

Report on the Youth Policy Dialogue with Henna Virkkunen, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for Technological Sovereignty, Security and Democracy

Title of Youth Policy Dialogue: *Navigating the Online World: Voices of a Young Generation*

Date: 18 June 2025

Location: European Solidarity Centre, Gdańsk – Poland

Introduction

The Youth Policy Dialogue with EVP Henna Virkkunen served as a conclusion to the two days dedicated to the Digital Summit and gathered 23 young participants: 12 students from the College of Europe in Natolin, 10 young people from the network of the Polish organisation Infoshare, and 2 influencers from the DigitalEU Ambassadors group. The discussion built on the conversations that took place during the previous Youth Policy Dialogue with EVP Virkkunen in Finland in March. More specifically, the participants focused on three topics:

- Cyberbullying, online hate speech and the role of the institutions to counter these issues;
- Social media presence and the evolution of online platforms;
- Disinformation, deepfakes and the ethical use of AI in the EU.

The session was moderated by Daniela Werbeniec, Director of Digital Forum at the Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers.

Summary of the online preparatory meeting

In preparation of the event on 11 June, DG CNECT organised a one-hour online meeting with the participants. The Youth Policy Dialogues were presented, alongside the practicalities of the session and the format of the conversation. The main policies and initiatives that were expected to be raised during the discussions were presented - namely the Digital Services Act, the AI Act and the AI Continent Action Plan, with the aim of giving the attendees an idea of the work of the EU in these topics. The attendees were asked to divide themselves into three groups and discuss one of the topics on which the event was focused, and come up with recommendations and possible solutions to the problems analysed, on the day of the Dialogue.

Summary of the Youth Policy Dialogue

On 18 June, the Youth Policy Dialogue started with an introduction by the moderator. Prior to the Dialogue, the participants gathered to present the outcomes of their work in preparation for the actual presentation to EVP Virkkunen.

EVP Virkkunen introduced herself, her portfolio and her work at the Commission, with some references to the activities outside of her role, such as sports and running.

Once the floor opened to the participants, the conversation ran smoothly, and was divided into the main topics that the participants previously worked on: 1) How institutions can fight hate speech and cyberbullying; 2) How social media platforms have evolved and how they

are going to evolve in the next years; 3) What the EU can do to counter disinformation and promote an ethical use of AI.

The participants demonstrated great interest in the topics and contributed by presenting some of their personal experiences, to give some context to their questions and comments. EVP Virkkunen wrapped up the session thanking the participants for their inputs and for their efforts in the work on the presentations on the possible solutions to the problems that young people face in the online space.

Topics of discussion

1. Cyberbullying, online hate speech and the role of institutions to counter these issues:

When the participants presented their preparatory work to the EVP Virkkunen, they suggested the introduction of a digital ID that can be used to access social media, with the aim of promoting greater accountability online. In the context of cyberbullying, they expressed their concern about the lack of accountability for some individuals, due to the possibility of staying anonymous.

The EVP welcomed the contribution and added that in certain contexts, such as anonymity can help protect users.

2. Social media presence and the evolution of online platforms:

To encourage healthier digital habits, the participants proposed a “cool-down” feature that limits engagement after prolonged use or a reward system that incentivises a more limited and moderate use of social media and screens. Moreover, their proposal included the introduction of a quiz or survey to be answered prior to the purchase of online products. Such a survey would help users to reflect on whether this purchase is necessary or not.

The participants reflected on the need to raise awareness among parents about social media, as the gap between generations in understanding new technologies and platforms is concerning.

3. Disinformation, deepfakes and the ethical use of AI in the EU:

To help users make more informed choices, the young participants called for clearer labelling of online content, in particular when it comes to deepfakes and other types of manipulation. They also welcomed EU-level solutions, highlighting that the borderless nature of the Internet requires action beyond national approaches.

They stressed the importance of finding the right balance between freedom of expression and user protection online.

Follow-up Activities

The Youth Policy Dialogue was not web-streamed but gathered great interest from the attendees in the room, who participated actively with their contributions and presentations of their preparatory works. The engagement of the participants, their ideas and concerns have informed EVP Virkkunen's work, and she will consider such issues that are of great importance to the new generation's online experiences in the future actions of the European Commission.