

Defend Democracy

Brussels, 30 October 2022

Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Mr. Charles Michel, President of the European Council

Ms. Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament

Dear Presidents of the EU Commission, Council and Parliament,

According to media reports, US billionaire Elon Musk has completed his deal to take full control of Twitter.

As civil society organisations committed to supporting, strengthening and defending democracy, we believe this is a major cause for concern, for three main reasons.

First, because of the implications of such a deal for **global security**. In recent weeks Mr. Musk has openly questioned the territorial integrity of Ukraine. He has actively pushed some of the false narratives on Ukraine being peddled by Putin and his henchmen. He engaged in friendly online banter with former Russian President Medvedev, even as Russian missiles were raining down on civilian targets and energy and transport infrastructure in Ukraine. His Starlink internet service mysteriously stopped functioning over parts of Ukraine where the Ukrainian army was making headway against the Russian occupation forces. He then threatened to pull the plug on Starlink in Ukraine altogether. Subsequently, he publicly sided with China, where he has substantial economic interests, by suggesting that Beijing should be handed some control over Taiwan.

Second, because of the implications for **online standards and safeguards**. Mr. Musk has announced that he plans to fire 75% of Twitter staff. According to media reports, he has already fired the CEO, the CFO and the Head of Legal Policy, Trust and Safety - the person thought to be responsible for banning former US President Trump. He has said that he will unban Mr. Trump and other currently banned accounts. Mr. Musk has called himself a "free speech absolutist". The announcement of major staff cuts, the lifting of account bans and the rejection of content moderation is directly contrary to the letter and spirit of new EU legislation adopted earlier this year that seeks to make big tech companies take greater responsibility for hate speech and disinformation on their platforms.

Third, because of the implications for the **data security and privacy** of EU citizens and citizens globally. Given Musk's apparent closeness to a number of repressive regimes, and given his dismissive attitude to enforcing applicable legislation on a range of public policies, we are concerned that the data of EU citizens and of citizens globally, including those living in repressive regimes, are not safe in his hands. This could impact the work and lives of democratic politicians, human rights activists, democracy defenders, journalists, lawyers, disinformation experts, minorities and ordinary citizens everywhere.

We therefore urge you to undertake an urgent security and regulatory review of this takeover and to take all possible steps to seek to block it.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Alice Stollmeyer, on behalf of Defend Democracy

Co-signed by the following organisations:

Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ)

digiQ

Fair Vote UK

#jesuislà

KaskoSan Roma Charity

Lie Detectors

'NEVER AGAIN' Association

Open Britain

Stop Funding Heat

Transparency International EU

Waag Futurelab