

Protecting our data and security - TikTok as a threat to data security

The Congress of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party convening in Stockholm, Sweden on 26-28 May 2023:

Considering:

- the significance of social media platforms as part of the digital world and their role in shaping public discourse and influencing political decision-making;
- the need for balance between corporate freedom and the right to privacy, especially on social media platforms influenced by foreign governments;
- the value of data not only in the digital economy, but also in geopolitical contexts;
- the constant exercise of the Communist Party of China using technology to extend its sphere of influence and to spread misinformation;
- the recent developments of EU-China relationships, including the geopolitical turmoil created by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Noting:

- that Chinese companies such as TikTok are often obliged to share even sensitive data from users outside China with the Government of the People's Republic of China;
- noting fact-based reports that China has already influenced TikTok's algorithm to determine what users see on the social media platform;
- TikTok's history of suppressing content that is deemed politically sensitive to the Communist Party of China, including content related to minorities and LGBTIQ issues;
- numerous occasions where TikTok has been collecting sensitive user data and shared it with the Government of the People's Republic of China;
- that in India, although having been banned in 2020, TikTok still has access to sensitive user data of 150 Million citizens with a tool that was described as "NSA To-Go"[1];
- the investigations of TikTok's parent company ByteDance by US agencies following allegations of TikTok spying on journalists[2];
- the recent ban of the TikTok application from official technical devices of the EU institutions, including the European Commission and the European Parliament.

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Believing:

- in the fundamental right of privacy and data protection, including the individual's control over their own data, especially when it comes to possible access of foreign governments;
- that given the nature of the sensitive information that is often handled by government officials, it is imperative that further action is taken to protect against potential data breaches;
- that TikTok's practices of data-sharing with the Chinese government pose a risk to our European values, national security, privacy and data protection standards.

Calls on the European Union, its Member States and the European countries:

- to fight disinformation, especially when created by foreign governments;
- to promote awareness among TikTok users about their privacy rights, their data protection rights and the potential risks associated with the use of the social media platform;
- to conduct comprehensive investigations into TikTok's data collection and processing practices to identify potential violations of data protection laws, especially the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR);
- The European Commission has to make sure that TikTok fully complies with the EU law and privacy rights;
- to take a strong stance on protecting user privacy and data protection on social media platforms, including TikTok, to ensure that individuals' fundamental rights are upheld in the digital world, and use, once in force, all possibilities of the Digital Services Act to do so;
- ban TikTok on official devices of government and public institutions where appropriate.

[1]

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandravine/2023/03/21/tiktok-india-ban-bytedance-data-access/?sh=164c6e632eca>

[2]

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybaker-white/2022/10/20/tiktok-bytedance-surveillance-american-user-data/?sh=2343e7bd6c2d>

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