Centering public interest in EU technology policies and practices:
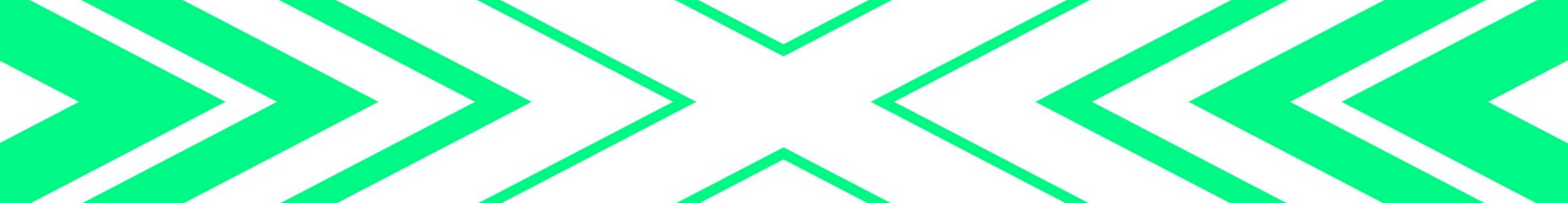## A civil society call to the new European leadership

Joint statement of civil society organisations following the Tech & Society Summit (1ˢᵗ October, Brussels)

As a new college of European Commissioners is put into place, the signatory civil society organisations listed below – leading on human, digital and consumer rights, social and environment justice and corporate accountability – call for increased transparency and participation of civil society in policy-making. We put forward our collective vision for EU technology policy that serves the public interest.

On 1 October 2024, 41 civil society organisations hosted the Tech & Society Summit – gathering more than 350 representatives from a wide range of NGOs, EU decision-makers, regulators and journalists. Panels, round-tables, fireside chats, action desks and informal conversations offered a much-needed alternative to the numerous industry-sponsored events on technology. Participants at the Tech & Society Summit consistently called for a renewed commitment by decision-makers to public accountability when regulating technologies and their social, economic and environmental applications and consequences.

The signatories come together in calling for a digital environment that is just, safe, open, sustainable and inclusive. We are concerned by the proposed new European Commission's approach which focuses on corporate and security interests, and is informed by the assumption that growth and securitisation are necessary for maintaining European values and way of life. Decision-makers should remain alert to narratives and arguments that promote the interests of and deepen our reliance on corporate actors. They should be steadfast in challenging policies and practices that ignore planetary extraction, reinforce harms, discrimination and inequalities, and threaten the core functioning of our institutions.

We call for people-centric policy-making, for meaningful civil society participation, and for accountability to and consultation of communities who bear the brunt of technological harm within and outside the EU. The impact of EU legislation as well as the EU's digital diplomacy efforts and trade agreements in other regions must not undermine the safeguarding of human rights standards worldwide.

In this European Commission mandate, the enforcement of existing EU legislation will be key – and lawmakers must listen to and act upon what civil society organisations and impacted communities report on the state of play of enforcement on the ground. We must also close regulatory gaps – especially to rein in the profound transformation of our economies and institutions by Big Tech, the harmful design of digital products and services, the use of mass surveillance technologies in public spaces and at borders, and the environmental harms of technology.

There is a way forward for Europe to lead on technology, policies and approaches that center people, democracy and the planet. This approach calls for the new European Commission to:

- enable rights, social protection and safety instead of surveillance, control and expansion of police powers. This would create the conditions for healthy and thriving communities;

- prioritise the rights-based implementation and enforcement of digital laws and policies passed in recent years, including the GDPR, the DSA, the DMA and the EU AI Act;

- center the safety of online platforms, products and services for all, refraining from legislation that introduces mass surveillance in any form or which undermines cybersecurity protections;

- reject technosolutionism to address complex social or environmental problems – which can reinforce marginalisation, increase surveillance and censorship of dissent, and harm vulnerable groups including journalists and human rights defenders, women, LGBTI people, racialised and minoritised people;

- move digitalisation beyond the 'growth at all costs' mentality that is driving resource and labour extraction and enshrining austerity policies. Instead, promote digital sufficiency, circularity, material use and waste reduction strategies that focus on reuse, refurbishment and repair;

- maintain offline alternatives to the all-encompassing digitalisation of public and essential services, ensuring that no-one is excluded or left behind by digital 'transformation';

- promote an open, inclusive vision of Europe centered on human rights, equality and the rule of law, and protecting the human rights of migrants and people on the move;

- level the playing field by investing in real alternative technologies and economic models that don't reproduce exploitative business models or further consolidate the power of tech companies.

Signatories:

1. Access Now
2. AlgorithmWatch
3. AlgorithmWatch CH
4. Alternatif Bilisim
5. Amnesty International
6. ARTICLE 19
7. Aspiration Tech
8. BEUC – The European Consumer Organisation
9. Bits of Freedom
10. Center for Technology and Democracy Europe
11. Citizen D / Državljan D
12. Civil Liberties Union for Europe
13. Communia
14. Corporate Observatory Europe
15. D3 – Defesa dos Direitos Digitais
16. Danes je nov dan
17. Deutsche Vereinigung für Datenschutz e.V. (DVD)
18. Digital Action
19. ECOS
20. Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)
21. Electronic Frontier Norway (EFN)
22. EPIC
23. Equinox – Initiative for racial Justice
24. European Anti Poverty Network
25. European Center for Non-Profit Law (ECNL)
26. European Digital Rights (EDRi)
27. European Environmental Bureau
28. European Sex Workers Alliance (ESWA)
29. Friends of the Earth Europe
30. Global Health Advocates
31. Gong
32. Health Action International
33. Homo Digitalis
34. IT-Pol
35. LobbyControl
36. Mnemonic
37. Open Markets Institute
38. Oxfam
39. PICUM
40. Politiscope
41. Privacy International
42. PublicSpaces
43. SHARE Foundation
44. SOMO
45. SUPERRR Lab
46. Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD)
47. Weaving Liberation
48. Wikimedia EU