

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

**25 September 2025**

We, the undersigned civil society organisations working to safeguard free and fair elections, democratic discourse, and transparency in Europe, are writing to express serious concerns about the impact of Meta's recent decision to stop serving "political, electoral and social issue ads" in the EU ahead of the entry into application of the new *Regulation on the Targeting and Transparency of Political Advertising* (TTPA) in October 2025.

While the TTPA has a number of serious weaknesses, Meta's decision to ban "political, electoral and social issue ads" while risks creating a growing imbalance in the online public sphere. Assuming that Meta will simultaneously maintain its algorithmic systems that prioritise emotionally engaging content, a broad but inconsistently moderated ban of certain types of ads may disproportionately disadvantage moderate and non-partisan political actors, who rely on reasoned argument rather than divisive speech when publishing paid content on Meta platforms.

Under Article 34(1)(c) of the *Digital Services Act* (DSA), Meta, along with all other Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines, has the obligation to carry out risk assessments regarding any actual or foreseeable negative effects on civic discourse and electoral processes and, under Article 35, to put in place reasonable, proportionate, and effective mitigation measures. We believe that Meta's efforts to effectively and demonstrably mitigate the risks its algorithmic content recommender systems pose to civic discourse and electoral processes have so far been unsatisfactory, and that this new policy change is likely to lead to a further deterioration of the situation.

There is ample evidence that similar social media platforms that have introduced such broad bans, have consistently failed at correctly delineating and filtering "political, electoral and social issue ads". The result is that the ban legally lets the platforms off the TTPA's hook, disregarding transparency requirements and targeting limitations, while many of the ads that aren't supposed to be there anymore, continue to be published.

In addition, Meta's definition of "political, electoral, and social issue ads" is very broad, and in many countries, Meta platforms' market dominance is such that they constitute the major, or even the only, online space where moderate political actors and civil society organisations can reach people. That is why the new restrictions will severely limit those organisations' visibility and could negatively impact their fundraising activities, which are essential for their survival.

It is important to note that we are not calling for the continuation of hyper-personalised advertising, which is currently at the core of Meta's business model. Meta has argued that the TTPA makes it impossible to continue offering political advertising in the EU, claiming that restrictions on targeting undermine products advertisers rely on and prevent users from seeing ads it considers relevant. We believe this argument is fundamentally flawed. Hyper-personalised advertising has no place in a society striving to maintain democratic discourse.

***In this context, we call on Meta 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 conduct legitimate civic engagement campaigns, including fundraising and issue advocacy, without arbitrary restriction.
- Disclose how its engagement-based ranking 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 obligation under the Digital Services Act to mitigate risks to civic discourse and electoral processes.

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