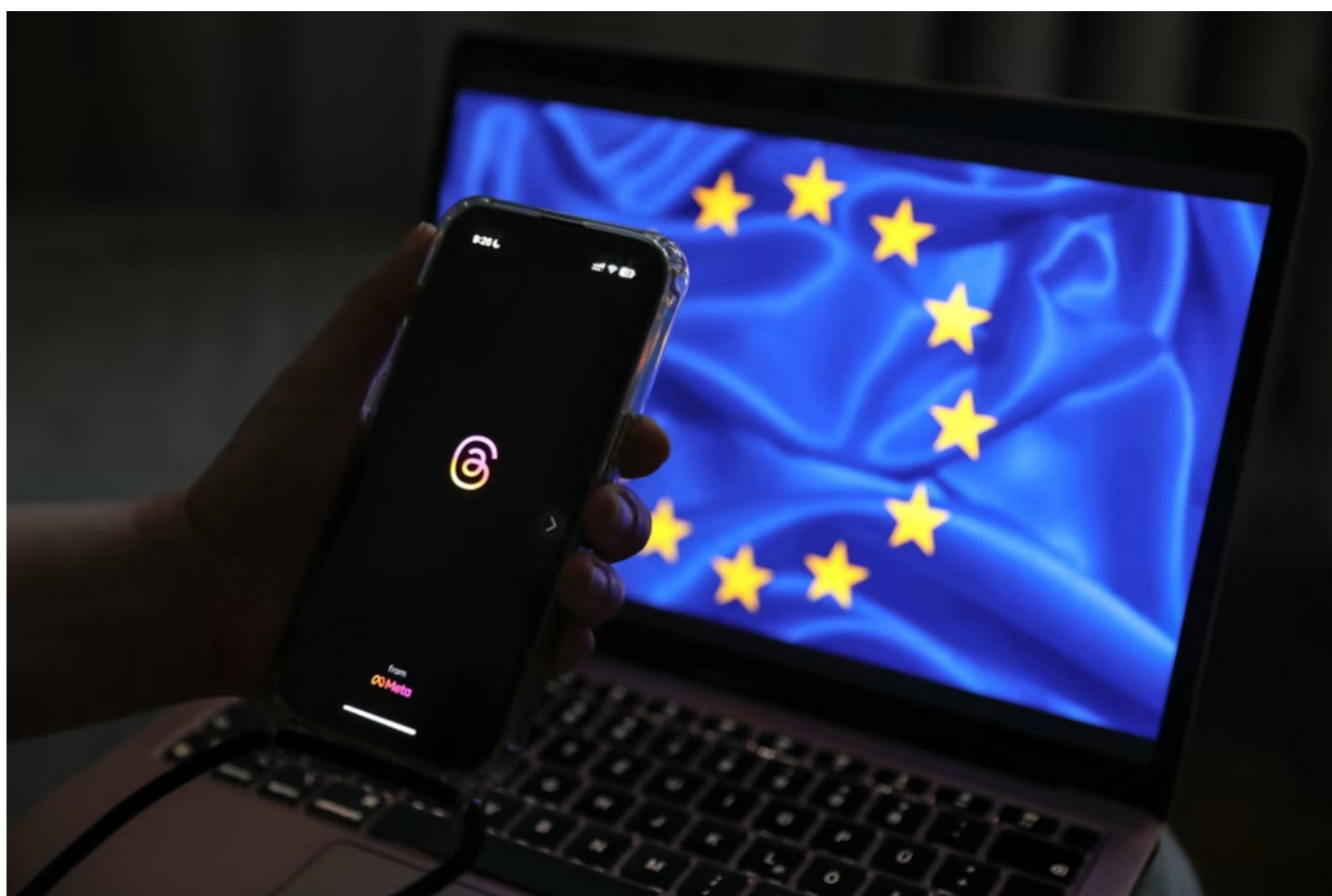


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Now the digital giants must seriously rein in hate speech and harmful content online: "These are ground-breaking rules"

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The EU's new rules have caused Meta to postpone the launch of Twitter rival Threads in Europe. Image: Michael Kuenne/PRESSCOV/Shutterstock/All Over Press

Mette Nordström
European correspondent

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Now there will be new measures to remove online hate, misinformation and other harmful content from the major online platforms. The EU is being praised for its new rules, but the vague definitions could be a problem.

"In Europe, the bird flies according to our rules". EU Commissioner Thierry Breton's tweet from last year gave a taste of what it will be like for social media. It was also a response to Elon Musk's own tweet when he had taken over Twitter and wrote that the bird was now free.

Since then, the characteristic blue bird of the Twitter logo has been transformed into the X that the platform is now called. And X is one of many companies that must now comply with the EU's [digital services](#) law DSA.

- These are ground-breaking rules, says Sally Broughton Micova from the University of East Anglia, but she points out at the same time that we probably won't see any big immediate changes.

What is starting, however, is a process towards a safer internet.

- The very large online platforms that have been designated must make their first risk assessments and send them to the Commission, she states about the initial steps.



Sally Broughton Micova is associate professor at the University of East Anglia and also works for the Brussels-based think tank CERRE.

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A total of 19 online platforms are affected

When the EU's digital law package DSA was launched last year, it was described as the most comprehensive rules to date for content on Facebook, Tiktok, Twitter, Google and YouTube, among others.

As of Friday, August 25, [19 major platforms](#) must comply with the rules, and they have been selected because they all have more than 45 million users, which is equivalent to 10 percent of the EU's population.

The digital giants must ensure that European users are not exposed to hate speech and various forms of harmful content. This also applies to tailored advertising for vulnerable groups, such as children.

If the online platforms do not comply with the rules, they are threatened with fines of up to 6 percent of the company's global revenue or even a ban from the territory of the EU.



We probably won't see anything revolutionary in the next few months.

Sally Broughton Micova, University of East Anglia

- I consider it a pilot project because it is completely new rules, says Andrea Calef who, together with Sally Broughton Micova, recently [published a report](#) for the think tank CERRE (Centre on Regulation in Europe) about the new legal package.

There are still many concepts to work on, they both note.

Because the comprehensive package of laws has very broad definitions, and this may also mean that one should, among other things, clarify what is acceptable content in different European countries.

- Therefore, we probably won't see anything revolutionary in the next few months, says Broughton Micova, because you have to set the benchmarks for what might be a failure in what you're trying to prevent.



A world with the internet as a place where people's rights are respected

Alia Al Ghussain, AmnestyTech

The role of algorithms in incitement to violence

One of the world's largest human rights organizations also praises the new rules.

- They provide a good basis for building a world with the internet as a place where people's rights are respected, says Alia Al Ghussain who works with digital issues at AmnestyTech in London.

She especially appreciates the fact that the companies concerned must make annual risk assessments, which, among other things, concern the algorithms. The network's algorithms play a big role in the dangers people are exposed to, she points out.

- They work so that any content that is inciting or that encourages violence is picked up and amplified on the platforms.

Al Ghussein takes as an example the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya in Myanmar in 2017, which [was preceded by massive smearing](#) of the ethnic group on Facebook, enhanced by algorithms.

From Amnesty's side, it is now hoped that the DSA legal package will not remain a paper tiger, but that it will have sufficient force.

- If in the coming months and years we see that the platforms do not submit their audits and risk assessments, how will the EU then react, asks Al Ghussain.



Alia Al Ghussain is a researcher at AmnestyTech, where they work for the protection of human rights in technology.
Photo: Fotis Filippou

Follow the rules or get banned?

Several digital giants have already taken steps to start limiting the harmful content.

It is partly about users being able to report content that should be removed, but also about appointing monitoring teams.

The platform X - formerly Twitter - is among those that have been criticized for allowing harmful content for some time, and it is unclear how X intends to comply with EU rules.

- If you don't do it, the commission has tools and there will be penalties, Broughton Micova points out

Companies need to be profitable and also protect their reputation to get advertising revenue, Calef points out.

- It would be the harshest punishment to be excluded from the EU market, and a big disadvantage.



Andrea Calef from the University of East Anglia believes that the designated companies cannot afford to be thrown out of the EU market.

Image: CERRE

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Foreign

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