

Stéphanie Yon-Courtin
Députée au Parlement européen

Henna Virkkunen
Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy

Brussels, on 23 October 2026

Subject: The role of very large online platforms in the recent violence in several Member States. Urgent request for action under the Digital Services Act

Dear Executive Vice-President,

In October, protest movements have taken place in parallel in several Member States, including France, Italy and Belgium.

In France, on 17 October, several cities were hit by rioting and looting on an unprecedented scale, resulting in more than 2,000 arrests. In Italy, clashes with law enforcement took place in Turin, Bologna and Rome, and Milan suffered significant damage on the same day. The situation remains volatile, and similar escalations could occur elsewhere in the Union in the coming days.

These events have raised serious questions about the role that social media may have played, whether through calls to gather, the live streaming of incidents or the circulation of images through recommender systems, as well as about any revenue such content may have generated. These questions require clear, fact-based answers, and they require them now.

When we adopted the Digital Services Act in 2022, the aim was precisely to make platforms accountable for the risks their services create for our societies. The Digital Services Act gives the European Commission the means to act, and we believe it must do so urgently, on three fronts.

The first is to establish the facts.

Today, no one can say how many people saw the calls to loot, how much of that reach was driven by recommender systems, or how much the platforms earned from it. We urge the European Commission to make use of its investigative powers under Article 67 of the Digital Services Act and send requests for information to the very large online platforms (VLOPs) concerned without delay, covering, in all the Member States affected, the reach of illegal riot-related content, the role of algorithmic amplification, removal times, notifications to law enforcement under Article 18 of the Digital Services Act, and the advertising revenue generated.

These requests could be complemented by access to data and explanations of how recommender systems function, under Article 40(1) and (3) of the Digital Services Act.

On that basis, the European Commission must assess whether these platforms met their obligations to identify and mitigate risks to public security under Articles 34 and 35 of the Digital Services Act, and open proceedings under Article 66 where they did not.

The second is to be ready for the next crisis.

The crisis response mechanism under Article 36 of the Digital Services Act has never been used, and its procedure is too slow for events that unfold within hours. We ask the Commission to clarify whether violence of this kind, affecting several Member States, can constitute a crisis within the meaning of Article 36(2), and to agree with the European Board for Digital Services on a way to activate it within 48 hours.

In the same spirit, we call on the Commission to extend the crisis protocol under Article 48 of the Digital Services Act, now being prepared as part of the European Democracy Shield, to domestic public-order crises. With full regard for freedom of expression, such a protocol should include targeted and proportionate measures, such as the temporary suspension of algorithmic recommendation of illegal riot-related content, the suspension of live-streaming and real-time location features in the areas concerned, and the demonetisation of such content.

As a last resort, the Digital Services Act also allows the temporary restriction of access to a service, within a strict framework: under Article 51(3), and Article 82 for very large online platforms, such a restriction may only be ordered by a judicial authority, once all other powers have been exhausted, where an infringement persists and causes serious harm involving a criminal offence that threatens the life or safety of persons, and only for a limited period.

The third is to protect minors, who appear to have been strongly represented among those arrested and who are the most exposed to this kind of contagion. We call on the Commission to examine how its guidelines on Article 28 could specify the safeguards expected of platforms with regard to minors' accounts in crisis situations.

Order must be restored offline and online alike. The Digital Services Act was designed precisely for situations of this kind: the Union must now make full use of it. There is no time to lose.

Thank you for your attention to this request.
We remain at your disposal to discuss it further.

Stéphanie Yon-Courtin
Member of the European Parliament

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