok content for teenagers. There have also been disinformation campaigns by third countries, such as Russia, detected on X or Facebook.

“The DSA essentially creates procedural obligations. Initially, we had little interest in it as it was not game-changing,” says Bastien le Querrec, a lawyer for La Quadrature du Net, a French association focusing on online rights and freedoms. The regulation puts obligations on platforms to have transparent flagging and content moderation systems, which many already had. It bans targeted advertising to minors and other misleading practices. It also requires major platforms to analyse the systemic risks they generate with regard to online hate speech and violence, fundamental rights (including freedom of speech), and electoral processes. In 2022, the DSA was adopted unanimously by the European Council and by more than 80% of Members of the European Parliament, with far-right MEPs abstaining or voting against.

The DSA did not present a major problem for Big Tech firms either. “When the DSA was passed, Big Tech companies were positive about the legislation. [...] There were a lot of rules in the DSA that they were fine with. It was not very costly, moderation measures were already in place, and it was customary to request greater control over what was happening there”, says Jan Penfrat, a Senior policy advisor at European Digital Rights (EDRi). “These companies support laws depending on what costs them money, but also in

terms of what is politically opportune. And at the time that the DSA was negotiated, being in favor of online safety and against digital violence was very popular. So companies made sure they looked engaged in this field.”

Everything changed when Donald Trump returned to power. He has been very vocal against content moderation policies ever since his Facebook and Twitter accounts were suspended following the Capitol riots in 2021. On the very day of his inauguration, he signed an executive order called “Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship” prohibiting the administration from fighting disinformation. A few weeks earlier, Mark Zuckerberg had announced the end of moderation on his social media platforms, stating that “Europe has an ever-increasing number of laws institutionalizing censorship”. “Attacking the DSA and moderation on social media might have seemed like a good way of getting closer to Trump,” says Bram Vranken, a Researcher and campaigner at Corporate Europe Observatory.

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### **‘Freedom of speech’: a new MAGA imperialism tool**

“The censorship narrative is repeated on a daily basis on Fox News, on X... When the UK opens an investigation because Grok undresses children online, Elon Musk will say it is censorship,” says Berin Szoka, president of TechFreedom, a think tank that gets funding from digital giants including Google and Meta.

“I make a distinction between ‘normal’ digital giants and another very Trumpist component in this sector,” he says. “Those who say they are libertarian, like Thiel, Sacks or Lonsdale, are mad. And they have funded an entire ecosystem of organisations such as the Federalist Society and the Internet Accountability Project to promote their ideas.” \*

According to them, the main reason why these (anti-immigration, anti-LGBTQ+ and pro-birth) ideas have so little resonance among the general public is because they are censored on online platforms, as a result of the influence wielded by ‘progressive’ elites they want to do away with.

This is precisely the narrative that the Trump administration is trying to impose, presenting itself as a champion of liberty against a European Union it says is adrift. But while the Trump administration has opened fire on the Digital Services Act, at home it has

launched a chilling and blistering attack on free speech, from putting pressure on media to silence critical voices, to opening criminal investigations against critics and political opponents.



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The new National Security Strategy, released at the end of last year, clearly indicates the aim to support far-right parties in Europe (“the growing influence of patriotic European parties indeed gives cause for great optimism”), while promoting the conspiracy and racist ‘Great Replacement’ theory (“within a few decades at the latest, certain NATO members will become majority non-European”).

“To justify such a thing, they need to claim moral superiority, they need to be able to portray themselves as the ‘good guys’, Berin Szoka points out. “If you want to be able to say that the US supports a “resistance” in Europe – and that resistance is actually the far-right - you need to say that the other parties are going after free speech.” At the Munich Conference in February 2025, JD Vance stunned Europeans by attacking them head-on about what he described as the rollback of freedom of speech on the continent. According to this narrative, the US far right is not trying to impose its climate scepticism, its anti-immigration and anti-social model on Europe, but is merely defending Europeans against censorship.

Since the Munich Security Conference, the Trump administration has only increased its attacks on the Digital Services Act. According to a Reuters report, in the summer of 2025, the White House instructed its diplomats to launch a lobbying campaign against the DSA. In July, the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee had just released an interim report entitled “The Foreign Censorship Threat: How the European Union’s Digital Services Act Compels Global Censorship and Infringes on American Free Speech” under the chairmanship of Jim Jordan, a staunch supporter of Donald Trump. In January 2026, US embassies in Europe simultaneously posted a series of messages on their social media quoting Secretary of State Marco Rubio as saying: “We are concerned that freedom of expression in Europe is eroding”.

In February 2026, the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee published a second report on “foreign censorship” that also targeted European NGOs. These claims were quickly amplified by Big Tech lobby groups such as NetChoice.

### **Far-right US think tanks at the forefront**

Far-right think tanks are playing an important role in the US campaign against EU digital

rules. The Claremont Institute, a longstanding supporter of Trump, published a long rant against the Digital Services Act in 2025 entitled "Make Speech Free Again". The think tank is one of the organisers of the National Conservatism Conferences (NatCons), which are also supported by Peter Thiel, the co-founder of Palantir among other companies. According to Politico, at least 70 alumni of the Claremont Institute Fellowship serve in the Trump administration.

The Heritage Foundation, the think tank that coordinated Project 2025 and has effectively become an extension of the Trump administration, has also amplified the view that Europe is eager to act as a global censor and that the DSA is politically motivated ("The EU's Digital Services Act is being used to limit new right-wing parties from bypassing old political powers.").

The Heritage Foundation has also been tasked by the Trump administration to select EU-based think tanks that would get funding from the US government. The aim: to target the UK's Online Safety Act and the EU's Digital Services Act.

If more evidence were needed of conservative alignment on this issue, in January 2026 the America First Policy Institute, a think tank set up by the first Trump administration and which provided several members of the second Trump administration, posted a video on social media accusing "the EU unelected bureaucrats [of wanting] to crush our free speech" by targeting the DSA explicitly. The fine against X and Elon Musk is presented as an attack by Europeans against 'the Americans'.



## Groundless allegations against the DSA

"The DSA is not going to impose EU rules across the world. Platforms know how to adapt moderation to the various regions of the globe. They have been doing just that. And the

DSA is not a threat to freedom of speech. This is a cliché used by the far right to impose its narrative,” says Bastien le Querrec from La Quadrature du Net. “It does not change anything as regards what is lawful online and what is not. That is a matter for national legislation and case law.” Dozens of scholars and academics put forward the same argument in a letter to the Republican representative Jim Jordan following the release of his report.

Nevertheless, the US offensive against EU social media rules is widely picked up by far-right parties in Europe, particularly the National Rally. The Patriots for Europe group has launched an online petition accusing the DSA of censoring “some views in the name of the fight against disinformation and hate speech” (see the table “DSA: true or false” at the end of this piece ).



The US offensive against EU social media rules is widely picked up by far-right parties in Europe

In the absence of any solid proof that the DSA leads to censorship, right-wing voices have highlighted legal proceedings, some of which are controversial, that are not linked to the DSA. This includes a court proceeding against the Finnish MP Paivi Rasanen for a tweet in June 2019, three years before the EU regulation was adopted. She criticised the Lutheran Church of Finland for supporting the Gay Pride, using the words ‘shame’ and ‘sin’ in connection with homosexuality. She was prosecuted in Finland under the national law on hate speech. The charges were eventually dropped.

Although freedom of speech is a fundamental right in Europe, it must be balanced with other rights, including the right not to be discriminated against. This approach explains why there are laws that penalise racist and revisionist views. In some cases, in the EU as well as the US, human rights organisations have criticised governments for unduly limiting freedom of expression through anti-terrorism laws, for instance, to censor pro-Palestinian voices.

“In some countries, there are laws that unduly restrict freedom of speech. This has nothing to do with the DSA, but Republicans will exploit it,” says Berin Szoka.

“They are also making use of Thierry Breton’s letter to Elon Musk, in August 2024, before his interview with Donald Trump on X.” Breton, a European Commissioner at the time, urged the owner of X to ensure that the platform adhered to the DSA, as he organised an online debate with the Republican candidate for the presidential election. Breton’s statements received a lot of fire from academics and civil society organisations in Europe. The DSA only applies to formal specifications relating to design (interfaces and algorithms), and the European Commission can only implement measures that are “neutral with regard to content”.

## Orbán supporters and Christian fundamentalists

In addition to the aggressive campaign by the Trump administration and MAGA think tanks, attacks on alleged EU censorship are being carried out in the very heart of the EU, including by outfits that have little to do with Big Tech, such as the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) International. This ultra-reactionary Christian organisation was set up in the United States in 1994. According to the NGO Southern Poverty Law Center, ADF fights abortion and gay marriage, and campaigns for homosexuality to be criminalised. Commenting on this piece, ADF International denied having ever advocated for the criminalisation of homosexuality.



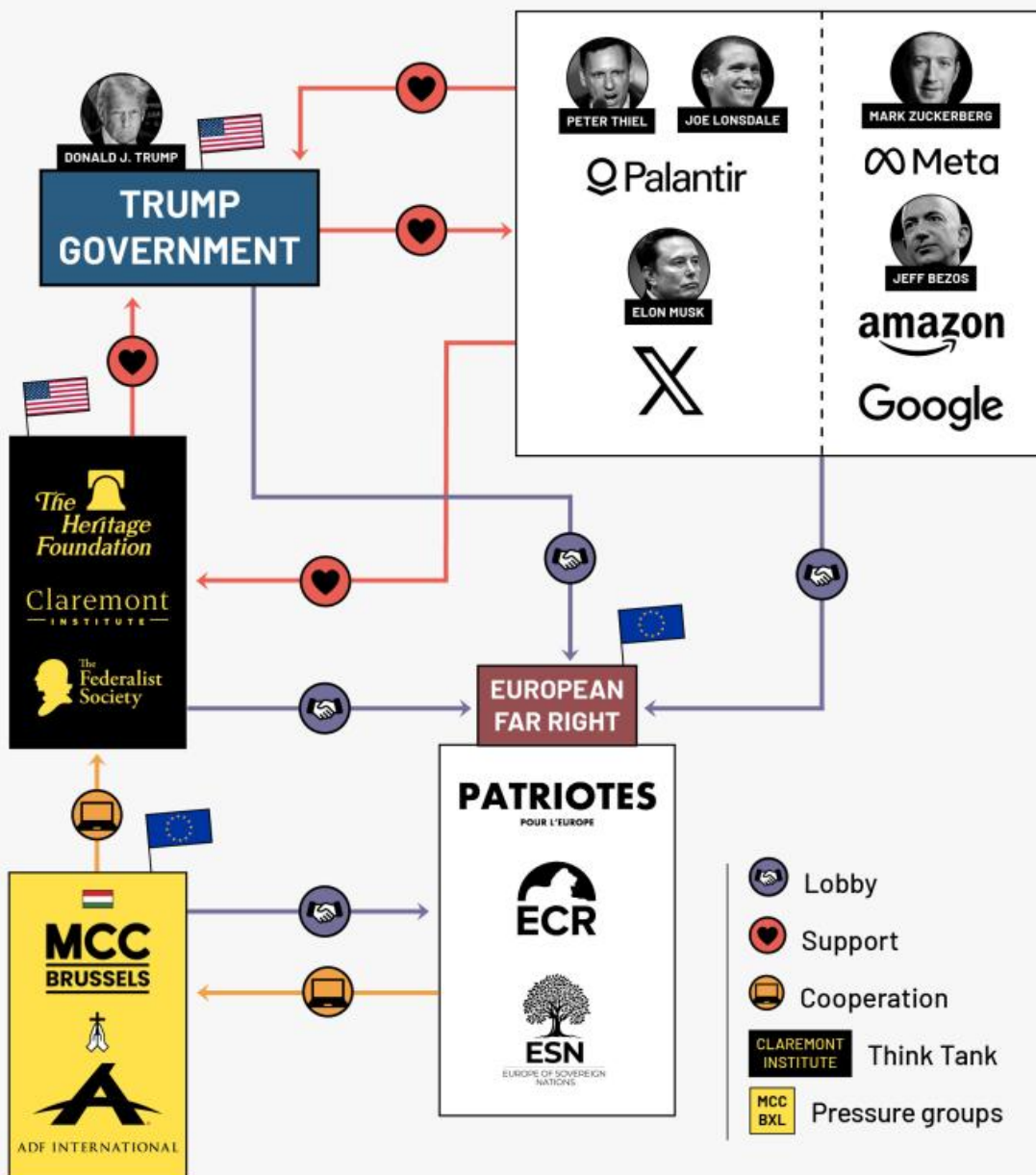
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With an official budget of more than 110 million dollars in 2024, it was behind the Supreme Court's ruling to revoke abortion rights at the federal level in 2022. In 2024, its international branch in Brussels declared an annual budget of more than one million euros. "ADF's expenditure in Europe has soared since 2018," Kenneth Haar, a researcher and campaigner at Corporate Europe Observatory, confirmed. "We get the impression that the DSA is now their favourite target, which is relatively new".

ADF expresses criticism similar to that of MAGA think tanks and JD Vance. In fact, the organisation appears to be very closely aligned with Trump's sphere of influence. In 2020, Michael Farris, who was then president of the ADF, worked on appeals to challenge the election results lost by Donald Trump. The association also participated in Project 2025, and its current president, Kristen Waggoner, was appointed by Donald Trump to the US administration's Advisory Board to the Religious Liberty Commission. An ADF International spokesperson told us that the organisation is non-partisan and that it works with people across the political spectrum.

Another vocal critic of the DSA is the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) Brussels. The Hungarian organisation set up a branch in the EU capital in late 2022 and has an annual record budget of more than 6 million euros. In May 2025, the MCC released a report critical of the fight against disinformation, likening it to propaganda against free speech. In a press release, it accused the EU of creating moral panic around "disinformation" and "hate speech" to further regulate online speech "under the guise of the Digital Services Act".

# Against the DSA



“MCC Brussels is ideologically oriented, they are anti-EU,” says Jan Penfrat. He stresses that it is a far-right political organisation and not a think tank that would draw upon genuine research. A few months ago, MCC introduced in Washington a plan to dismantle the European Union. “Their opposition to the DSA is either about Hungary, which sees the Commission as a nuisance that needs tackling, or to support their US ally. Trump’s greatest allies in Brussels are Orban’s supporters,” Kenneth Haar points out.

In April 2025, MCC lodged a complaint with the EU Ombudswoman about the Commission’s alleged lack of transparency regarding its investigation into TikTok’s activities before the 2024 Romanian elections.

While the Commission may be investigating, but the annulment of the elections was decided by Romania's Constitutional Court based on information from its intelligence services. On X, Elon Musk [shared a post](#) suggesting that the EU was behind the decision, alongside a truncated interview with Thierry Breton. The misleading video clip was then picked up by Jordan Bardella [in a video](#), and is regularly disseminated by National Rally MEP Virginie Joron in her [speeches](#) at the European Parliament, on her [social media](#), and in interviews on the [MCC Brussels](#) podcast.

## **Virginie Joron, an outspoken critic of the DSA in Brussels**

Both ADF International and MCC Brussels can count on far-right MEPs to amplify their messages. Among French MPs, they can count on Virginie Joron, who is running for mayor of Strasbourg in the March 2026 municipal elections. On 21 May, Joron delivered a speech at an ADF International symposium entitled "The Digital Services Act and Threats to Freedom of Expression" at the European Parliament, where she was joined by Reconquest MEP Marion Maréchal. In October 2025, ADF International released an [open letter](#) criticising what it described as the DSA as a dangerous censorship regime. The letter was signed by more than a hundred conservative and far-right figures, including Rod Dreher, who has ties to JD Vance and is an associate of the Budapest Institute, another organisation linked to the Orbán regime and Trumpian spheres. Virginie Joron, Angeline Furet (National Rally), and Laurence Trochu (Reconquest, led by Éric Zemmour) are also among the signatories.

In May 2025, fellows of the Tocqueville Scholarship, which provides training on how to use US ultra-conservative tactics to some of France's future conservative leaders, [met](#) members of ADF International in Brussels in May 2025. The agenda included "an in-depth conversation about the issues at stake with regard to the Digital Services Act". They then discussed transatlantic relations with representatives of the Heritage Foundation.

In June 2025, Virginie Joron, together with National Rally MEP, [Catherine Griset](#), attended an event organised by MCC Brussels. It was called "The DSA, NGOs and the EU Propaganda Machine". The conference took place within the European Parliament as it was co-hosted by MCC and two parliamentary groups, Patriots for Europe (chaired by Jordan Bardella) and European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). The third far-right group in the European Parliament, Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN), which includes Reconquest's Sarah Knafo [Eric Zemmour's partner]. Like the ECR, the ESN describes the DSA as a censorship tool and [has refused](#) to support Thierry Breton following last December's US sanctions against him. Far-right MEP Catherine Griset made it clear that she has aligned herself with the MAGA rhetoric and Trumpist stances when she [said](#): "The United States is breaking away from Europe over censorship".

## **Social media, a major political issue**

The far right's alignment with the Trumpist narrative can be explained in part by the new

US National Security Strategy's explicit support for 'patriotic' parties in Europe. Their virulent objection to the principle of online content moderation also involves more immediate interests. Discriminatory statements and incitement to hatred are banned by French law, and several far-right party officials have been prosecuted.



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Again, the DSA is not designed to target specific content. In fact, it provides for appeal procedures in the event of content being removed. Nevertheless, the DSA is targeted on a regular basis, as shown by a [parliamentary question](#) from Sarah Knafo and a [speech in the EU Parliament](#) delivered by the French far-right MEP Laurence Trochu. Far-right voices often invoke Trumpist slogans about onslaughts on 'free speech' when reacting to the dissolution of organisations inciting hatred, such as Generation Identitaire, or to the broadcasting ban imposed on French TV channel C8 for failing to comply with its obligations towards Arcom, France's broadcasting and digital authority. French MEPs from the three groups, along with other far-right figures, signed an [opinion piece in French weekly \*Valeurs actuelles\*](#), written by the ASLA collective - an offshoot of the dissolved Generation Identitaire, which was banned for hate speech - where they suggest that several far-right groups' accounts (Nemesis, Frontières...) have been suspended because of the DSA. Far-right magazine *Frontières* ran the headline "Censorship: Totalitarian Temptation" in its first quarter issue for 2026.

"These parties are very active on social media. It's their main way of communicating," Bram Vranken says. For this reason, they may fear rules creating a framework for social media, including on algorithmic content amplification. In February 2025, an [investigation by NGO Global Witness](#) concluded that ahead of the parliamentary elections in Germany, right and far right contents were favoured on X and TikTok.

"It took us a long time to regulate allotted time in the mainstream media, to make sure election candidates have equal speaking time on television and radio, even if things are far from perfect," says Green MEP David Cormand. "Exposure is increasing, including for traditional media. The visibility of their contents also depends on their presence on social media. Therefore, there is a lot at stake should the rules of equity, transparency, and pluralism governing access to information also apply to social media, which is not the case right now."

The DSA establishes principles on content moderation and 'system risk' reduction, including restrictions on freedom of expression, as well as the negative impact on elections and public debate. But its implementation by the Commission is actually still tentative. Several inquiries have been launched, but only one final ruling has been made –

the fine against X. Jan Panfret says, "There is undoubtedly an issue about a lack of resources, as well as some kind of political pressure from outside the EU, but also from inside. They also know that the companies facing them will challenge decisions in court. Therefore, they cannot afford to make mistakes, and they are very cautious".

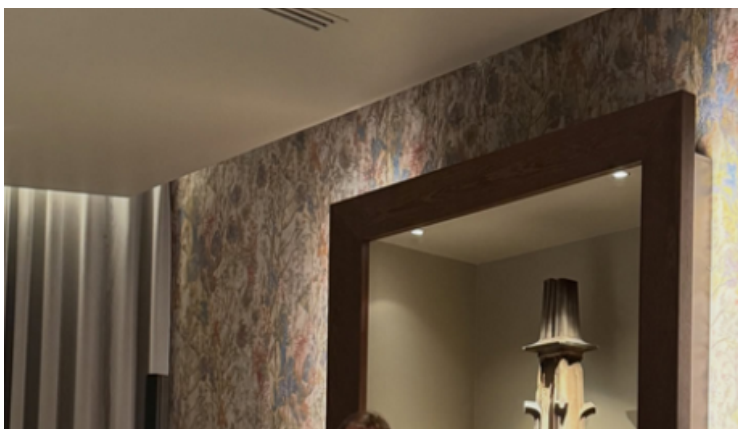
## Convergence between tech multinationals and the far right

It is hard to say whether digital multinationals would benefit financially from attacks on the DSA. 'Toxic' content can generate more interactions and, as a result, enhance data collection and increase profit. However, advertisers may be reluctant to use platforms that are out of control. X's advertising revenues plummeted after Elon Musk took over. The alignment of Meta and Google with the US administration's anti-DSA narrative and rhetoric against censorship is an indirect strategy to pursue their economic interests. The tech giants that have gained favor with Donald Trump have obtained, for example, national-level AI deregulation, by the US government threatening to take retaliatory measures against countries that introduce taxes on digital services or impose fines on "state-of-the-art US tech companies". India and Canada have already yielded to this pressure and dropped their taxes.



The alignment of Meta and Google with the US administration's anti-DSA narrative and rhetoric against censorship is an indirect strategy to pursue their economic interests

Yet many EU regulations are a thorn in the eye of tech multinationals. "During its previous mandate, the EU tried to make a 'tech deal,' a package of digital legal texts based in part on specific EU standards such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)," says David Cormand. These include the Digital Markets Act (DMA), which is designed to fight digital giants' anti-competitive practices, and the AI Act, which establishes a framework for the use and development of Artificial Intelligence. By joining forces with the Trump administration against the DSA, Big Tech knows it can rely on the Trump administration to put pressure on EU legislation as well.



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November 25, 2025

The Head of Public Affairs of Google France joined at a dinner party in Strasbourg hosted by six MEPs from the far right Rassemblement National. Source: Instagram

They can also count on the support of the European far right, which has already expressed support for the Digital Omnibus, a Commission proposal aimed at weakening the GDPR and the AI Act. Since the start of the parliamentary term in June 2024, Meta has met fifty-five times with MEPs from European Conservatives and Reformists, Patriots for Europe, and Europe of Sovereign Nations (as of the time of publication). Since August 2025, Meta has had the most meetings with the far-right Patriots for Europe, more than with the far larger right-wing EPP party. Just a few days after the Digital Omnibus was proposed by the Commission, the Head of Public Affairs of Google France attended a dinner in Strasbourg hosted by six National Rally MEPs, including Virginie Joron.



Since the start of the parliamentary term in June 2024, Meta has met fifty-five times with far-right MEPs

In 2021, Jordan Bardella submitted a written question to the European Commission to express his concern about what he described as Google's "aggressive lobbying"... against the DSA. He has come a long way since then. The main objective of the far right in Europe seems to be to align itself with the Trump administration and the interests of US multinational corporations. This wouldn't be the first time. As early as 2025, the European far right was acting as a Trojan horse for US fossil fuel interests, weakening the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive.

DSA: True or false?

**The DSA makes it possible to censor online**

**Yes and no.** The DSA is not designed to take content offline, except if it is illegal under existing national or EU laws. On the contrary, the DSA gives the right to users to challenge

DSA: True or false?

**content**

platforms content moderation decisions. Platforms are obliged to give detailed explanations why they block accounts or take content offline.

**It is the European Commission that decides whether to censor online contents**

**No.** Platforms are responsible for content moderation. The DSA does impose procedural obligations on platforms to properly address illegal content based on national and EU law.

Additionally, the DSA reinforces a ban on general monitoring, which means that they are not obliged to proactively monitor all posts from users for illegal content.

**Online censorship stems from political decisions**

**In theory, no.** States decide what is lawful and what is not. Some states may unduly restrict free speech. Appeals against these national laws can be lodged with the European Court of Human Rights. International treaties protect the right to freedom of expression.

**Only conservative contents are censored**

**No.** Fundamental rights in the EU do not make it possible to censor content on the basis of political affiliation. If platforms chose to remove content based on the political views expressed, such decisions could be challenged in court. Platforms have a long history of moderating content by amplifying, demoting (by shadow-banning for instance) or taking certain content offline. For instance, in December 2025, Meta is reported to have suspended accounts that were linked to abortion advice and queer content. Also pro-Palestinian accounts have faced systemic censorship on Facebook and Instagram. The DSA imposes obligations on platforms to guarantee that content moderation decisions are transparent and can be challenged in case they violate the freedom of expression. These transparency requirements also cover demands from governments for taking content offline. The DSA also gives users the right to seek out-of-court settlements with specifically established bodies.

DSA: True or false?

**The EU is going to impose its free speech rules across the world**

**No.** Platforms know how to introduce regional moderation rules. They have been doing just that because countries do not have the same rules regarding what is lawful.

**Trusted flaggers are paid by governments and will censor contents unfavourable to the government**

**No.** Platforms know how to introduce regional moderation rules. They have been doing just that because countries do not have the same rules regarding what is lawful.

**The DSA imposes an obligation to prevent “systemic risks” which may lead to censorship**

**No.** Trusted flaggers – organisations that may receive public funding – do not decide whether to remove content. The platform does. Their status only means that their flagging is processed as a matter of priority, given their expertise in detecting unlawful content such as incitement to hatred and discrimination.

**The DSA imposes an obligation to prevent “systemic risks” which may lead to censorship**

**No.** The Commission can only implement measures that are content-agnostic. The DSA obliges the largest platforms to take steps to prevent systemic risks, including threats to fundamental rights or to elections. Platforms must assess how the design of their products, including algorithmic systems, can pose risks to society and take preventive measures. Furthermore, the DSA grants research organisations and journalists the possibility to request data from large platforms to guarantee external scrutiny on how these platforms operate.

**The EU used the DSA to have the elections annulled in Romania in 2024**

**False.** The results of the first round of Romania’s 2024 presidential elections were annulled by the country’s Constitutional Court on the basis of information provided by Romania’s intelligence services regarding suspected Russian interference. The Commission has launched an investigation into TikTok to determine whether the platform has complied with its obligations under the DSA with regard to recommendation systems and targeted advertising rules.

DSA: True or false?

The investigation may result in TikTok being fined.

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