

Joint Civil Society Statement: Google's Decision to Stop Serving Political Ads in Europe Will Restrict Political Discourse Online

11 December 2024

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, issue this statement in light of the recent [decision](#) by Google to stop serving political advertising in the EU ahead of the entry into application of the new **Regulation on the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising (TTPA)** in October 2025. We are concerned by this decision as this will significantly restrict the access of citizens to diverse political discourse online with consequences on election integrity, freedom of information and freedom of expression.

Google's decision will restrict political discourse online

Google took the decision to leave the EU market for political ads alleging 'operational challenges' and 'legal uncertainty', specifically on account of the definition of political ads being too broad and key technical guidance being issued too close to the deadline for compliance.

The company claims that identifying political ads would be too difficult at scale. In practice, Google stopping political ads likely means that the company will **not allow advertisers to pay for their political content to be distributed**. However, Google will still have to check if any ad still contains political content - arguably leaving them with the same identification task as before. Yet, instead of identifying political ads to make them easily understandable for consumers, **Google would identify them to remove them**.

This is particularly **bad for smaller, outsider political campaigns** - while favouring established parties and political groups -, **for civil society organisations and for voters**, who will see further restrictions to their ability to obtain political information and engage in political discourse online.

Improving the definition of political ads: a shared responsibility

Civil society has stressed on many occasions throughout the legislative process and initial implementation (for example [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) that the **definition of 'political ads' should be further clarified** to differentiate between political ads and not-paid-for political content.

Creating the right conditions for online political advertising is a responsibility that should be shared between all stakeholders, including policymakers and service providers. While many **civil society organisations continue to engage** with businesses and policymakers to

operationalise and improve the definition and other shortcomings of the regulation, some companies choose to disengage.

Conclusions and recommendations

Google is not the only company that decided not to allow political ads on their platforms (e.g., TikTok and LinkedIn), but doing so while the implementation is still ongoing **sets a precedent** signaling that withdrawing from the market equals compliance. **Google could have [taken many other steps short of withdrawing](#)**, such as signalling that the deadline for complying was too tight and engaging further on the delegated acts.

For these reasons we call on Google to **reconsider their decision by continuing their engagement on the TTPA** and **provide more information on their operational challenges** to help draft better regulation. **We also call on the European Commission to proceed with swift implementation** to fill in the regulatory gaps left open in the Regulation, while allowing flexibility around timing. In particular, the Commission should **clarify the interpretation** of the political ads definition in the delegated acts and investigate whether demoting political content should be regarded as compliance.

Given the growing trend from platforms to take politics out of their services, we also encourage the Commission to conduct an **assessment** on corporate decisions to withdraw the provisions of services that are crucial to ensure functioning online [infrastructure](#) for civic discourse - and the impact they have on fundamental rights within the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) such as election integrity, freedom of information and freedom of expression.

Signed,

Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

Citizens Network Watchdog Poland

Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties)

European Center for Non-For-Profit Law (ECNL)

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Foundation for Poland

Global Witness

Hungarian Civil Liberties Union

Hungarian Helsinki Committee

Irídia - Center for the Defense of Human Rights

League of Human Rights

Political Accountability Foundation

StraLi

Unhack Democracy

Who Targets Me

Xnet, Institute for Democratic Digitalisation