

Decoding EU policy trends

Comparative analysis of European parties' manifestos – **Digital**



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As EU citizens prepare to elect a new European Parliament, all major political groupings have launched their manifestos. Red Flag has examined these election programmes and compared policy positions. This analysis focuses on digital policy.

The political landscape looks very different today compared to five years ago. COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have changed the political context and the economic paradigm. AI has advanced hugely. Over this mandate, the focus has shifted from a regulatory drive towards safeguarding European security and economic competitiveness.

Most of the manifestos reflect this. Parties across the centre and the right of the political spectrum are explicitly calling for a regulatory break and to shift the focus on implementing and enforcing existing rules rather than creating new ones. Centre-left parties are pushing the social dimension, arguing that the EU needs to achieve the twin transitions while addressing the socio-economic effects for its citizens and businesses.

Member State governments seem to be similarly minded. A leaked draft of the Council's Strategic Agenda highlights the importance of removing barriers to services, encouraging investment in "game-changing" digital technologies and exploring the untapped potential of data, all while boosting competition and reducing administrative burden. Within the Council, the D9+ group is pushing for a balanced regulatory approach, including a "high threshold" for new digital regulation.

Digital policy trends

Digital technologies as key for EU security and strategic autonomy

The manifestos of the mainstream parties address digital issues primarily from the perspective of strategic autonomy and security. The need for a more sophisticated approach to trade and competition policy features in several manifestos. This means reducing dependencies in strategic technologies such as advanced semiconductors, quantum computing and AI applications in the EU. Enabling significant investment in digital networks is also likely to be a priority, with the first report against Member States' progress towards the EU's ambitious 'Digital Decade' targets noting that EU investment in digital progress was lower than that of key trading partners such as the US.

Focus on enforcement

Major pieces of legislation were adopted during this mandate, significantly changing the way tech players operate in the EU. There is a widespread feeling of tech regulation fatigue, with most parties agreeing that the upcoming mandate should be about implementation and enforcement. Renew is going as far as calling for a new Commissioner on Enforcement, in charge of ensuring a harmonised enforcement across the EU Single Market, especially for digital services.

Safeguarding rights in the digital world

Several manifestos stress the risks associated with the digital age, namely when it comes to disinformation, cyberthreats and child abuse. When it comes to AI, European policymakers remain cautious about potential pitfalls. Politicians and regulators are likely to continue, if not intensify, their scrutiny over online platforms, and we can anticipate a new focus on the treatment of copyrighted material in AI model training.

Takeaways for business

The next mandate is likely to start with a more pragmatic policy approach... It will be important for industry to capitalise on opportunities early in the mandate, bringing forward proposals in line with the new policy direction. This should include calling for concrete solutions to enable industry to deliver the digital transition, and pushing for a proportionate oversight approach safeguarding innovation.

... but don't assume an actual regulatory pause. As the digital world evolves, so will EU policy priorities. Industry can expect new regulatory drives over the course of the mandate, in particular when it comes to AI, data spaces and use, as well as digital rights. It will be important to continue engaging with relevant stakeholders to shape the policy discourse in line with your business interests.

The new direction of travel offers opportunities to shape how legislation will be implemented and enforced. Stakeholders should adapt their advocacy approach and narrative to capture the new focus: evidence-backed proposals calling for simplification, efficiency and reduced administrative burden will get a good hearing.



The institutional transition offers ample engagement opportunities

The coming months will be crucial for the development of the policy priorities for the next term. The agenda will be shaped by input coming from different actors, both in Brussels and key EU capitals. Moving the needle on priority issues will require complementary engagement with the European Commission and the new European Parliament (EP), as well as targeted outreach in key member states.

- **Influencing the Commission transition.** An important part of the transition within the European Commission takes place through handover briefs, prepared mostly by relevant Directorate-Generals (DGs). These handover briefs are quite influential in forming the position of new Commission cabinets on specific dossiers. Engaging with key officials from relevant DGs (in addition to the new cabinets) as they work on the briefs could significantly influence how a specific issue is approached by the next Commission. Another key moment will be immediately after the appointment of new Commission cabinets, likely to happen in early Q4 2024.
- **Engaging with the new EP.** New MEPs will be taking office in July. Getting in front of new, relevant MEPs early on will be highly beneficial, particularly given the crucial role that MEPs will be playing during the appointment of new Commissioners, including by grilling them on their policy plans during confirmation hearings, due to take place in autumn.
- **Shaping the EU agenda through national governments and parties.** The EU agenda is heavily influenced by formal and informal interactions between member state governments and EU institutions. In addition, national parties have a significant influence on the positioning of European parties through their delegations. Carrying out targeted outreach with key government and party officials will be very important to complement Brussels engagement.

Annex – Manifestos highlights



The EPP stresses the need to avoid over-regulation and the importance of unlocking innovation for key digital technologies.

Horizontal

- An Innovation Union for future technologies

Energy / climate

- A European digital network for 5G and 6G

AI

- Enable, develop and utilise AI; no over-regulation
- Creating scientific centres of excellence for AI, as well as an EU research-computing centre to simplify data exchange across the EU

Digital rights

- Criminalising cyberbullying
- Storage of IP addresses for the most serious criminal offences, especially in the fight against child abuse
- Action plan against child abuse, sexual exploitation, cyberbullying and cyber threats
- Protecting citizens' choice between the use of digital means or cash and the accessibility of financial services for older people
- A European Workers' Guarantee for the digital market to ensure the rights of workers and the self-employed in the digital age

Read the manifesto [here](#)



The Party of European Socialists outlines the importance of investing in the digital transition and safeguarding citizens' digital rights.

Horizontal

- Investment plan for the digital and green transitions

Networks

- Better inclusivity via high-speed internet access and major investment in digital public infrastructure and digital education

AI

- Harness the power of AI to protect workers and citizens based on the "human in control principle"

Digital rights

- Implement rules against foreign interference, disinformation, hate speech, online violence, and harassment while safeguarding privacy
- Improve police and judicial cooperation in the fight against cyber-crime

Read the manifesto [here](#)



The ECR wants the EU to support industry as it deploys key technologies and delivers the digital transition.

Horizontal

- Call to modernise the EU's digital landscape to spur innovation and investment in cutting-edge technologies like AI, 5G/6G, and quantum computing
- Support research and technological innovation and propose strategies in agreement with companies, not against them

Read the manifesto [here](#)

Renew Europe focuses on the importance of enforcing existing rules to unlock the single market for digital services.

Horizontal

- A Commissioner for Enforcement, in charge of enforcing EU rules in a harmonised manner, in particular in the digital sector
- Completion of the single market for services, with a focus on digital integration, facilitating cross-board e-commerce and digital services
- Ensuring a dynamic data economy through digital infrastructure, digital skills and the takeup of digital tools such as AI, cloud and big data
- Introduction of a digital euro in a two-phased approach

Networks

- Supporting future investment in network development and deployment to increase high-speed broadband access

Read Renew's priorities and ALDE's manifestos [here](#) and [here](#)

The Greens call for a decentralised approach to digitalisation and stricter rules on AI.

Horizontal

- Decentralised approach to digitalisation
- European Central Bank to offer a public digital euro as an alternative to private payment systems
- Need to open interoperability and standardisation to developers, civil society and SMEs
- Promote digital tools for SMEs wherever they can make compliance with regulation easier
- Support the reusing & recycling of digital devices and components within the EU

AI

- Stricter regulation on AI

Crypto

- Cryptocurrency markets should be properly regulated, including their environmental impacts

Digital rights

- European Data Space that opens anonymised social data uses that serve the common good
- A Digital Fairness Act to protect people from intrusive online advertising practices

Read the manifesto [here](#)



The Left calls for a tax on digital platform revenues and more human-centric AI regulation.

Horizontal

- A cloud tax on digital platform revenues

AI

- Incorporating the “humans-in-control principle” into EU AI regulation. Any AI regulation must take into account the impact of AI on the world of work and social systems, and exclude possible discriminatory uses of AI

Read the manifesto [here](#)

ID has not published a manifesto. This summary is based on their policy positions in the current mandate, as well as on statements from ID politicians.

Horizontal

- Defend digital freedoms
- Concerned about the implications on privacy of digital wallet and AI real-time identification systems
- Worried about arbitrary enforcement of social media policies



RED FLAG



[Red Flag](#) is a multi-award-winning strategic communications and public affairs agency. We have mounted some of the strongest and most impactful EU affairs campaigns in recent years, helping to shape debates around a wide range of EU policy areas, including platform regulation, connectivity, AI and wider digital policy.

Should you wish to discuss how Red Flag could support you in navigating the EU political transition and influencing the long-term policy agenda, please get in touch with Lorenzo Torti.

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