

Ms. Ursula von der Leyen  
President  
European Commission  
Sent via e-mail: [ec-president-vdl@ec.europa.eu](mailto:ec-president-vdl@ec.europa.eu)

8<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear President von der Leyen,

As the European Union sets out to consider various legislative proposals to regulate internet platforms through the Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA), the undersigned Members of the World Leadership Alliance-Club de Madrid (WLA-CdM), all democratic former Heads of State or Government from European Union member states, would like to highlight the historic opportunity before the European Union to become a global leader in the defence of democracy online.

A number of platforms have amassed unparalleled influence over our democracies. They have strengthened our ability to participate in our democracies, creating spaces for people to connect, mobilise, inform and express themselves freely. But they have also become gatekeepers to these spaces, unilaterally taking decisions that affect the content we see and the conversations we have. As Executive Vice President Vestager pointed out: “They define our public space – and the choices they make affect the way our democracy works.”

People’s information diet is carefully personalised so as to keep them on ad-driven platforms, rather than provide them with meaningful and factual information on issues that affect them. Profit-driven information curation amplifies sensationalist and extreme content with significant offline consequences - from the health impact of COVID-19 disinformation to the manipulation of elections.

These business and design decisions are leading to further fragmentation of our political discourse. They undermine our shared understanding of what’s true and what isn’t, making it hard to engage in public debates. People increasingly inhabit entirely different online realities. This fragmentation is leading to greater polarisation and distrust of independent media and public institutions.

It is unacceptable for these platforms to be able to mark their own homework when it comes to mitigating this adverse impact on democracy. Since there is no clear market incentive to embrace broader societal responsibilities, nor a duty to cooperate with relevant regulators, it is time for public actors to step in and allay these harms.

Today, our online public sphere is dominated by just a handful of online platforms. This situation stifles innovation precludes new forms of democratic exchange and participation, and creates a power imbalance between platforms on the one hand, and regulators and citizens on the other. It is time to reconfigure this power balance.

With the DSA and the DMA, the EU has an opportunity to create the transparency and accountability frameworks needed to ensure internet platforms, take appropriate measures to safeguard democratic processes and human rights, and address the challenging concentration of power.

As democratic former leaders with a strong commitment to the future of democracy and multilateralism, we will follow the DSA and DMA process closely. We count on the European Commission to propose legislation that safeguards democracy in the digital public sphere.

Yours sincerely,

Esko <b>Aho</b>	Prime Minister of Finland (1991-1995)
Jan Peter <b>Balkenende</b>	Prime Minister of the Netherlands (2002-2010)
Valdis <b>Birkavs</b>	Prime Minister of Latvia (1993-1994)
Kjell Magne <b>Bondevik</b>	Prime Minister of Norway (1997-2000; 2001-2005)
Felipe <b>González</b>	President of the Government of Spain (1982-1996)
Alfred <b>Gusenbauer</b>	Federal Chancellor of Austria (2007-2008)
Aleksander <b>Kwasniewski</b>	President of Poland (1995-2005)
Rexhep <b>Meidani</b>	President of Albania (1997-2002)
Zlatko <b>Lagumdžija</b>	Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2001-2002)
Yves <b>Leterme</b>	Prime Minister of Belgium (2008, 2009-2011)
Iveta <b>Radicova</b>	Prime Minister of Slovakia (2010-2012)
José Luis <b>Rodríguez Zapatero</b>	President of the Government of Spain (2004-2011)
Petre <b>Roman</b>	Prime Minister of Romania (1989-1991)
Danilo <b>Türk</b>	President of Slovenia (2007-2012) and President of WLA-CdM
Herman <b>Van Rompuy</b>	Prime Minister of Belgium (2008-2009)
Vaira <b>Vike-Freiberga</b>	President of Latvia (1999-2007)

**CC:** **Margrethe Vestager**, Executive Vice President for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age and Competition, European Commission

**Věra Jourová**, Vice-President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency

**Thierry Breton**, Commissioner for Internal Market