



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on June 12, 2023

EU Threatens Twitter for Leaving Disinformation Pact; Twitter to Publish Censorship Requests

In a press briefing on June 5, European Commission Vice President for Values and Transparency Věra Jourová [warned](#) that Brussels will seize every chance to “vigorously” monitor Twitter’s activity and compliance with EU law, after the social media outlet decided to dismiss the “anti-disinformation” measures proposed by the EU.

Slamming Twitter, Jourová said:

We believe this is a mistake by Twitter. [It] has chosen the hard way, they chose confrontation. This was noticed very much in the commission. I know the code is voluntary. But make no mistake: by leaving the code, Twitter attracted a lot of attention and its actions and compliance with EU law will be scrutinized vigorously and urgently.



European Commission
Věra Jourová

Jourová’s meeting took place with the representatives of 44 companies and organizations, including most of the big names in Silicon Valley, such as Google, Microsoft, Meta, and TikTok, all of which have implemented the EU’s [Code of Practice on Disinformation](#) to join Brussels in its supposed attempt to combat harmful and intentionally misleading content on social media.

The commissioner pointed out:

We need [social media companies] to have sufficient capacities in all member states and all languages, especially the Central and Eastern European countries, [which] are under permanent attack from especially Russian disinformation sources, and we need the fact-checking to be done properly.

During the meeting, Jourová also urged her audience to [step up](#) their fact-checking actions to tackle external disinformation, and to adopt measures to limit the use of artificial intelligence (AI) when creating and distributing disinformation. For instance, she suggested that companies could unveil systems that would classify AI-generated text and graphics as such.

Notably, Twitter did not attend the meeting. The company recently [pulled out](#) from the code, as reported by *The New American*.

In response, the European Commission issued a cautionary message to Twitter almost instantly.



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“You can run but you can’t hide,” Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton tweeted, elaborating that such “voluntary” measures under the code would become compulsory legal commitments according to the new EU Digital Services Act (DSA) beginning in late August.

Alluding to the impending DSA, Jourová echoed Breton’s views, claiming that the code is not only the “right thing to do,” but also meant to help companies gear up for the DSA, under which most of these obligations would be legally mandatory.

“If [Twitter] wants to operate and make money on [the] European market, they have to comply with the Digital Services Act,” the commissioner said, pledging rigorous implementation, particularly in the cases of “illegal content.”

Jourová took another hit at current Twitter CEO Elon Musk, as the latter has been at loggerheads with Brussels ever since he assumed control over the platform last year.

“I also want to come back and appreciate the cooperation with the former people working in Twitter,” the commissioner said, referencing previous Twitter management’s attempts at curtailing content online. With regard to Musk’s ascendancy to the platform’s leadership, Jourová admitted that “Twitter had very knowledgeable and determined people, who understood that there must be much-increased responsibility from the side of platforms like Twitter.”

Perhaps even more ominous-sounding were Jourová’s comments about what could happen if the EU did not regard Twitter’s efforts as sufficiently complying with the DSA requirements. “In September this year, Twitter will get a sanction of 6 percent of [its] annual turnover,” she said. However, she then added, “Forget it, I didn’t say that, because of course, I cannot predict [it].”

Previously Musk declared that Twitter would publish government censorship requests, including calls for deleting tweets or banning accounts based on claims of alleged disinformation, according to a June 4 report by the German daily [Exxpress](#).

Some observers contended that Musk’s move appeared to be a direct retaliation to Brussels’ growing propensity in controlling online content, such as persuading most social media bigwigs to join its 2022 [code](#).

“We’re going to publish all government censorship requests and whether or not we complied with them,” Musk wrote.

He elaborated that all the other major social media companies — including Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram — that comply with the EU’s regulatory framework under the Code of Practice regularly participate in censorship on behalf of governments. “To the best of my knowledge, [Twitter] does the least amount of censorship,” he stated.

Musk’s latest move is also supposedly to address recent [controversy](#) surrounding his company, after revelations that under his leadership, Twitter’s compliance rate with governments’ removal requests has risen up to 98 percent, portraying a completely disparate picture of the self-proclaimed “free-speech absolutist.”

In an [interview](#) with CNN regarding his decisions to give in to government censorship demands, Musk justified his policy by saying that Twitter had no choice but to comply with most requests because of local laws. “By ‘free speech,’ I simply mean that which matches the law,” he said. “I am against censorship that goes far beyond the law.”

According to Twitter’s last [transparency report](#) from before Musk assumed power, the platform



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received around 47,600 removal requests in the last six months of 2021, and complied in 51.2 percent of these cases.

The report indicated that these requests hailed from 44 countries in total, with 97 percent of the total global volume hailing from merely five countries (in decreasing order): Japan, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, and India.

Therefore, Musk's latest move has been perceived as his way of showcasing Twitter's purported commitment to free speech by individually publishing all requests and detailing whether Twitter complied, and the reasons why.

Meanwhile, Spain's stance on the EU's current proposed Chat Control regulation has been lambasted for being even harsher than the European Commission's, as Madrid has been rallying for a total EU-wide blockage on end-to-end encryption technology used by popular messaging apps, based on a leaked document published by [Wired](#).

The so-called Child Sexual Abuse Regulation (CSAR), labeled [Chat Control](#) by critics, would compel service providers to monitor the private messages of Europeans, both texts and pictures, supposedly to crack down on the distribution of illicit content related to child sexual exploitation material (CSEM). Under the regulation, messages and media, including audio and video files that arouse the suspicion of the automated scanning system, would have to be flagged and sent to a central database for further investigation.

Critics (including human-rights NGOs and watchdogs dealing with digital freedom) lashed out at the commission's proposal, castigating Chat Control as a blatant breach of privacy rights, raising grave questions about the efficacy of the proposal, and even pointing out the ambiguous support among stakeholders such as child protection agencies and many of Europe's [teenagers](#).



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