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Press release | 17.04.2019

Facebook’s new rules will hurt democratic debate

Facebook/European elections

As of this week, Facebook put in place new rules for political advertisement in all EU Member States. Effectively, political advertisements will be only allowed in the country where an individual or organisation is based. The rules create an unprecedented barrier for European political organizations, where the only way to comply with the policy would be to create entities and employ staff in all EU countries.

Reinhard Bütikofer, President of the European Green Party and Greens/EFA MEP in the European Parliament will take the floor in the plenary today to draw attention to the new rules and to ask the President of the European Parliament to address this issue:

"That Facebook decides, from a board room in the United States, how the European Union can function as a democracy is unacceptable.

"It is not normal that a private company imposes rules on democratic institutions and organisations such as the European Parliament or European Parties that have the legitimate ground to advertise throughout the European Union. With these rules Facebook is de facto putting barriers in place that will harm the European discourse around a European democracy. Facebook should not be able to impose their own limitations for elections. These regulations should be done by democratic institutions."

Philippe Lamberts, President of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament, added:

"Facebook is selling the new rules as an improvement for transparency on the platform. But these rules contribute to more opacity. Facebook recommended to both European parties and the groups in the European Parliament to use agencies to organise the advertisement. This doesn't make the use of public money more transparent. In addition, big influencers from inside and outside the European Union who want to have an impact on the European elections, can still pay agencies and continue their aggressive advertisement.

"The new rules will be easily bypassed by bigger budgets and harder for smaller players. The new rules have no negative effect on nationalist parties. This means that Facebook is not a level playing field for European political actors. In essence, Facebook is favouring nationalists and multinationals by impeding the communication of transnational organizations. "

Background

With the new rules, users may only advertise in a country if they successfully through Facebook's authorization process. Users can only advertise if they are physically based in the country and can present a residency card or ID card issued by the country and if they have a bank account/credit card registered in that country that will be linked to the advertisement. This means that international organisations will be only allowed to advertise in the country they are based in. If they want to advertise in other countries, they need representatives in all countries. This is a ‘new reality’ that Facebook is implementing means that these rules will not only apply to the election period, but will remain after the elections as well. That's why political groups in the European Parliament are affected as well as political European parties and other multinational Institutions.

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