



VICE PRESIDENT VĚRA JOUROVÁ

**VIDEO MESSAGE FOR ONLINE POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING: THE DUTCH
CODE OF CONDUCT AND LESSONS FOR EUROPE**

DATE AND TIME: 24 JUNE 2021

Speaking points

- Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,
- As I am sorry I am not able to join you today directly. I would like to especially thank our colleagues from the Netherlands and the international institute for democracy and electoral assistance for organizing this event to discuss a very important issue of political campaigning in the digital age.
- To me, this comes at a very good moment, as I am planning to propose a legislation on online political advertising later this year. I will tell you more about it in a moment, but let me first take a step back to argue why I think we need to act on this front.
- Digital revolution has offered great possibilities to all of us. More than ever, the pandemic has showed the power of digital technologies to connect us.
- This revolution also reached the scene of political campaigning. Politicians are on social media and political parties spend increasing amount of funding for online campaigns.

- It used to be a promised land for a democratic revival. Social media were supposed to allow candidates to reach more people, talk directly to voters, without the filter of traditional media and give a big boost to challengers who often have smaller means than the incumbent.
- Yet, these days, it is clear that this revolution also has a darker side. The digitalisation, especially in the Covid context, is a great accelerator of disinformation tools and manipulative techniques. We are witnessing unprecedented amplification mixed with the personalisation, and therefore fragmentation, of content. We saw the same methods used in elections before.
- Our work in the Commission focuses on maximising benefits and reducing risks stemming from this digital revolution.
- And this is why we are shaping new digital rules with ground-breaking legislation, like Digital services Act, Digital Market Act or an AI act. But we also are going beyond legislation with the European Democracy Action Plan.

- This is more than just update of the legislation. With all this we are aiming to create a new digital soul of Europe. We want Europe to be home to human-centred technologies where people can have high degree of trust to innovation.
- In the plan we committed to measures to ensure free and fair elections; to protect media freedom and media pluralism; and to fight disinformation.
- This plan is very comprehensive and takes a whole-of-society approach, because in the end it is about empowering the citizens and the voters.
- Today, I will focus only on one of its elements, namely on election pillar. As announced in this plan I will propose legislation on the transparency of sponsored content in a political context.
- People must know why they are seeing an ad, who paid for it, how much, what micro-targeting criteria were used.
- I don't want elections to be a competition of dirty methods. We saw enough with the Cambridge Analytica scandal or the Brexit referendum.

- Promoting political ideas is not the same as promoting products.
- Nearly four in ten Europeans state in a recent Eurobarometer survey that they have been exposed to content where they could not easily determine whether it was a political advertisement or not. This must end.
- Many participants of our public consultations on the new legislation have urged us to be ambitious, cover a wide range of actors and dissemination tools, especially for paid content.
- This is exactly what I aim to do. I also want to pay particular attention to microtargeting as there is a lot of concerns about use of these techniques and their impact on democratic debate and elections.
- We are also examining options for self-regulatory commitments, in the areas where we are lacking the competence.
- Here we are inspired by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior initiative to mitigate risks ahead of the elections by establishing a code of conduct on online political advertising.

- It would not be totally new in the European context as you might already know about the Code of Practice on Disinformation or Code of Conduct on hate speech which are in place for few years already.
- Both Codes provided a structured framework for cooperation, between the private and public sector as well as civil society.
- This is why we decided to launch the revision of the Code of Disinformation. We recently published our guidelines about it and I hope in autumn we can see the results of our discussions with platforms and other players that are involved in it.
- And we'll continue to facilitate exchange among Member States and suggest strengthening the cooperation of our established Elections' network of national experts to work better together on elections resilience.
- To conclude, we are responding to the challenge in the European way, in full respect of our fundamental principles and values as set out in the Treaties.

- Although the Commission is ready to play its part, democracy belongs to all of us and as such, it can only be lived and defended by all of us.
- I count on the EU governments to fully support the Democracy Action Plan, share their ideas and experiences.
- Thank you very much.