

## Save social networks as a democratic force

Everyone shall have the right **freely** to **express** and **disseminate** his opinions in speech, writing and pictures and to **inform** himself without **hindrance** from generally accessible sources. The freedom of the press and the freedom of reporting by radio and film are **guaranteed**.

— Grundgesetz (Germany), Article 5 Para. 1 S. 1 and 2

### **The fundamental right to freedom of opinion and information, freedom of the press and broadcasting is at risk - and with it our democracy.**

In the digital space, a few predominantly US and Chinese tech companies<sup>1</sup> control information and public debate. Their platforms do not allow unrestricted access, as users have to **disclose their most personal data** in order to access them. At the same time, **algorithms** intransparently filter what users get to see and what they don't - algorithms that only follow the laws of the attention economy, freed from the common good and journalistic quality standards. With a flood of **hate, malice, agitation and disinformation**, a few monopoly platforms are destroying our democracies and endangering everyone<sup>2</sup>.

Meanwhile, independent services are increasingly losing their audience and their **financial basis** through their own **distribution channels**: journalism is becoming a loss-making business because big tech companies are capturing the majority of advertising revenue. Journalists and media companies have to subordinate themselves and their content to the platforms and their algorithms. Individual creatives and other stakeholders are also becoming increasingly dependent.

The rapid introduction of **generative AI**<sup>3</sup> is accelerating this process. Users have little reason to visit the websites of an original source because AI-supported search engines summarise the content - on the basis of non-transparent technical processes that change the tenor or statements, often in breach of copyright. These AI services are likely to cement the supremacy of the platform companies and further marginalise journalistic media before they die out.

**The free internet is being abolished - it has been taken over by the big tech monopolies.** The growing dominance of platform companies for information and exchange is leading to a concentration of opinion power that is jeopardising our democracy.

**But the internet belongs to all of us,  
we must free it from the dominance of the monopolies:**

The signatories see an urgent need for action for everyone, for companies, associations, social institutions and politics at national and European level. Democracy-enhancing offerings must be expanded, and platform monopolies that are harmful to democracy should lose their massive privileges immediately.

# Reclaim the internet, strengthen the alternatives!

Our society needs other platforms for social networking, exchange and debate than those provided by Chinese and US monopolistic corporations. Over the past 15 years, such alternative networks and services have emerged (for example Mastodon or Friendica in Fediverse<sup>4</sup>). They can strengthen our democracy because they promote social exchange and debate on the basis of **open and recognised standards**<sup>5</sup> in **decentralised structures**. Politics and society must strengthen and expand these services:

- 1 **We strengthen alternatives with good content** Content financed with public funds must also be fully available at least on those platforms, which are based on open and recognised standards and protocols. Politicians, public authorities, universities, research institutions, libraries and public broadcasters are obliged to make all content available on these platforms without exception. They must open up their own services, such as media libraries, to these platforms via protocols.
- 2 **We strengthen alternatives structurally** Public institutions (politics, authorities, universities, libraries, public broadcasters and others) currently produce exclusive content for Instagram, TikTok and other monopolistic platforms at great expense. In future, they will be obliged to invest at least the same financial and structural effort in the production of content and its distribution for these open digital platforms. Supervisory bodies will examine at regular intervals whether the proportion of expenditure on open platforms can be increased without jeopardising the required reach of the services.
- 3 **We invest in the development and usability of alternatives** The federal and state governments are obliged to massively expand their investments in the development and strengthening of these open platforms and protocols as well as services based on them. In particular, the aim is to improve their usability, enable growth through sufficient technical infrastructure and increase market penetration through marketing. In addition, the federal and state governments are creating citizens' committees to define and monitor the requirements for such democracy-enhancing offerings.
- 4 **We enable services that benefit from a commitment to the common good** A legal framework will be created for operators of democracy-enhancing platforms and services in which they can operate on a non-profit basis<sup>6</sup>.
- 5 **We improve media education** Educational institutions, especially schools and providers of media literacy programmes, are obliged to primarily teach the use of open and democracy-enhancing platforms and networks. At the same time, the use of hardware and services offered by monopolistic platforms in educational institutions will be restricted with the aim of avoiding them altogether wherever possible. In addition, teaching and learning content from the state education system is to be made available on open platforms, provided that the authors have granted the necessary rights.

# Enabling open dialogue, ensuring freedom of expression!

In order to strengthen our democracy, the monopolistic platforms should also enable fair, non-discriminatory exchange for all. A wide range of instruments of competition, tax and copyright law can help to achieve this:

**6** **We create diversity and transparency** Upper market share limits are introduced for large platforms, above which parts of the company must be sold or content and distribution channels must be separated. A digital tax will be levied on tech giants<sup>7</sup> to finance an information and discussion infrastructure that strengthens democracy as well as quality journalism.

**7** **We open up platforms** Large platforms must introduce open standards and interoperability between services<sup>8</sup> so that users can utilise content regardless of the manufacturer and do not lose their own content when switching services. Such a change of service must also be facilitated by complete download options for own content.

**8** **We enable visibility** Today, monopolistic platforms penalise links that refer to content outside of these platforms, such as own websites, for example through lower reach or less visibility. In future, such outlinks must no longer lead to a disadvantage in the distribution of content so that users can link to content outside the platforms without disadvantages. Large platforms must transparently disclose their algorithms for verification purposes.

**9** **We give communities a real voice** Independent supervisory bodies must monitor compliance with the above measures with the aim of curbing monopoly positions, criminal statements and targeted disinformation and election manipulation. The platforms must employ easily accessible contact persons via several channels who act quickly in the event of account blocking, hate speech or defamation.

**10** **Anyone who earns money with content must take responsibility** To this day, platforms are even allowed to monetise criminal content (racism, discrimination, Holocaust denial, etc.). The liability privilege for particularly large platforms<sup>9</sup> must be scrutinised. Just as media groups are responsible for content under press law, platforms must assume responsibility and liability for their content.

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[See all signatories](#)  
[and sign yourself!](#)

<sup>1</sup> such as Meta (with Facebook, Instagram or WhatsApp), X (formerly Twitter), Microsoft (LinkedIn), ByteDance (TikTok) or the Swedish Spotify.

<sup>2</sup> increasing dependency, false body images, the spread of hatred and hate speech and the intensification of social polarisation

<sup>3</sup> such as Chat-GPT, Perplexity AI, Microsoft AI or Google Gemini, Dall-E2, Llama-3 or others

<sup>4</sup> on the Fediverse and its various services: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fediverse>

<sup>5</sup> Among other protocols, the W3C has recognised the 'ActivityPub' protocol for online social interaction, which enables networking and exchange in a decentralised structure. Offerings such as Mastodon, Friendica and Peertube are based on this protocol.

<sup>6</sup> Mastodon lost its non-profit status in Germany in 2024 and founded a non-profit organisation in the USA.

<sup>7</sup> based on the French model

<sup>8</sup> such as RSS, CardDAV, ActivityPub, JSON etc.

<sup>9</sup> In the USA, a regulation was laid down in 1996 in the Communications Act of 1934 under 'Section 230', which, as the 'Communications Decency Act', generally provides immunity for online computer services with regard to third-party content generated by their users. This rule should no longer apply to 'very large platforms and search engines' under the European Union's Digital Services Act.