

# ***Joint Civil Society Statement on Google's Decision to Stop Serving Political Ads in Europe***

**25 September 2025**

We, the undersigned civil society organisations dedicated to protecting free and fair elections, democratic discourse, and transparency across Europe, write to articulate our deep concerns regarding Google's [recent announcement](#) that it will update its Political Content policy in September 2025. This decision comes just ahead of the entry into application of the new *Regulation on the Targeting and Transparency of Political Advertising* (TTPA) in October 2025. While Google had already announced in [November 2024](#) that it would, with limited exemptions, stop serving political advertisements in the European Union, the new announcement specifies in more detail which types of ads will be banned and which may remain permitted.

In December 2024, some of us already [voiced concerns](#) about Google's withdrawal. At that time, one of our major concerns was that this would leave Meta with a *de facto* monopoly in the online political advertising market, with potentially harmful consequences for democratic debate. With Meta also now exiting the market, that specific scenario will not materialise. However, the combined withdrawal of the two largest platforms that previously carried political ads effectively leaves the EU without any major online platform offering political advertising. This marks a significant shift in the digital public sphere.

In this context, we remind Google that under Article 34(1)(c) of the *Digital Services Act* (DSA), Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines, including Google's relevant services, have the obligation to carry out risk assessments regarding any actual or foreseeable negative effects on civic discourse and electoral processes. Under Article 35, they are required to put in place reasonable, proportionate, and effective [mitigation measures](#).

Engagement-optimising algorithms are designed to maximise user attention, which in practice means privileging emotionally charged content. In such an environment, political advertising can serve as one of the few channels through which moderate actors reach their audiences. Unless Google makes corresponding changes to its recommender systems, the new ban on political ads risks reducing the visibility of moderate voices and thereby accelerating radicalisation, to the further detriment of democratic discourse.

It is to be noted that upon reading the announcement, we do believe that the scope of the restrictions is not sufficiently clear. We are concerned that, to minimise compliance costs and the risk of fines, along with *sui generis* political ads, Google, in practice, will also block ads from civil society organisations drawing attention to societal issues or calling for action. This would severely limit the visibility

of CSOs conducting important advocacy and awareness campaigns, and would negatively impact their fundraising activities, which are essential for their survival.

It should also be noted that while Google's political ad offer was far from perfect, including shortcomings with data quality and user-unfriendly ad repositories, it provided a more desirable model than Meta's. With further restrictions on targeting options, Google could still play a constructive role in supporting pluralistic democratic debate. If Google is unwilling to reconsider the ban on political advertising, then at the very least, it should commit to transparency regarding the effects of withdrawing political advertising on public discourse and the mitigation measures it intends to introduce.

### ***In this context, we call on Google to:***

- Re-examine the possibility of serving political advertising in the EU that is not based on tracking and profiling, in a manner that is more conducive to civic discourse and electoral processes.
- Ensure that civil society organisations and other actors can continue to run legitimate civic engagement campaigns, including fundraising and issue advocacy, without arbitrary restriction.
- Disclose how its algorithmic systems affect political and civic content, including what steps have been taken to avoid systematic biases that may silence moderate voices or advantage emotionally charged, polarising content.
- Re-engage with EU institutions, civil society, and researchers to ensure that its evolving political content policies are transparent and compliant with the EU's regulatory framework, including, but not limited to, its obligations under the Digital Services Act to mitigate risks to civic discourse and electoral processes.

We welcome further dialogue with Google on these matters and urge the company to publish a clear policy statement and risk assessment outlining how it intends to support democratic discourse in the EU going forward.

### ***Sincerely,***

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| • aHang Platform, Hungary   | • European Center for Not-For-Profit Law Stichting, International          |
| • Balkan Civil Society Development Network, Europe                    | • Expert Forum, Romania  |
| • Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Bulgaria                              | • Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, Hungary                                 |
| • Civil Liberties Union for Europe, Europe                            | • Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Hungary                                    |
| • Civil Rights Defenders, Sweden                                      | • League of Human Rights, Czechia  |
| • CEE Digital Democracy Watch, Europe                                 | • Nederlands Juristen Comité voor de Mensenrechten (NJCM), The Netherlands |
| • Centre for Peace Studies, Croatia                                   | • Peace Institute, Slovenia  |
| • Coalizione Italiana per le Libertà e i Diritti civili (CILD), Italy | • Vox Public, France   |
| • Estonian Human Rights Centre, Estonia                               | • Who Targets Me, International  |