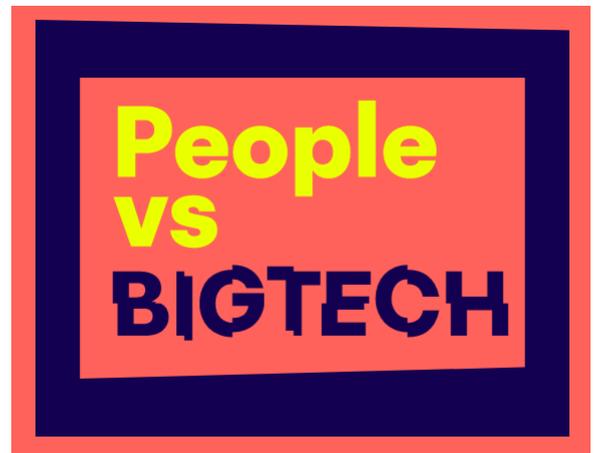


DSA Reactive: European Parliament stands up to Big Tech – votes to restrict abusive business model

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Civil society network People vs Big Tech welcomes European Parliament's moves to curtail invasive advertising and block loopholes that would worsen vulnerability to disinformation attacks.



Brussels, 20 January – A coalition of dozens of civil society groups across Europe have welcomed growing momentum against Big Tech's surveillance advertising model after MEPs voted to outlaw the most invasive practices of targeted advertising.

While the European Parliament missed a historic opportunity to fully outlaw targeted ads based on people's personal data, critical steps were yesterday taken to curtail the system which allows Big Tech companies to profit off abusive collection and use of their users' data.

In a full vote of the European Parliament in Strasbourg yesterday evening, announced this morning, MEPs backed amendments to Article 24 of the Digital Services Act that will see tougher restrictions on how users' data can be used in targeted advertising, including a ban on use of sensitive data for targeted ads and a requirement that platforms must provide continued fair access to users who turn targeted ads off.

The European Parliament's final text comes after months of hard campaigning from civil society groups and in the face of unprecedented lobbying from Silicon Valley firms. Other wins included defeat of a broad trade secrets exemption late last year, which would have undermined crucial data access and scrutiny provisions in the DSA, as well as widened access to platform data for third-party researchers including civil society.

The vote comes as US Members of Congress separately proposed legislation to ban surveillance advertising in the US, the latest signal of growing global appetite among lawmakers to take a stand against Big Tech's abusive business model.

Another welcome development in Europe was the voting down of an amendment to Article 12 that would have effectively mandated the continued algorithmic promotion of content from any outlet calling itself media, even if the content is disinformation.

Members of People vs Big Tech, a network of over 100 civil society groups across Europe working to challenge the power of Big Tech, welcomed the outcome of the vote and called on EU leaders to ensure the changes are signed into law.

Flora Rebello Arduini, a Campaign Director for SumOfUs, said: "Today the European Parliament has drawn a line in the sand and set a new precedent for how we regulate Big Tech. The message is clear: abusive data practices and harmful loopholes that fuel the spread of disinformation will not be tolerated. Now it's up to EU leaders to follow on this critical path and sign these amendments into law."

Xavier Brandao, co-founder of #jesuislà : "EU citizens are vulnerable online, they need protection from the law. Every day, we fight online hate and disinformation with counterspeech, and too often, we feel abandoned. Today, the EU Parliament showed it was hearing us. This is a historic milestone. We hope to see big changes soon in the digital landscape."

Naomi Hirst, Senior Campaigner, Global Witness: "MEPs have voted to protect citizens' rights and wishes by voting to restrict the invasive practice of surveillance advertising, signaling the beginning of the end for Big Tech's toxic business model. As negotiations progress, we urge legislators to hold firm and deliver on today's promise."

Rafal Pankowski, a co-founder of the ‘NEVER AGAIN’ Association: “It is high time to stop the explosion of hate speech online and the European Union must act to defend the victims of hate speech and hate crimes, not the perpetrators.”

Alice Stollmeyer, Executive Director of Defend Democracy: “We thank the European Parliament for standing up for democracy. EU leaders should now adopt and implement the law asap, because shared reality, democracy and even security remain at risk until they do. We urge democracies to team up and disrupt polarisation as a business model for tech platforms – and as a vector for hybrid warfare.”

Nathalie Maréchal, Senior Policy & Partnerships Manager at Ranking Digital Rights: “This is a huge victory for democracy and human rights. The DSA is a pivotal opportunity to build on the GDPR to protect privacy and all fundamental rights, not only in Europe but around the world. I hope policymakers in Washington in particular follow Brussels’ example and seize this chance to finally address the root cause of information disorder, the surveillance advertising business model that enables all manners of malicious influence campaigns to wreak havoc on our communities and societies.”

Omri Preiss, Managing Director, Alliance4Europe: "Members of the European Parliament have taken a historic step. This was a vote against manipulation and abuse, and in favour of fairness and inclusivity, and it is now up to the governments in the Council to do their job and deliver."

Eva Simon, senior advocacy officer at Civil Liberties Union For Europe, said: "Europe has finally spoken up to stop Big Tech from using surveillance advertising. This vote means that our digital future is built on the fundamental rights and values that will ensure that the internet is a safe, predictable and trusted environment where freedom of expression and privacy are both respected and protected."

Claudia Prettnner, Legal and Policy Adviser at Amnesty Tech, said: “Amnesty International has long been highlighting the dangers of surveillance advertising, and today’s vote represents a significant step towards seriously protecting people’s rights. It is encouraging that the amendments outlaw the most invasive practices, including the targeting of children and the use of our most sensitive data. However, there remains more work to be done to fully ban the intrusive practice of surveillance advertising. With this vote, MEPs are helping us move towards an online environment that better respects our rights to privacy, freedom of expression and non-discrimination. Further meaningful regulation of Big Tech platforms remains crucial to forcing companies – such as Google and Facebook – to address the human rights harms created by their surveillance-based business model.”

Parliament’s overall position is due to be rubber-stamped in a final vote later today. The next round of negotiations, the so-called trilogues, is expected to start imminently, and the final package agreed as early as April. Civil society groups from the People vs Big Tech network will be demanding greater access to justice for victims of online abuse under Article 17 of the Act.

The DSA currently leaves victims of digital violence and abuse with no option to appeal if their notifications or request for remedy are denied by the platforms. Platforms’ content moderation practices already harm marginalised groups more. A lack of appeal options would have a silencing effect on large numbers of platform users such as women and minorities.

Josephine Ballon, Head of Legal of HateAid: “Every second woman is afraid to express their opinion freely online. With this vote, the European Parliament leaves millions of users defenseless against hate speech and disinformation - with devastating consequences especially for women and minority groups. HateAid, the first counseling center for victims of online violence in Germany, is calling on the Council to uphold their position concerning equal access to mechanisms laid out in Article 17 and Article 18 in the Trilogues.”

<https://peoplesbig.tech/press/dsa-reactive-european-parliament-stands-up-to-big-tech-votes-to-restrict-abusive-business-model>